From Bethlehem to Batoche:
Rudy Wiebe's Poetics of Presence and Place

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Manitoba

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

CLIFFORD LOBE

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ABSTRACT

"From Bethlehem to Batoche: Rudy Wiebe's Poetics of Presence and Place" considers how Wiebe develops a poetics of "presence" and "place"--a seemingly contradictory task--in three of his novels: *Peace Shall Destroy Many, The Blue Mountains of China*, and *The Temptations of Big Bear*.

There is present in Wiebe's fiction a bi-polar tension between a spiritual, theological sense of "presence," on the one hand, and, on the other, a physical and contingent sense of the local "place." In negotiating between these two extremes --language and land, Spirit and Flesh--in his novels, Wiebe develops a poetics that interrogates, but at the same time asserts, a Christian theology of "presence." For Wiebe, the "Word" must always be located in the "Flesh," in the earthly, local place, whether in the stables of Bethlehem or Wapiti, or *in* the plains of Siberia or Batoche.

Peace Shall Destroy Many sets up the dialectic between Word and Flesh, presence and place, in the context of textual and corporal "reformation." *The Blue Mountains of China* goes further and shows one way in which the body--the "local" place--can become a site of "meaning," how the often impossible "universal" must always be mediated by the contingencies of the local place. Put another way, the "Flesh" that is denied in "Sons and Heirs," the story of Jakob Friesen V, is celebrated in "Drink Ye All Of It," the (Christ) story of David Epp Jr. *The Temptations of Big Bear* continues to ask questions about the relationship between presence and place, language and land, but in the context of the "North West Territories" around the time of the rebellion at Batoche. In the story of Big Bear, and in the common land that both Wiebe and Big Bear were born into, Wiebe discovers a sense of "presence" that is similar to his own Anabaptist theology of the Word, although Big Bear, in Wiebe's novel, may be (in part) the product of Christian typology, informed by the Christian fulfillment of history. All the same, *Big Bear* may be Wiebe's clearest statement of the tension between language and land, of the impossibility of

language to translate into a "desecrated" landscape and culture, in so far as it is the Cree landscape that is imbued with "presence" and the "paper," "textual" world of the Whiteskins that, for Wiebe, lacks any integral, spiritual presence. *Big Bear* may reveal the most about Wiebe's "poetics" of "presence" and "place," which may be a kind of Canadian, Prairie Romanticism, in short, a "presence-in-place."

The (oppositional) language theories of Walter Ong and Jacques Derrida, among others, serve to undergird my discussions of Wiebe's novels, as does Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the novel as a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices" which exist in *dialogic* relationships to each other. Bakhtin's theory of the novel fits Wiebe's texts well, in that it considers not only the linguistic and contextual forces in "polyphonic" novels, but also the author's relationship to his work in light of these forces.

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Mom and Dad
Karen and Vern, Brett, Tori and Tanya
Murray and Brenda
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and my friends . . . who believe

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Introduction

Rudy Wiebe occupies a precarious, "double" place in Canadian ficiton: to many of those Mennonites who have read his work, or heard of him, he is all too "liberal" in his willingness to portray Mennonites in his novels; to that group of readers and critics who can be called "Non-Mennonite" he seems conservative and moralistic. Though this "double" positioning can be explained, in part, by the reader's expectation or experience, it follows a tendency of Wiebe's fiction to "split" itself between an assertion of a universal theological "presence" and an acceptance of the contingencies of the local, "earthly" place. Thus, Wiebe's Mennonite readers may not be troubled by his assertion of "presence" in language, as his academic readers, or readers who do not share his faith, might be. Conversely, Wiebe's Mennonite readers might flinch at his preoccupation with the "accidents" of place--flesh, "natural" existence, secular history--while his non-Mennonite readers would be amused by what they see as "conservative" inscriptions of the body.

My thesis explores this split between presence and place in Wiebe's fiction, a split that is remarkably consistent throughout his fiction. I test the idea that Wiebe's poetics is based upon such a tension between presence and place, that Wiebe negotiates between an over-riding sense of presence in language--a Christian theology of the Word--and an understanding of place that resists any totalizing, universal ordering. If Wiebe is in fact possessed of a "double" poetics, it is likely that his fiction would reveal a simultaneous denial and affirmation of the local place, a preoccupation with *both* "heaven" and "earth," or a "heaven" *in* earth.

The relationship between language and land underwrites much post-colonial theorizing; a language that is said to "fit" the land, to lay some sort of autochthonous claim to place, stands in contrast to--and in competition with--the imposed language of the colonizing culture. Wiebe is concerned with this sort of indigenous language-presence on the levels of theology and aesthics. The title-story to a 1974 collection of short stories

asks: *Where is the Voice Coming From?* That story begins with the meta-fictional statement--"The problem is to make the story" (135)--and ends with the assertion that the voice, at once spiritual and historical, is located in the land:

> And there is a voice. It is an incredible voice that rises from among the young poplars ripped out of their spring bark, from among the dead somewhere lying there, out of the arm-deep pit shorter than a man; a voice rises over the exploding smoke and thunder of guns that reel back in their postions, worked over, serviced by the grimed motionless men in bright coats and glinting buttons, a voice so high and clear, so unbelievably high and strong in its unending worldess cry.
>
> The voice of "Gitchie-Manitou Wayo"--interpreted as "voice of the Great Spirit" --that is, The Almighty Voice. (143)

The voice, for Wiebe, seems at first to be in the land. Yet if the voice originates in the land, it does not remain there. It is a voice that is mediated, if not informed, by a spiritual, timeless, "un-earthly" presence, above and beyond this world. This movement is typical of much of Wiebe's fiction; it reveals a fundamental tension in his work: most of his narratives--and his characters, for that matter--strain to represent, to exist in, the contingent local place at the same time that they suggest, or yearn for, an other-worldly heavenly place. It is language--voice--that spans the gulf between heaven and earth for Wiebe; language connects spirit and matter, life and death. In the middle section of *My Lovely Enemy*, entitled "The Black Bridge," an impersonal narrator, hinting at despair, tells of how, when the valley of the North Saskatchewan River is mist-filled at dawn, Edmonton's High-Level Bridge "sings with the voices of all those who have fallen from its high cold steel, fallen down into the treetops, into water, onto inexorable ice . . . an anthem . . . an incredible song" (183). It is through language that universal, spiritual presence can be experienced, however imperfectly or provisionally. "Words," Wiebe writes in "The Good Maker," a short story in his 1982 collection entitled "*The Angel of the Tar Sands and Other Stories*, "are man's creative acts, with them he gains knowledge and understanding. Words, language, that's the highest achievement of man" (186). In *The Temptations of Big Bear,* it seems as if Wiebe is trying to insert this sort of (Christian) "word" or "voice" into the prairie of the North-West via the medium of the Cree chief Big Bear, even as he is

"tempted" by the sense of presence-in-language and presence-in-place which he takes to be native to the Plains Cree.

The three early novels I consider share an insistence upon "land" or "landscape," just as they share a sense of a theological presence in language. I trace the sense of "presence" back to the Reformation understanding of Christ's presence in the "word" of the Sacrament, and further, with the assistance of Walter Ong's work on orality, to a tribal sense of self-presence in speech. In addition, Wiebe's preoccupation with land, like that of his Mennonite ancestors, is also tribal and theological, bound up in an Old Testament sense of place as "promised" and therefore holy, in a teleological world view that is always implicitly Judeo-Christian. Though Wiebe is sympathetic to the language and land of the aboriginal, he is also loyal to--or at least implicated in--a pre-emptive Christian master narrative.

As the relationship between language and land, between presence and place, underwrites Wiebe's fiction, so it also serves as a superscript of questions related to language and land, questions such as the construction of gender in the context of a repressive patriarchy; the inscription of body in a culture whose response to the materiality of the world is to insist on "purity" and reject impurity; the construction of "subjectivity" as it is shaped by the opposing forces of self-interest and self-lessness; the creation of community "in" the land; and the emplotment of the reader in a text imbued with the "presence" of language.

The novels I have selected represent what seems to me to be a developing sense of the relationship between presence and place. Though *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is a flawed novel, it nonetheless sets up the dialectic of Word and Flesh--presence and place--in the context of textual and corporal "reformation." *The Blue Moutains of China* re-focuses the problem of Word and Flesh, and goes further than Wiebe's first novel in showing how the body--the Flesh--can be a site of meaning and power, just as it shows how the "universal"--often an impossible, utopian ideal--must always be mediated by the contingent

local place. *The Temptations of Big Bear* is perhaps the clearest treatment of the question of language and land. In the story of Big Bear, and in the common land that both Wiebe and Big Bear were "born into," Wiebe discovers a sense of "presence" that is at once similar to, or parallel with, his own Anabaptist theology of the Word. The degree to which this commonality exists independently of Wiebe and his "re-writing" of Big Bear is an important question; Big Bear's enviable presence-in-the-land and the "spiritualized landscape" he inhabits make possible a sense of "being-in-the-land" that white or European culture, and especially Wiebe's own migratory--"placeless"--Mennonites, lack.

Though they are less directly concerned with these questions that Wiebe answers definitively in *Big Bear,* novels such as *The Scorched-Wood People* and *My Lovely Enemy* which I exclude from full discussion, fit into my argument about language and land. Pierre Falcon, the disembodied—dead—narrator of *Scorched-Wood* poses an obvious limitation or bias to a study of "place," as does the novel's "body-less" hero, Riel, who is "free" only after he is hanged, even though Riel, like Dumont or Pierre Falcon, participated *in* the history that led up to Riel's death in 1885. *My Lovely Enemy* has little that is new to say about presence or place in its presentation of the history-maker-cum-lover, James Dyck. The flesh that is so threatening to the "purity" of the Word in *Peace* is finally less interesting in *My Lovely Enemy* where language turns into carnal (and historical) apologetics and indulgence.

It could be said that Wiebe's latest novel (1983) still suffers from a didacticism which is shared by his first work (1962). But the tensions of this early novel are worked out with an increasing sophistication and formal brilliance in his middle period which makes the later work seem slack in the absence of such tension. In general, then, both of Wiebe's most accomplished novels (and my thesis) depend upon a bipolar tension between presence and place which is fundamentally a tension between the Word and the Flesh.

Chapter One
"There's nothin' really in there":
Pure Bodies and the Purified Text in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

> He gazed unseeing between the grey's heads, nodding in their trot. The evening overwhelmingly upon him, it would be long before he could conceive of how much had been sloughed aside that night in Wapiti. Then, Jackie Labret, bending down to lead the way to the manger, stood before him. There must lie the way. Not the paths of conscienceless violence or one man's misguided interpretations of tradition. But the path of God's revelation. Christ's teachings stood clear in the Scriptures; could he but scrape them bare of all their acquired meanings and see them as those first disciples had done, their feet in the dust of Galilee. He must. (237)

Rudy Wiebe's concern with the "original" meaning of Scriptures in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is hardly out of keeping with the Reformed heritage of his Mennonite upbringing. What is truly jarring, however, in this first novel, is his attempt to "scrape" bare the meaning of the Nativity story in a way that both exposes the presence of the body and urges its final containment. Thom Wiens's language at the end of the novel is thus doubly-coded: "No, if in suppression and avoidance lay defeat, then victory beckoned in pushing ahead. Only a conquest by love unites the combatants. And in the heat of this battle lay God's peace" (238). Having discovered the truth about Elizabeth Block's death, Thom rejects a tradition of supression and avoidance which has twisted her pregnancy into a "crucifixion." But this "scraping away" of the "acquired meanings" of the Virgin Mother creates a new problem. In a final "Nativity" scene in the schoolyard stable, Thom rejects with violence the sexual being of the female school teacher. For all his insistence that he must "push ahead" in "a conquest by love," Thom is unable to locate himself in relation to the female body, to affirm what a later Wiebe protagonist will finally call *My Lovely*

Enemy. Thom may be preparing himself for a disciple's committed life, for a life that would lead him outside of Wapiti and its self-enclosed textuality and into battle with not only the Germans but one or two of another sort of adversary. Put another way, Thom's "enemy," as he sees it, is the body, and especially the *female* body.

Peace Shall Destroy Many is thus a key text in exploring Wiebe's developing sense of how an imported story itself can have a dislocating effect, or can alienate people from their own bodies, much less from places where they live. For Wiebe, the Mennonites of Wapiti have "escaped" this world and reside somewhere in a textual landscape based upon the Old and New Testaments. Such a textual landscape is desirable because it is a "pure" place. If the goal of a "reformed" poetics can be said to be a "pure" text, the Mennonites, a Reformation Anabaptist sect, seek an equally "pure" version of body. But bodies, like texts, tend to be unreliable, sites of contamination and of "[d]ark, earthy matters" (*Peace* 113).

Traditionally, the Mennonite reaction to forces that would contaminate their world--their bodies and communities--is withdrawal. In the case of the Wapiti Mennonites, withdrawal is into the reliable "purity" of a text, into a "textual" landscape organized and imprinted by the Bible. This sort of escape, however, contradicts the responsibility of a social gospel, grounded in specific bodies and in specific places; as Joseph Dueck has pointed out to Thom Wiens: "you cannot, as it were, retreat from reality into worship. You can never really worship without the proper ethics" (*Peace* 52). By escaping into language, Wiebe's Mennonites only pursue a rigourous denial of body as well as a deep-seated rejection of the world--a *place-lessness* that is in fact utopian. But escape, as the logic of Wiebe's story insists, is complicated by the very activity of language, much less by the presence of bodies; as the novel's language often reveals, an earthly body and land are not only denied in *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, but also desired.

Underwriting Wiebe's novel is the Reformation insistence upon a "poetics of presence." It is a virtual truism of "reformed" churches (best articulated by John Calvin)

that the "real presence" of the Lord is contained in the "word" of the Lord's Supper--literally, in the Scriptures, the word of God. There is no "real presence" in the institutionally controlled bread and wine, which are "transubstantiated" in the liturgical office of the Mass. In fact, Calvin insisted that the Mass, the central sacrament of the Catholic church, was not a "sacrifice by which we obtain forgiveness of our sins before God" (182). Rather, the Lord's Supper is a "communication" of a "spiritual mystery" (171). The question is an old one: "how are we to understand the words in which the bread is called the body of Christ, and the wine his blood" (170). As Calvin makes clear, the true sacrament is an act of verbal communication--a "mirror in which we may contemplate Jesus Christ crucified. . ." (169).

Instead of locating the "presence" of the Lord within the institutionally controlled liturgy of the Catholic church, in "an imaginary bodily presence" (187), Calvin and the reformers located the "real presence" of God in language. The bread and the wine become "visible signs, which represent to us the body and blood, but . . . this name and title of body and blood is given to them because they are as it were instruments by which the Lord distributes them to us" (171). "True understanding" or "communication" is the "principle thing" to be gained by our participation in the Lord's Supper: "Jesus Christ is the only food by which our souls are nourished . . . it is distributed to us by the word of the Lord, which he has appointed an instrument for that purpose, that word is also called bread and water" (166). Calvin cites St. Augustine to show just how important the essential power of the word is: "'What is the water of baptism without the word but just a corruptible element?' The word (he immediately adds) not as pronounced but understood'"(191). Calvin explains that, by this, Augustine means "that the sacraments derive their virtue from the word when it is preached intelligibly" (191).

Calvin stresses the power of the word of God, a word incarnated with God's presence, a word that must be heard, read, and *understood.* Calvin's theology, it seems, has much to do with exegesis and the advent of print. "That the introduction of printing

was at least a catalyst, and probably also an agent, of social change is beyond dispute" (129), Alister McGrath concludes of the growth of literacy in the Reformation. And one of the most obvious changes in Reformation thought can be seen in "reformed," literal reading strategies of the Bible. Reading God's Word became "an occasion for epiphany, a further revelation of the incarnation of Christ the Word in the reader through the power of the Spirit" (Johnston 2).

Walter Ong maintains that Christian attitudes toward the word are closely linked to this idea of revelation and, as a result, "to the word of God and thus to sound itself" (*Presence* 12). This tendency is already established in the Old Testament, where God intrudes upon human history and calls out persons such as Abraham, or where prophets act as oral agents for God. In the Old Testament, Ong suggests, "[t]he word is not an inert record but a living something, like sound, something going on" (12).

In the New Testament, the word becomes even more important. The New Testament "presents the word of God as . . . the center of its teaching, announcing that the Word was made flesh and dwelt, a Person, among us" (Ong, *Presence* 13). Here, the word becomes a sort of interface between God and man, a reciprocating medium in which "the Word who became man is God's communication to man, [but also] man's response to God" (Ong, *Presence* 13).

In their insistence on the primacy of God's word and the importance of preaching, and in their "peculiar faith in the literal meaning of the Bible" (Wiebe's "Foreword" to *Peace* ix), the Mennonites incorporate both Old and New Testament attitudes toward the word. Unlike the Catholic church, they do not see the spoken word as an "efficacious" word, which is to say that "the sign itself does something. . . .[is] an event, an action, an indication of the present use of power" (Ong, *Presence* 279). Rather, the Mennonites possess a more "typographic" state of mind: "In typical Protestant teaching, the words of consecration are commemorative but do nothing to the bread and wine as such" (*Presence* 280-81). Still, the Word of God is powerful: "According to Genesis 1:4, 'God said, Let

there be light; and there was light.' That is, the word was the creative agent that brought the thing into being" (Frye, *The Great Code* 18). Power, then, resides for the Catholic church in the institutional control of the word--the priestly office speaks "for God." For Reformation sects, on the other hand, God is supposed to be more accessible, and His power more evenly distributed, through the act of reading. As Georgia Christopher points out, in the Reformation reading becomes closely connected with faith; faith becomes a literary or "poetic activity." According to Luther, "the discovery of clarity in Scripture waited upon an epiphany of the Holy Spirit. . . . The Holy Spirit's work, formally considered, was that of rhetorical expertise. In a very important sense, faith becomes a 'poetic' activity--a passionate reading of a divine text (in which the figures were identified and read aright) followed by a reading of experience through this text. With the Reformation, religious experience, to an overwhelming degree, became 'literary' experience" (3).

As both Calvin and Ong show, "reformed" theology is nonetheless characterized by a strong sense of the need to preach the word (an obviously oral mode). Mennonites, in particular, subscribe to a Biblical theology which is a "theology of the Word: God speaks his Word to man and man must hear and obey. 'Hearing', or obedience, indicates the proper response to the revelation of God" (Schroeder 13). Hearing (and by extension reading) God's word demands a response that is, to a large degree, ethical. In fact, as Schroeder goes on to show, "the Hebrew word for 'hearing' is translated by the word 'obey' in Greek" (14).

The belief that God's revelation, "Christ's teachings," stand "clear in the Scriptures" reflects the idea that there is a presence in the word that guarantees language, that communicates Truth. It is also consonant with the notion of textual purity, influenced by the rise of new historical and philological techniques of pre-Reformation and Reformation biblical exegesis. In a way, Erasmus's 1516 edition of a Greek New Testament, in which he translated *Logos* as *sermo* (speech) rather than as *verbum* (reason),

"prepared the way" for the Reformation insistence upon a "theology of the word" (Christopher ix, 3-5). Personal and theological "presence" are conveyed in language; "God is present to man through verbal speech" (ix). Erasmus's "pure" text created a storm of controversy over the corruption of the Vulgate text used for 1100 years by the Church.

Erasmus's "purified" text is directly linked with the work of other Reformers, such as Luther and his 95 Theses in 1517. From Erasmus's text, Luther proceeded to "work out an antiphilosophical theology that dealt in literary categories. He conceived of God, not as an *Actus Purus,* but as a person who 'speaks' " (Christopher 4). In the Reformation, "the locus of religious experience," writes Christopher, is shifted from "visual symbol and ritual to verbal action" (4). Luther regarded this "sacred philology" as "nothing less than providential, in that God had, in his wisdom and providence, provided the means by which purification and reform of doctrine might come about" (McGrath 137). As Georgia Christopher concludes, "it is a shift of the sacramental medium from things to words, which demonstrably can be both intimate and communal . . . . Luther's exegesis makes a radical shift from physical to *verbal"* (7). In fact, "through immediate access to the original language, the theologian could wrestle directly with the 'Word of God,' unhindered by 'filters' of glosses and commentaries which placed the views of previous interpreters between the exegete and his text" (McGrath 137). The Reformation "poetics of presence" thus inaugurates a textual movement back to the "pure," original text, back to a source that is "guaranteed" by the presence of God.

The ideal of a "pure" text in which Christ is present has extended even to Wiebe's protagonist in the bush of Northern Saskatchewan. In a conversation with Pastor Lepp, Thom Wiens asks him "what are the traditions of the fathers?" (86). Lepp's answer begins as follows: "The fundamental teaching our fathers followed was that the Bible is God's recorded revelation to man. Whatever commands the believer reads in it are sacred to him. If Christ in its pages commanded them to turn the other cheek, then they did so" (86-7). Thom then questions this "literal" faith, the belief in a book. He asks: "Does the Bible

make Christ sacred or does Christ make the Bible sacred?" (87), a question that focuses the idea of presence in language or text. Lepp, "slowly but warmly," answers Thom, "I don't know if that question can rightly be asked. Without Christ the Bible loses all uniqueness, for everything it speaks of centres in Christ. In the sense that Christ is God's complete revelation and that Christ's words are recorded in the Bible, in that sense Christ makes the Bible a divine book" (87).

The education of Wiebe's protagonist turns on his Reformed quest for the "original" meaning of the Nativity story as told in that "divine book," given the Protestant identification of the text both with the body of Christ and with the communal body of believers. Of course, whether or not Thom is in fact "educated" in Wiebe's *bildungsroman* is a question that must be considered carefully. How successful is Thom in his search for an "original" meaning in Scripture, in finding that presence which guarantees language? Does he come to an understanding of the "placeless" universals of Christianity that might incorporate the "local" people and place, the female body, and even his own body? World War II may serve as a horrible and ironic backdrop to this novel, but the greater "war" in Wapiti is, in the Pauline tradition, against the flesh.

Some of these questions have not yet been asked because criticism of the novel is so scant. What little there is tends to agree that *Peace* is a "flawed," "first novel" from a Western Canadian writer with "promise." There is, however, little agreement as to what is "promising" about *Peace Shall Destroy Many:* most critics tend to be "embarrassed by Wiebe's explicitly religious themes" (Tiessen 171), or to read his first novel as a morally high-handed exposé. Among Mennonites (and Wiebe calls the Mennonites his "severest critics"), the novel provoked mixed reactions: some praised it; some, like the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*'s Marlin Jeschke, found it "lacking in 'grace' " (Keith 50); and some, like Herbert Giesbrecht, found that the novel left a "distressing" final impression--one without "compassion and hopeful concern" (Keith 63).

The inability of Wiebe's Mennonite readers to maintain a distance between art and life in their consideration of *Peace* proved a serious problem for Wiebe. At one point, shortly after the publication of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe was "forced" to resign from his position as editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald;* at another, he wrote a response--an apologia really--to Herbert Giesbrecht's review of *Peace*. In it, Wiebe broke the traditional silence that he feels an artist usually maintains about his work. Replying to his critics, Wiebe stated that art "bears within itself its reason for existence and its own justification" (Keith 64).

One of the best justifications for the novel, according to Hildegard E. Tiessen, is found in the figure of Hal (from the German *Helmut:* "bright spirit"), who "represents the positive force sustained throughout the novel which finally points toward a renewal of the life of the Wapiti community" (171). In her argument, Tiessen leans heavily on the "cyclical" structure of the novel, including the four "lyrical preludes" which correspond to the four seasons of the year. And she suggests that, at the end of the novel, after the "spiritual winter" experienced by Wapiti, "Thom, and other members of the community, begin to realize the folly of their life of avoidance and to reconcile themselves to a mode of acceptance already practiced by [Hal] . . . who innocently embraces the world" (172). While Tiessen correctly identifies the mythical structure of the novel as well as the Biblical allusion to the "child-like" nature of the Kingdom of Heaven,[1] I am less certain than she that any sort of renewal occurs as the novel closes. In fact, the Edenic, perpetual innocence of Hal is undercut by Mrs. Wiens' silent tears and by the last sentence of the novel: "Around the world the guns were already booming in a new day" (*Peace* 239). The Kingdom of Heaven may well privilege a necessary innocence, but the kingdom in which Wiebe's novel is set has not been able to do so.

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[1] Consider, for example, Matthew 18:3 "And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' " *NIV*

All the same, Hal is associated with the traditional images of fertility and regeneration, and, as Tiessen points out, he is absent from the prelude to Winter, a season closely related to the "spiritual winter of man" (172). As well, there is no doubt that in Hal's character there is coded a childish innocence that does not need to be set in opposition to the horrors of war to be appealing. Yet Hal's position at the end of the novel is almost identical to his position at the beginning of the novel--he once again desires to play hookey and to search for frog's eggs in the slough-flats. Though Wapiti could learn from Hal's exemplary racial tolerance, he is for the most part a naive figure who does not (yet) have to face difficult cultural and theological questions. Unlike his brother, whose education is imminent, Hal is able to retreat into nature. Of course, he is only a child, yet his childlike tolerance and innocence, though impractical, are wise in their own way.

Nonetheless, Hal is an important figure in the novel, especially in the way that his naive search for nature's generative source parallels Thom's "reformed" search for a "pure" and original presence in the Scriptures. These two quests are suggestively linked at the end of the novel in Hal's school play, "The Star and the Three Kings." Though Hal's participation in, and understanding of, the nativity is still naive, he seems to be learning that things are not always as they seem, or are said to be:

> Hal's mind flew. "Anyway, I sure liked our concert. 'Specially the Three Kings. We sure worked on that. You know what part I like best? Just the last where we all follow Jackie into the barn one by one to see the baby Jesus--'course there's nothin' really in there, but after the four fellas go I always feel like there was." The horses turned east into the poplars and scattered pines of the Lepp's south quarter. The pines were massive. "Mom, 'member I used to believe it when you said there were pines all 'round the edge of the world?"
>
> "We just said that because you were too little to know about it."
>
> "Yah. The world's really round, eh?"
>
> "Yes." (*Peace* 238)

While adumbrating Hal's coming of age, this scene also hints at the strategies of denial that are practiced in Wapiti. Hal may once have been "too little to know" about the world, and the "pines" that surround Wapiti may have been a convenient way to explain closure and isolation to an inquisitive child. But, as Hal grows older, the bush represents

not just a way to delimit space, but a way to deny the specific and ethical responsibilities of place, a way to justify a community that strives for ethnic homogeneity while masquerading as a New Testament Church. The bush that surrounds Wapiti is a barrier that isolates and insulates.

The denial practiced here by Mrs. Wiens is more than that of a mother protecting her son. We must remember that Hal has just asked: "Mom, what happened in the barn?" (238)--an important question in a novel structured around (parodic) nativity scenes. In the past, Mrs. Wiens has denied the contingency of the local place by asserting that the world is ringed with pine trees, but she comes clean, here, and reveals to her son that the world is in fact round. She is, however, unable to be as clear about what happened in the barn. "Her voice was old. 'You'll know, some day. Now we'll soon be home.' She held him close, weeping without a sound, for it had come as hard, and harder than she had feared, and the end was not yet" (238). Mrs. Wiens seems to realize that the structures of bodily denial practiced by Wapiti are out-dated, and not the solid foundation they are supposed to be.

Hal, it seems, could benefit from a standard "birds and bees" lecture. It is, however, unlikely that he is going to get one. And if he did, Thom, his older brother, would do well to listen in. Thom sees the world, especially females in the world--female bodies--as either virginal or whore-like. But the neat binary logic of Thom's world-view is frustrated--put into crisis--by people like Joseph Dueck or Elizabeth Block, people who do not--cannot--accept the neat "either/or" of Wapiti's rigid morality. Thus, Elizabeth Block's death is a crisis for him: what does he do with her life and death--a nativity scene that is twisted into a perverse crucifixion? Similarly, what is he to do with Razia or Annamarie and their bodies? The answer must lie in the Nativity.

Hal's statement about the nativity that he has just re-enacted shows one way in which that story functions as a subtext for Wiebe's novel. The Incarnation, of course, marks the moment when God "took on" a body; strangely, for Wiebe's Mennonites, this

body is forgotten, or conveniently effaced. In his search for the "true" Christ, the authentic Nativity, Thom, it could be said, must try to find his Saviour's "body," just as he is trying to "find" his own, Annamarie's, or Elizabeth's. His search is partly textual, but partly physical--it leads to a stable and a manger, and beyond. Like the Magi of Yeats's poem, Thom is driven, almost in spite of himself, to seek the "uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor" ("The Magi").

For the duration of the novel, Thom stays in Wapiti, a community where bodies, and the things bodies do, are put under a strict taboo, denied any sort of value other than being a site of "worldliness" or an object lesson in death. At Elizabeth Block's funeral, a turning point in Thom's education, Pastor Lepp preaches: ". . . but she is not silent, even in death. Though her spirit has gone to be with her Lord, her body here before us teaches us a solemn lesson. It says to us, You must all die. You have no dwelling place here, but through the Grace of God you can triumph over Sin and Death at last" (153). Though we all must die, Pastor Lepp seems in his thorough-going dualism to encourage an immediate death-in-life.

Hal's naive reading of the nativity may be conditioned by denial, but it points, however faintly, toward a presence in language: "I always feel like there was [something in there]," says Hal. He thus hints at the fact that there were "real" bodies in the barn of the first nativity. All the same, Hal does not have to deal with these facts, with these bodies. Nor does he have to contend with an "impure" text and four hundred years of tradition. Thom, however, must confront the (post) Freudian twentieth-century. Hal, in a way, is a younger, more innocent version of Thom, even if Hal, like his older brother, has "got the idea of running away from ho[me]" (97).

At this point, a better understanding of how the the Wapiti Mennonites read their central text is important: a Protestant understanding of faith, after all, is a literal, textual one. And the kind of denial to be found in Wapiti parallels the privileging of text over experience. Reading, as mentioned earlier, was to be the occasion of personal epiphany.

Ironically, after four hundred years, this egalitarian model became institutionalized: interpretation is set down and controlled by the "fathers." Fathers, in the case of Peter Block, less concerned with proper hermeneutics or a "pure," "reformed" text than with economic security, ethnic purity, and escape from the guilt of the past. Noting one of the ironies of the Reformation insistence upon a pure text, Alister McGrath writes: "It is perhaps one of the more intriguing paradoxes of the Reformation that a movement which was initially dedicated to making the 'word of God' available to *Herr Omnes* (to use Luther's phrase for 'everyman') should actually have inhibited this very possibility through an insistence upon the necessity of approaching the biblical text in its original language . . . There is thus a curious twist to the Reformation *sola scriptura* principle, in that the interpretation of scripture was effectively limited to a group of people. The direct engagement with the original text was reserved for those with the necessary linguistic abilities. . ." (138-9). The career of Deacon Block in Wiebe's novel shows how those most skilled at power-relations, at making their point of view felt as truth, are to be added to this limited group of interpreters. When power is grounded in language, in the word, power belongs to *him* who controls the text.

Traditionally, Mennonites are a "textual" people, an Anabaptist Christian sect which believed in what Wiebe calls, in the preface to his novel, a "literal biblicism" (ix). I use the term "textual," here, to denote a people who have constructed their identity upon, around, and even *in* a central text. My use of the term "textual" owes something to Walter Ong's work on the technologization of the word, on orality and literacy, but it is not intended to be synonymous with his idea of "literacy." Mennonites, I think, are both *oral* and *literate:* oral in their belief in preaching the Word of God; literate in their credo of *sola scriptura.*

In a culture with a set, finite text at its center, readers who turn to this text for their *raison d'etre* and for ethical instruction must read and re-read, interpret and re-interpret. Interpretation, as Stanley Fish points out in a different context, "is the only game in town"

(458). While the text is set down once and for all, carved in stone, as it were, reading God's word (and reading often included oral "recitation") is a dynamic process which is influenced by the "Holy Spirit"[2] which "guides individual readers to the same truth" (Ong *Presence* 272). The reader is the site for an incipient, if religious, theory of reader-response. Yet reading, as Ong maintains, atomizes communities and encourages a form of solipsism, "forcing the individual into himself and out of the tribe" (*Presence* 272). I would change Ong's conclusion: in the case of the Wapiti Mennonites, reading--engaging the technologized word--is not the only force that threatens to destroy community. In fact, as Wapiti demonstrates, Mennonites have managed to maintain strong communal identities because of, not in spite of, their literacy. Reading the Bible does not force the Wapiti Mennonites into themselves as much as it pushes them into their shared text and (supposedly) out of their withheld bodies. The Bible and its fictional "landscape" becomes a place to escape to, somewhere not "of" this world. Of course, the division between body and soul is an old one, and, as Northrop Frye points out, it is a division that is closely related to different phases of language use and their corresponding world views:

> In proportion as metonymic thinking and its monotheistic God developed, man came to be thought of as a single "soul" and a body, related by the metaphor of 'in.' Human consciousness feels that it is inside a body it knows next to nothing about. . . . Hence it cannot feel that the body is identical with consciousness: the body is born of nature and will return to nature, but the soul belongs to the transcendent world and will return to that world. The figures employed to describe their relation include a body and a tomb, a prisoner and a cell, a peasant in a decaying cottage, a bird in a cage, [a Mennonite in Wapiti?], and the like. The separation of body and soul at death is thought of as a vertical one, the soul going "up" and the body going "down."(*Great Code* 19).

Wapiti clearly functions along this "vertical" axis, one result of which is a deep-seated scepticism and consequent de-valuing and denial of place and body. Block cannot see Wapiti's native and Metis neighbours as even human; they serve only to frustrate his

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[2] Walter Ong points out the connection of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, with oral utterance: in "classical Christian theology" and in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is thought of as "breath" (*Presence* 182).

"son necessity" (126) by contaminating his "pure" community. But Thom as well can hardly admit that he, let alone Annamarie or even Elizabeth, has a body. And Thom's most obvious discovery of "body" is violent--in the barn at Hank and Razia's passionate "nativity." After "smashing" Herb, "Thom drove, reins clenched in his left fist, his right throbbing dully, forcing his thoughts back. His body revolted in barely controllable nausea at the remembered crash on Herb's face, the oozing blood. Beastly. One taste eclipsed a thousand imaginings. He, with his months of oh-so-noble questionings, had plumbed the pit" (237). Wiebe's novel is crammed with similar references to bodies--bodies usually represented in the language of denial and closely associated with a violent, repressive sexuality. Even Block, the "one rock in the whirlpool of the Canadian world" (21), "felt his body consuming itself, cell by cell, as if each nerve quivered erect, longing, searching" (130) after he killed the old Bashkir. Wiebe's language here, as in so many other places, is thus insistently sexual: deny the body and it will make itself manifest, if only in bodily violence.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many,* the stable serves as the central place where bodies make their presence "felt." In fact, Wiebe's novel is structured around parodic re-tellings of the Christian Nativity scene, a story annually read and re-enacted, announcing the birth of Christ (or the union of body and spirit). It is the originative moment for the Christian church and closely linked to the seasonal beginning of the year, falling just after the reborn sun of the Winter Solstice in December. It would be an interesting study that addressed the mechanics of repetition in a society such as the one Wiebe has created: a collection of people that is primarily agrarian and therefore closely connected to a cyclical, seasonal sense of time, but also textual and therefore "linear-minded" in ways that are not usually associated with rural communities. The split between land and text parallels the different directions taken by the novel's two "questers": Hal's search for frogs' eggs in the slough takes him into the landscape, and, suggestively, into versions of the feamle body; Thom's search for origin and Truth takes him into a "reformed," "pure" text.

Hal, whose presence in the novel may signal Wapiti's need for a religious and social tolerance, can be seen as a romantic figure retreating into nature, out of or away from the linear culture of print. The direction of this search for source is into the land, into place. This sort of community, I suggest, intrigues Wiebe, and appears in *Peace* in the Cree culture that exists in the margins surrounding Wapiti. It is a culture that is (or was) more closely related to the land than the hybrid European culture of the migratory Mennonites. It is also a culture, on another level, that shares with the Mennonites the fact that they have had lands "taken" from them. (By the time of *The Temptations of Big Bear*, a close, chthonic connection of a people to a land, and the idea of a presence *in the land,* will together come to dominate Wiebe's imagination.)

A search for source that extends itself into texts is, on the surface, less appealing to Wiebe--it is a movement away from nature into culture. In "Bunyan and the Confines of the Mind," Vincent Newey considers the "psychological and experiential truth" embodied in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Truth, Newey suggests, is relative to the "essential character and later significance of the vision of the individual's existence, or 'being-in-the-world', expressed in Part I of Bunyan's classic" (22). And truth, he suggests, is textual *and* experiential: "What ever claims might be made for the reality of Heaven and life-after-death, and whatever feeling the devout might bring to and find satisfied in the revelation, we are neither required nor asked to believe in them, except by a willing suspension of disbelief. We are offered, and persuasively involved in, experience--the end of a story and a narrator's dream. The progress into vision is but part of Bunyan's, Puritanism's, and religion's progress-into-literature--the displacement of Truth by the relative, life-interpreting 'truths' of fiction" (42-3).

James Turner calls this literary experience a "progress-into-text" (107). A search for source in a text has dominated Protestant, and especially Anabaptist, theology and history. Block represents this extreme: he finds legitimization in the textual landscape that he inhabits--that he recreates--but it is a world that is rigidly out-of-place in the sense that

old stories and patterns are imposed onto the present. Thus, Block's "search" is a kind of "progress-into-text," but instead of finding in the text of the Bible the "life-interpreting 'truths' of fiction," Block and his Mennonites locate therein the Absolute Truth of the Word of God. So Block's "progress-into-text" is in fact a literal regression. Ironically, the reformed agenda to "scrape clean" the acquired menaings of Scripture makes clear that interpretation is, and has always been, involved in the act of reading--even in reading the Bible. The Bible may be God's word, but a text, the production of a text (a commodity), and even the reading of a text are processes that are never "pure" but always contaminated by ideologies and modes of production.

As a "regression-into-text," Block's reading strategy, like his politics, is conservative: it repudiates the present moment of the world and attempt to organize or re-organize the present via patterns of the past. Like Block's search for a "promised land," vitiated by his secret act of inhumanity, his "poetics" are nostalgic, a movement that seeks a better and golden age similar to the mythic unity sought by Derrida's "engineer," a figure who seeks an ideal that is "an impossible dream of plentitude" (Spivak xix). The "engineer" is most unlike the "bricoleur" who works with the parts and not the whole, in a field of "*freeplay*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble" (Spivak xix, from Derrida's *L'ecriture et la difference* 423).

The Wapiti Mennonite's search for textual origin, then, is partly nostalgic: "'a theological idea,' an idea we need to fulfill our desire for plentitude and authority" (Spivak xix). According to Derrida, both Levi-Strauss and Heidegger are afflicted with this kind of nostalgia. Derrida writes of Levi-Strauss: "one . . . perceives in his work a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins, an ethic of archaic and natural innocence, of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech . . . " (*L'ecriture et la difference* 264 and 427, cited by Spivak). This "self-presence" in speech is also Ong's; I cannot help but wonder if, for all his doubt, Thom Wiens (and maybe even Wiebe himself) does not desire a similar "ethic of presence": an innocent and pure, *body-less* and *place-less,* existence.

Wiebe certainly seems to go this way with his placeless, dead narrator in *The Scorched-Wood People,* Pierre Falcon, who looks down and back from some undefined vantage point after death. So, too, Riel drops at the end of a rope, thinking, "he was free, O God free" (346).

At least in the beginning Thom shares this movement of Deacon Block away from nature into culture, finding his "ground" or source in a similar conflation of text with land. As Thom plows the field, he thinks: "Packed by the snows, it twisted free and lay open, crumbling at the edges, intruding no questions, offering itself and its power of life to the man who proved his belief with his calloused hand. And the believer went on turning its page" (18). But as long as the land is read in terms of the "Book," the believer is justified in staying in his rut, in ignoring how, "round the world[,] it was wounded to death by slashing heathen tank-tracks" (18). The nostalgic "ethic of presence" thus allows a virtual absence of the world, as long as the "text" is present in the land, as text. At this point, early in the novel and in Thom's education, any movement for Thom outside of Wapiti is set in the absolute language of a (medieval) Crusade, and the land is seen as a surface, a page, a palimpsest to be written over by "universal" master narratives.

In addition to being nostalgic, the search for a textual "source" or pattern tends to be conservative and authoritative. T. S. Eliot claimed that Joyce, in using the myth of *The Odyssey,* super-imposed the past onto the present. That is, in *Ulysses,* the narrative structure of the Homeric epic served as a formal "foundation" for a modern novel set in Ireland. The Modernist Eliot sees this sort of borrowing as "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (483). In using *The Odyssey* as a "parallel" text--in using myth--Joyce "manipulates a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity. . ." (483). And, although Mr. Eliot's comments about Joyce may not be as accurate as he would have us believe (was the past as unified and ordered in focus as his claim implies it was? Or is this, too, a version of nostalgia for a better time?), he does

identify a historical method similar to the one used by Peter Block and his Mennonites, who order their present *by* and *upon* the stories of the past.

Eliot's "mythical method" is, in fact, a way of redeeming the present moment by assimilating it to a "universal" past. So, too, a habit of Christian thinking about history has been to re-locate the present moment in a particular part of "universal," or divine, history. For the Anabaptists, this allows a thorough identification with Israel and her *Heilsgeschichte*. As Wiebe explains in the *Foreword* to his novel, the Mennonites "like ancient Israel. . . were a religious nation without a country" (ix). As a placeless and persecuted people in search of a "promised" land, the Mennonites, while claiming to be a New Testament church, find in the Old Testament and the story of Israel an analogue for their own experience, for their own wanderings. Significantly, this identification is with a text. By the time that the Mennonites settle in the bush of Saskatchewan, they have eyes only for Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

One effect of such a denial or negation of place is that the stories appropriated from Palestine at the time of Christ are impressed upon the *tabula rasa* of the prairies in such a way as to justify an imperial appropriation of the land and a cultural--if not physical--apartheid. Deacon Peter Block (no doubt an ironic namesake of Peter, the "rock" upon which Christ's church was to be built), does his best to secure a promised land for himself and his "brothers," and to ensure that Wapiti will remain, or at least *become*, as pure as possible. We read: "the Deacon held the church community solidly on the path of their fathers. He seemed to understand how the newness of Canada must be approached. It was at his insistence that they bought out all the English years before, despite the deeper debt it forced upon them, that they might have a district of Mennonites. Now, there were only four breed families left, and war prices had almost cleared them of their debt" (21-2). God's Word, in the hands of leaders such as Block, can be made to justify social relations that are hardly "Christ-like." Put another way, Block, I would argue, lives in an Old Testament world of tribal salvation, impossible patriarchy, and promised lands.

Block's obsessive search for a "promised land" is a "regress-into-text" that serves his need to escape his past, himself, and his body. Threshing, Block contemplates: "he had now tangled himself in the coils of his memory and he could not escape by forcing his look to the thick-erupting bundles. It had been for his son, after all. It was not for himself or his wife or Elizabeth or anyone: it was for his son who had been so long, so despairingly long, in coming" (125). The land--the world--exists for the male. Again, Wiebe uses language that is so over-determined even a Mennonite farm-boy could not miss the sexual connotations. Block's son, of course, is an extension of himself: he shares both of his names with his father, and has surrendered most of his personality to him. In fact, Block's "only religion," Wiebe writes, is to "work for his son" (*Peace* 127).

And Block's "son-necessity" (126) is a devastating and inhuman "religion." He kills a Bashkir in Russia to ensure (at least in his mind) that his only son will survive. Tormented by the "remembered horror" (131) of his crime, he is "driven to confess and repent" (131), but cannot. Instead, he works to atone for his sin, "labour[ing] for the Widow Esau and her family as for himself" (131-2). But Block's community-building is a twisted penance, a malignant drive to create a "paradise" in which he could forget his past and easily deny his (angry) repressed body.

As such, Block is a deadly figure. He is so driven by denial that he tries to escape into the world of the Old Testament, a textual landscape that he sees as "pure," a place where "father knows best." In it, he can justify murder in the name of tribal security and patriarchal perpetuation. All in the name of God. Wiebe subtly suggests that Deacon Block's dream of a racially pure community, a "colony of true Mennonites" (*Peace* 132), echoes the dream of another German autocrat. The narrator reveals that the Wapiti Mennonites were "honestly horrified at Hitler's ravage of Europe, but beneath lurked the suspicion: 'Only a German could set the world on its tail like this' " (30).

Block's son-ambition is not as "self-less" as he would have us believe. He is obsessed with the need to live, however vicariously, through his son, to thus "make"

himself new and better. Block, we read, "wanted to raise his son as he himself, neglected by a careless father, had not been, and he knew this was impossible in a mixed district. To have a colony of true Mennonites again!" (132). Just how "careless" Block's father was is a question that is not disclosed by the text. Could his carelessness have involved some sexual impropriety? Block's insistence on "purity" hints that it might have. In Block's Mennonite tribe, the genealogy cannot be broken or stained. It represents the tribe's connection with the past, with God, and with His "chosen" people. Sexual indiscretion disrupts this continuum, stains the "sacred Mennonite blood" (218). Block's explicit reaction to mixing blood is most telling: enraged, he accuses Herman Paetkau of being the "bastard" son of a "slutty Mennonite and a heathen Russian farmhand" (114); infuriated, he terrorizes Louis Moosomin, threatening to emasculate him, telling him that he will "never touch another woman" (184). For someone who has worked hard to deny the body and erase its presence, Block seems to have a good understanding of the mechanics of sexuality and the vocabulary of repressed desire.

"Sexual immorality," Block thinks, "was for all Mennonites the nadir of sin; it was equivalent of murder" (180). Of course, it is in his own interest for a murderer to find guilt in others, especially if the taking of life can be linked to the giving of life. But Block seems most concerned, in his horror of sexual immorality, at being unable to control it: "Peter," his wife informs him, "Elizabeth's in childbirth" (143). His response reminds us that the man who plays god in the taking of a life is now threatened by the god-like power of another to give life:

> Blood burst on his scar. "Woman, you're mad! It's imposs--"
> "Peter, I've seen it all my life."
> "It can't be true!" and a faint-wretching oath tore from him. But even as he wheeled towards the bedroom, he knew it true. Her ungainly body. (143)

Block's patristic association of hysteria with woman, with the womb, betrays both a fear and a fascination with female reproductive power--perhaps a fear of exclusion, of being

"written out" of the nativity scene. It is also a fear of surrendering, or sharing, control. In *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir writes:

> The womb, that warm, peaceful, and safe retreat, becomes a pulp of humors, a cavernous plant, a dark, contractile gulf, where dwells a serpent that swallows up the strength of the male. The same dialectic makes the erotic object into a wielder of black magic, the servant into a traitress, Cinderella into an ogress, and changes all women into enemies: it is the payment man makes for having set himself up as the sole essential. (179).

Block, the "sole essential," denies the female body in his textual landscape and community: the blessed (virignal) woman is set in opposition to the cursed whore; the angel to the demon. He cannot, however, escape the logic of the nativity, which insists upon the presence and importance of bodies, upon the "uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor." Unfortunately, for Elizabeth, her "nativity" has to be denied as long as it can, until her "ungainly body" cannot help but make its presence felt.

Block's obsession with "purity" thus means a denial of his daughter in favor of his son: "Erect in the withering cold of the radiant night, he did not care, in his numbness, that he had, by every standard he ever believed, damned his own soul eternally. Wapiti was clean for his son" (185). Behind the facade of his Mennonite and Christian witness lurks the violence of a repressive sexuality, a severe misogyny, and a murderous denial of body. Indeed, Block is so suspicious (and afraid) of the "flesh" that he treats people--especially women and the native minorities around Wapiti--"as if they were pieces of farm machinery" (207).

Yet Block's position within the narrative is problematic in another way. Narratively, he is something of a straw-man for an authoritarian omniscience that would expose his secret act of murder, and his willingness to repeat that crime ("If I ever once had an inkling what you were doing," he tells Louis, "I would have taken you and with my two bare hands killed you" (184).) Not even Thom knows about Block's sin. In a novel that is to be about his education, Thom ends up playing catch-up to the reader, who knows more than he does. Why, if Thom is ignorant of Block's sin, are we ever told of it? Or why is

Block, though despicable and violent, not allowed even to come close to confessing his sin and experiencing the mercy of his forgiving God? Perhaps this is one of the reasons why many of Wiebe's Mennonite readers objected to his novel, finding it "lacking in grace" or "distressing." For the narrator who opposes the authoritarian patriarch ends up being quite as authoritarian in another way.

Put more formally, one of the deepest flaws in Wiebe's novel is that its narrative technique subverts Thom's education. While Thom seeks truth--partly to confirm Elizabeth's urgent appeal to him to leave Wapiti--he lacks privileged information that has already been given to the reader, not through dramatic discovery but through authorial exposition. The narrator's omniscience is what exposes Block in Chapter IX. But no one else knows, besides the reader. And so the rest of the novel is Thom's frantic attempt to "catch up" with the reader. In Chapter X, we are ahead of him again, allowed into a final confrontation of Block with his daughter just before her death. Similarly, we are present when he threatens and buys out Louis Moosomin and his clan. Thom only partially catches up with us in Chapter XVI, when he makes his mother tell him what "really happened" (216) to Elizabeth. Of course, we already know. And so authorial omniscience exceeds Thom's education; we are told too much, or at least more than he needs to know. Perhaps Wiebe is more concerned with educating his reader, which would explain the usual criticism of the novel's didacticism. Though Thom complains of Block, he doesn't ever learn what we know about the Deacon's murderous past:

> So he helped us! We would have survived somehow in this land without him. Others did. Even if he is a great business man and can run this district like no one else, does that mean that on every subject he must place the only word in every man's mouth and they go home and re-chew it for their family? What has he done to own us? He tells us what is good and what isn't good for us. He keeps us behind this bush away from all the world as if he were one of those mind-scientists who take rats and puts them in cages and sees how they jump when he sticks them with pins. Behind all this bush, do we have to be the rats of Block and our forefathers? Whenever they jab us, we know what to believe? We don't owe them our souls! (218)

As much as Thom protests, the narrator, like Block, still plays at being god--and a Puritan, judgmental god at that. Thom's questioning might hint at a subversion of authority, but this is overshadowed by a narrative omniscience that would merely replace an old authority with a new one. Thom becomes an unintentionally ironic figure whom we can hardly admire, and more likely look down upon.

Nevertheless, Thom's position at the end of the novel suggests that his education is not a total failure. Though the novel's narrative technique undercuts his process of learning, he seems, as the novel closes, to be ready to leave Wapiti. He is ready to act on Elizabeth's words, hallowed by her death: "Thom--go away from here . . . Go away from here--Wapiti--for a few years . . . you'll be buried here under rules that aren't as important as this chaff. Go! while you can!" (140-1).

While our experience of the novel is marred by a judgmental, even voyeuristic, omniscience, Thom's education is rounded out by a series of dialogic relationships that exist between himself and most of the other characters in the novel. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that "the author is far from neutral in his relationship to this image [the characters' language]: to a certain extent he even polemicizes with this language, argues with it, agrees with it (although with conditions), interrogates it and so forth--in other words, the author is in a dialogic relationship . . . is actually *conversing* with [the characters' language]" (46). Wiebe, I think, is conversing with his own characters in the greater part of *Peace:* the author of a text can be found at a place that Bakhtin calls the novel's "center of organization," a place where the different levels of language or language images intersect (*Dialogic* 49).

For *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the "center of organization" is Thom. He is the go-between for every group and ideological position in the novel, even though he lacks the narrator's omniscience. He must choose between Block's regression into text and Block's dialectical opposites: Joseph, on the one hand, who advocates inter-racial community, and who moves outside of Wapiti in an attempt, however successful, to take the text--God's

word--out into the world through his work in the Medical Corps; the Unger boys, on the other hand, who deny the text in favor of the body. Block, it seems, would show the Mennonites "how to live the Bible" (218) or, I would add, live "in" the Bible. Joseph would take his "reformed" Bible outside of Wapiti to the "breeds" and "bloods" surrounding Wapiti, and presumably to the battlefields of Europe. Herb and Hank would not be concerned with "purity" nor with evangelism, but with the male enterprise of sexual and military conquest. It is then Thom, in the novel, who alone negotiates between extremes.

Thom's education extends beyond masculine limits represented by Block and the Unger boys. Just as he must come to terms with his own body, he must incorporate the female body into his "world"--he must do something with the sexuality of Annamarie Lepp and Razia Tantamount, and with Elizabeth Block's (thwarted) body. Significantly, much of Thom's "education" results directly from the words and deeds of the novel's female characters, including his mother, his sister Margaret, Annamarie Lepp, and Elizabeth Block. Females, in this novel, seem to know that truth can and must be sought outside the patriarchal closure of Wapiti. In fact, most of Thom's "instruction" is not grounded in the patriarchal logic of the "faith of the fathers," though he does consult it when he questions Peter Block and Pastor Lepp, and he has quite likely heard it every Sunday. Rather, his "education" seems to be based on dialogue with females, as the following exchange with Annamarie on Christian non-resistance makes clear:

> A verse rose in [Thom's] mind with startling clarity: "But Jesus Christ said, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. For if you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans do so?'"
>
> "Yes, He said that," she returned, and silence lengthened between them. Four hundred years before, that verse had been the guiding star of their fathers, but somehow, through the centuries, they had worked it into an impasse. He wondered, thinking of Wapiti's isolation, whether now they could even be termed as loving their friends. (48)

Similarly, Elizabeth Block functions as a female-educator. She powerfully exhorts Thom, just before she dies: "Your brother David couldn't work here--Joseph had to go--Pastor

Lepp--Herm--Aaron Martens--look what they are! A church is supposed to be a *brotherhood*--all equal--that gets its direction from Scripture--not rules!" (141). Thom, it seems, is getting his instruction on the need for Scriptural and community reform from a silenced *sisterhood.* Though this may be an elevation of the female (to Wisdom--*Sophia*), which in turn denies her a physical body, it is nonetheless a beginning. If the logic of the fathers is authoritative and monological, the logic of Thom's new teachers is questioning and dialogical; and it is clear that Razia, Annamarie, and Elizabeth have bodies.

Wiebe's location of truth or knowledge in the feminine extends to the point that he re-tells the crucifixion with a "female" Christ. Elizabeth, we learn at her funeral, is "aged thirty-three years, seven months and ten days" (154) when she dies. The suppression of Elizabeth's body by her father (by the "Law of the Father", in Kristeva's terms) twists her nativity into a crucifixion. Elizabeth's story, however, is a disruptive testament that, for Thom, threatens to subvert the tyranny of patriarchy and take apart the structures that confine him. At her funeral, Thom thinks: "He was the last p̄erson she had talked to on earth, and that knowledge gave her words an eternal significance. She had said that he must get away from Wapiti to learn other ways; he would be ruined otherwise" (154). As Elizabeth's body is placed in the earth--relocated, as it were, in a specific place--Thom comes face to face with the dualism that has split himself and his community: "'What do we gain,'" Thom recalls a sermon, "'if we retain our bodies here on earth an hour longer, but lose our everlasting souls? We can ignore the black power and his fiendish earthly workers who can destroy our bodies but cannot touch our souls.' There was no argument against that. . . And truth necessitated following" (13). For Wiebe, the gap between body and spirit can still be closed, it would seem, by following an ideal.

Ironically, Pastor Lepp is correct when he states that Elizabeth is "not silent, even in death . . . her body teaches us a solemn lesson" (153). The lesson, however, may not be that we must all be dead to our bodies, as Block and patriarchs like him assert to their own advantage. If nothing else, Elizabeth's body teaches Thom the necessity of leaving, of

following the truth. He thinks: "as he carried her body in the coffin down the church steps, that look reached after him and he knew himself eternally committed to something. Stepping to the ground in the sullen afternoon, he did not know what" (155). At this point, the naive idealism of his youth is being replaced by an "earth-grounded" realization of the meaning of bodily death and sacrifice.

If Thom does not know what he is to follow, we, perhaps, do. Truth "necessitates following." And truth, in this case, takes Thom into the specific place of the grave. "[T]he dust shall return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (156). Elizabeth takes Thom into, or under, the ground, forcing him into the materiality of body and of place. As Thom looks up from her grave, where he is placing her coffin, "he saw the elongated bodies and heads of the people dividing the slate sky and the grave's rim, staring down at him. At a corner, beyond the granite form of Block, he glimpsed a woman's face he had never seen before. It terrified him, somehow, to hunch in Elizabeth's grave, feet on her coffin-box, and look up and see all Wapiti" (157). In this chthonic union, however, Thom is still unable to place the female body. He does not yet know what happened to Elizabeth. He still sees women as virgins or whores, pure or impure. So he must ignore her pregnancy, her sexuality, her body. It is this wilful blindness, this denial, that Elizabeth recognizes as destructive. She had cried to Thom: "God in heaven! Can't you see what's happened to me?" (141). Yet Thom resists *seeing* her body: broken, but also fertile and regenerative.

His greatest temptation now is to see all women as he sees the teacher's narrow face from his perspective of the grave: Razia "looked like a death's-head from down there" (157). Earlier in the novel, Annamarie, the pastor's daughter, does not represent this sort of female threat to male integrity. In a parodic version of Eden, the couple stand at the lip of a wide valley: "The river below them, a vista opened in their minds: what else had they missed and were they missing at this moment" (44). Annamarie gives signs of a dawning sexual awareness, or at least the danger of her female situation, not his male position in

advance of her: "What would you say to Dad and Mom if I got pushed into the valley?" (44). But Thom is a literalist: "I guess then we'd better stay away from it" (44).

This inablility to imagine Annamarie's body shapes Thom's thinking to the very end of the novel. Nonetheless, the limits of his binary construction of the world--of seeing females as virgins or whores--implicates him at least in the same sort of violent repression--and aggression--as practised by Block or Unger. For Hank and Herb, the dialectical opposites of Pete and Thom,

> held to no law of the fathers: they were animals. Worse, for he could think of no animal that, at the mere sight of a female, could only slaver in anticipation; or killed for the pleasure of seeing the victim writhe in his last throes. But even Hank paled beside Herb. The body, the body, the body. It was impossible to think of Annamarie in that way, but Razia--abruptly he found that if he allowed his mind a corner of leeway he could think in unison with Herb. The realization staggered him. His mind, strange to such thoughts, went fumbling after the tantalizing figure in the tight green dress. Such wells of depravity yawned in his empty self that he could only shudder and pray for diversion. (227)

His only answer to such depravity, he thinks, is to see Annamarie "as a person and not as a figure. She was to him beautiful, but beauty which had little to with her shape. Her beauty reached beyond her appearance into her purity. For Herb to drag Annamarie and Razia together in one obscenity was--his mind could articulate no word; he felt rasped to the soul. But the question stood" (227). It stands all the more pronounced in the wake of his discovery of Razia and Hank together on the straw of the stable, and his assault and battery of Herb: "It was the first time he had hit a man with his fist. Herb crumpled, pole-axed, on the straw beside his brother" (235). For, having acknowledged the "obscenity" of the male body by striking it, he has now to consider what response he can allow himself to the female body.

When Thom learns the answer to this last question, he seems ready to set out on a journey that would take him out of Wapiti. He would be moving toward an understanding of body that would resist--following Joseph's and Elizabeth's advice--the ideal of separation. Though he is genuinely horrified at the "impurity" of Hank and Razia's parodic nativity, and cannot "avoid the conviction that Elizabeth faltered" (231), he seems to be

ready to move in a direction that would take him towards a new Nativity in which the body must find a genuine place. Like the three Kings of the original Nativity, Thom "must follow the Star. Wherever it leads" (231). And, like the original kings, Thom's journey is still text-based, though it moves outward from the text into the world: "We must go. The scroll tells us that when the Star appears, the Saviour of Mankind will have been born" (230). The childish re-writing of the text in "The Three Kings and the Star" is one way of purifying that text, of ensuring that "there's nothin' really in there" (238). But Thom must now find more mature ways of giving body to the story of the Incarnation, of finding himself in the story, in the flesh. For "a man must live on something. And Truth must be followed as a Star, though the road is sometimes superhumanly difficult" (231).

Conveniently, for Thom's sake, the extremes between which he must navigate are obvious:

> despite her father's rigidity, [Elizabeth] still had to consent personally to that act. If she was not really responsible, then Block was not either, because then he also had been, helplessly, moulded by his training. Following that back, you arrived at Adam: what then? You blame God. And you go through life doing what you do because you can do no else. No. There was no need to follow your body with its every impulse, or acclaim yourself a murderer before your fellow men and brandish ribbons and medals like scalp-locks strung across your chest. So where was the Truth that must be followed? Was there only the old Block or the young Unger way? (231).

Thom's dilemma restates the problem of free will and determinism. And the answer, for Wiebe, seems to lie somewhere between the two extremes, somewhere distant. It involves an incorporation of body and place and soul, and does not allow separation or isolation from the world. Even the original Nativity would not allow an escape from the consequence of this world, of history. For as Joseph Dueck writes to Thom, interrogating (however didactically) the idea of "peace," "the peace of the New Testament is quite different. The angels sang 'Peace on Earth' and shortly after all the babes of Bethlehem were slaughtered because of the birth of Christ" (162). Indeed, peace *does* destroy many.

Thom, in the end, seems poised to follow the advice of Joseph and Elizabeth. Like the kings, he too is going to follow the Star of Truth. Yet, his search is also different: "He

could follow the kings in their quest, but when they bent and entered he was blocked. [Peter *Block*ed?] They found the answer of their search in that barn in Bethlehem, but his answer? He needed it--this evening--in Wapiti. The War was before him" (232). Thom's call (military but also religious) is imminent; the last word of the novel re-introduces the guns that "boom" on the other side of a round world with no more "corners" to hide in. It seems that he is ready to put his body on the line, even it it means violating other bodies. He has, we must remember, just "suppressed" Hank and Razia in the barn, himself committing "conscienceless violence." And "victory," we have been told, "beckoned in pushing ahead" (238). Like the three kings, Thom must leave his country and follow a road that may lead to stables and almost certainly will lead to mortal bodies. Thom's implicit decision to leave Wapiti is ominous, and he seems to realize its (deadly) significance. He prays: "'God have mercy on me, a sinner--in silence'" (238). In the end, he is ready to break free of the closure and stasis of Wapiti. He seems to have found a way out of the fifty-below cold and the "far more deadly" "silent malignancy" (167) of Wapiti. Driving home in the sleigh after the Christmas play, Mrs. Wiens notices that "Thom stood huge before her, staring skyward. As she looked up at him, it seemed momentarily that he was driving them towards the brightest star in the heavens" (239). But whatever his "progress-into-text," he now knows that he cannot leave his body behind, and that there is no escape from the demands of a world where "the guns were already booming in a new day" (239). The virgin himself must leave the "old" Bethlehem to be born.

Chapter Two

"This do in Remembrance of Me": Heroism, Sacrifice, and the Politics of Imitation in *The Blue Mountains of China*

Though it is unclear at the end of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* whether or not Thom Wiens leaves Wapiti, he seems set to search for a "Nativity" that would incorporate "real" bodies. At the beginning of *The Blue Mountains of China,* however, Wiebe has something new to say about Mennonites who deny their bodies and are obsessed with the idea of "purity." *Blue Mountains* opens with a chapter, "recollected in tranquility," of Frieda Friesen's peaceful--if not passive--life, only to explode into another violent "barn" scene in the next chapter, where Wiebe re-introduces the problems of a malignant patriarchy once again set against a violent backdrop: the collectivization of post-revolutionary Russia.

In "Sons and Heirs," Wiebe parodies Thom Wiens's violent sexuality and obsession with "purity," only this time Wiebe gets it right. Wiebe, as it were, confesses the narrative failure of *Peace* as he re-considers the structures of repression that shape the tyranny of the Mennonite father-son complex. We are back in another "stable" scene, but the focus of the scene is tighter. Instead of a "unified" protagonist searching (his community) for a true *imitatio Christi*, Wiebe describes a protagonist who is split between his spiritual need for "purity" and his body's "impure" desire, and the fracture is played out in the context of a single family. Thom Wiens fought the loss of his virginity, but went on to follow the star; in this sense, he too was split. Jakob Friesen V, on the other hand, perishes for his failure to out-grow his innocence, while a different protagonist, David Epp, is left to imitate Christ. *Blue Mountains* thus "begins" with a crucial revision of Wiebe's first novel.

To manipulate the "split" of his protagonist, Jakob V, Wiebe re-writes the Old Testament story of Jacob and Esau, inverting it, and conflating it with the "stable" of the Nativity story as well as the stories of Cain and Abel and the Prodigal Son. Whereas in the Genesis story Isaac is tricked by his two sons, and the younger son Jakob receives the "blessing" or "birthright" that the older son Esau is entitled to, in Wiebe's novel the "blessing" is in fact a curse that ultimately destroys Jakob V. Of course, it is important to remember that Escha, the Russian peasant hired-hand is not only Jakob's fictional "second-self," but also his half-brother: "they were the same age and size" (16); Muttachi notices that "Escha stands, looks around like heir and owner" (18); Serebro, the Mennonite-turned-Communist, a "younger son of a younger son living in the worker shacks at the end of the village while cousins lived fat" (32), muses about Jakob: "You are free of [your father]--free of everything. As free as Escha. . . . You are very alike, big, your faces--you could almost--strange" (33). And Jakob, we learn, sees Escha, *feels* Escha "close as his shadow" (35). As Jakob murders Escha in the barn, we read that Escha stretches before him "slack the breadth of the aisle like a mirror image flat without defense" (38). Perhaps the most incontrovertible evidence linking these two brothers is Jakob's account of what he assumes to be Escha's genealogy: "Escha was like every other Russian peasant working on a Mennonite farm, just a bastard; his mother in the Russian village in the hills he never went near except to tank himself over with vodka, his reddish-blond hair giving some fly-by-night father away. Probably some clown from a foreign circus stopping for a night between Kharkov and Odessa. . . " (19). We know that the Friesens are "red-blond," though Jakob does not seem to remember this. He is remarkably unable to see himself, his body, or his father's body, for that matter. Ironically, it is his father, Jakob IV, who is the "fly-by-night" "clown," making Jakob's assessment of Escha's parentage more accurate than he thinks; indeed, Jakob IV "flies" by night.

Thus, the official, patriarchal racial and sexual "purity" of Gnadenfeld is unofficially and actually "impure." The structures of repression fail to deliver the "purity"

they promise, and the father-son complex proves an impossible dream of "purity" that fragments community, splits the masculine self. Though Jakob V fails to recognize this about his father, he sees the split in himself. For Jakob, this realization is too much. He relies on a rigid textual "purity" and can hardly stand the immoral and sensual indulgence of his half-brother, his second-self. Wiebe uses an inset "stream of-consciousness" narrative to reveal the split. Jakob is tormented by his body's desire and his "mind's" (soul's) insistence on "purity": "control of mind and body he had fought for and he thought he held. . . . He had been trained well, a good Mennonite boy; learned quiet joy and denial and prayers. . . . He prayed also, as always, as always all he had pushed aside and gotten around though he knew it wrong, rose in the praying blacker and heavier than sin and he asked forgiveness, crying. There was such comfort in cleanliness" (28). Wiebe leaves no doubt that Jakob V is in fact split by the logic of denial and purity; he is waging a war against himself.

Without question, the narrator's third-person limited omniscience in chapter two, interrupted by chunks of elliptical, stream-of-consciousness narrative, is intended to take us into Jakob V's fractured self. In the "hellish" world of 1929 Gnadenfeld, to which he returns on November 12, Jakob's textual, religious training is "in conflict" with his body's "sexual desire" (Bilan 52). Although Jakob's religious training helps him to survive the GPU prison, when Jakob prays "*blessed savior make me pure that in heaven I may*" (12), he is denying the validity of his body in a way that has nothing to do with the GPU prison. The prison is an ironic analogue for Mennonites such as Jakob, whose metaphysics suggest that the soul is incarcerated *in* the body. Though it would be irresponsible to suggest that Heaven is not a better place than a GPU prison, or that belief in Heaven is frivolous--to survive a place as horrible as that, faith seems a "most necessary possibility" (114)--it is also irresponsible to be blind to this world, to deny the body to the point of self-destruction. Jakob's prayer, like his training, leads him out of the world, away from bodies to an "other-worldy," "pure" place. Indeed, when he returned home, it seemed to

Jakob that "in six weeks everything alive had been swallowed with him and only his aching body, by some freak spasm, had been heaved back" (13). It is this "aching body" that he now must "wrestle" with.

But instead of coming to terms with his body and the impossible "purity" of his tradition, he is destroyed by it. He wanders through a literal hell--an apocalyptic, sexual inferno. So strong is the literal imprinting of the Bible on him that he immediately sees his father's empty "*hof*" as proof not only of his own sexual and scholastic guilt, but of the Second Coming:

> *you read the bible in they are all gone jesus has come again and taken them and I am left for hell and the devil and his angels and the place prepared he could not find me with the* GPU *he could not take me with him and my mothers and sisters I never confessed when I saw the answer and wrote it down I didn't want to see it the Russian girl in the water naked squatting and rising I never confessed that I saw my sister when and wet playing with jesus has come again he will come again will you be ready when the trumpet sounds six times I was not ready with all my sins he has come only sinners and the* GPU *where is your fa-* (14)

Jakob's confusion is as clear as Wiebe's control is strong, here. Jakob is "literally" damned, condemned by his fallen sexuality. As Jakob becomes more and more tempted by his body, by Escha's indulgent sexuality, and by the Russian whore, his "interior" language becomes more and more elliptical: *"blessed savior make"* (39) becomes "*blessed alone.*" Purity is impossible, and Wiebe is clear in showing that Jakob's insistence upon purity, his overriding master narrative, ultimately "erases" him. Like Thom Wiens and Pete Block, Jakob V shows that a repressive sexuality is a dangerous and violent one; although here, in *Blue Mountains,* the scene is believable and chilling.

Jakob V's voyeuristic sexuality and his desire to kill his "shadow-self," Escha, are the "two last remnants" of a transgressed textual morality of "do not" (35). Jakob is split; he struggles to refuse his bodily desires, but failure "was inevitable; as he also knew" (35). Jakob "bursts" out of his literal world of denial and purity, only to plunge into an apocalypse of self-destruction. For him, there is no "real" or middle ground:

> A thought came, or went. Without thought he had been known, completely, as he himself either could not or had refused to know. . . . Thought had been his

> redemption; he had been taught to think: in the home, in the church, in the school he had been taught to think on his sins: this is not right and this is everlasting wrong. He had been taught man is not a carefree brute; he is a thinking creation made in the image by the hand of the holy terrible God who has said once and for all in a voice dry and hard as the rock of his mountain, "Thou shalt not." He had been taught his sins. But now, like then on the studfarm, he had played with himself, and he was beyond control. (39)

Actually, he is probably normal, though his training is not; his inherited tradition is cruel and inhuman: it leads from masturbation to murder. Jakob would do well to break out of the absurd legalism and rigid literalism of his father's faith, but he cannot. Instead, he destroys himself for failing to meet the severe letter of the law. Like Deacon Block, "he recognized with terrible clarity the horror he was working upon himself, he knew he would do it again. What had to be done now had to be done where only the impossible eye of God could see" (39).

Abandoned by his father and condemned by his father's faith, Jakob self-destructs. Staggering under the weight of a *meta-physical* original sin, he becomes like Escha who "just threw his body around like an animal" (41). His new creed is "Never wait, never think; do it" (40). Just as his father has abandoned him, his tradition has betrayed him in its impossible insistence on "purity": "It was good," Jakob thinks, "to teach children their sins and watch them close, make sure they kept their conscience poking their action and thoughts away from each little twitch, kept their hands where they belonged. Ha! and that wasn't in your lap! But that wasn't enough either, somehow" (41). Somehow, Jakob laughs as he violently provokes his own *violent* death.

Blue Mountains, then, confesses the ultimate evasion of *Peace Shall Destroy Many,* even if Thom is left "on the way," trying to negotiate between an impossible insistence upon purity and the contingent necessities of the "flesh," between the "Star" and the "stable." Jakob, on the other hand, is a prior-day "Thom," destroyed by this inhuman division of spirit and flesh. The previous ending is thus re-written as a deadly new beginning.

If the "silent malignancy" that threatened Wapiti is present in *The Blue Mountains of China,* its effects are felt on a wider range: the corrupt patriarchal father-son complex extends from the personal to the global level. This "silent malignancy" is one of the forces that shatters the Friesen clan, predating the chaos of the Russian Revolution. Its repressive patriarchal power structures not only split the Friesen clan, sometime before 1879, when Jakob I casts his grandson Isaac out, but also serves to undercut its own agenda when Jakob IV betrays his son in Gnadenfeld, Karatow Colony, in 1929. The two betrayals are similar: both involve fathers, sons, and inherited land. And, though the Friesen's custom of primogeniture seems to be biblical, here it seems to be economic-based. Jakob IV is closely attached to his "*hof*": in the face of collectivization in the "communist paradise" that Russia was becoming by 1929, Jakob V's father, "face black with rage, said he was not moving, let the whole village run if it would. He would

> *let them run can't fit in when a little changes or some stupid communist says don't preach so much let them run won't take this from me they can't do anything without me and they'll have to keep exile pooh I'm no preacher*

buy it up and run it all himself. He almost had" (27). Friesen, it is clear, is not interested in religious tolerance or non-violence. He is no preacher. In a fashion that reminds us of Deacon Block, his religion is economic- and "son"-based: it involves capital, land, and power.

But this is only one half of the story. *Blue Mountains* would be lopsided if not for the presence of David Epp Jr.'s "land-less" and "self-less" actions. Jakob IV is the dialectical opposite of David Epp, whose legacy is a "place-less" and ethical imitation of Christ, an authentic sacrifice of self. Epp leaves his land and his son to "save" others. Between the extreme examples of Friesen and Epp, Wiebe weaves a narrative that consists of competing voices and stories, a narrative that manipulates a dialectic between place and presence--between the specific responsibility of "place" and the universal value of self-sacrifice in the ethical imitation of Christ.

God and land, presence and place, have always been significant determinants for the Mennonites. Up until the last half of the twentieth century, Mennonites, for the most part, were an agrarian people. As Mennonite farming communities thrived, no doubt because of their "excellent industry and morality," [3] more and more land was needed. Thus the logic of "sons and heirs" is complicated by the problems of demographics; the world exists for males to pass on to other "first-born" males. But what happens when there are too many males, and not enough land? A "promised land" works well as the *telos* towards which a tribal people can orient themselves, but when the "tribe" grows, new "promised lands" are needed and God's "promise," then, can be endlessly used to justify a patriarchal program of territorial appropriation. This is one reason why the Mennonites are tempted by Israel's (textual) history: it is not only easy on the conscience but eventually profitable to escape into text--in this case, into the story of Israel. As John Reimer makes clear at the end of the novel, Mennonites "have always wanted to be Jews. To have land God had given them for their very own, to which they were called; so even if someone chased them away, they could work forever to get it back. Wherever they got pushed, or pull themselves, they'll try to prove to themselves they are building that land" (227).

One of the first and most successful attempts by Mennonites to "build" their "own" promised land occured in Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Originally, a "religious nation without a country," the Mennonites in Russia became a nation-within-a-nation. This nation-making began as far back as 1762-63, when Catherine II, German-born wife and successor of Peter III, ruler of Russia, invited Germans to re-populate land that was vacated by the Turks. By 1772, there were about one hundred German colonies in South Russia. The Mennonites did not arrive for another decade, and then not so much because of the "attractive settlement offer" as because of the "pressure of events at home in Prussia. Growing military preparations, in the face of a Europe made

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[3] This statement is taken from the preamble to an early charter granted to the Mennonites. Dyck reprints part of it in his *Introduction to Mennonite History,* 166.

restless by the political upheaval in France, made the Mennonites apprehensive. Then, too, many were coming to be without land. The problem arose from the fact that both military and church taxes were based on land ownership, and Mennonites would pay neither for support of the military nor for support of the state church. . . . Consequently, government controls prevented Mennonites from buying more land" (Dyck 164-5).

Russia offered not only the promise of religious tolerance but a land that seemed to be "without" history or inhabitants. As such, it seemed the perfect "clean slate," an inviting palimpsest upon which the Mennonites could write a whole new (salvation) history. The problem with this sort of "over-writing" is that it ignores the indigenous peoples and their claims on, and connections to, the land. Indeed, the charters that granted privileges to the Mennonites in Russia offered them an almost complete separation from the native population of Russia, as well as "the guarantee of complete religious freedom and exemption from military service for all time" (Dyck, 165).

The Tsarist experiment to cultivate South Russia worked well. Perhaps too well. By the time of Jakob Friesen IV, the Mennonites had become rich land-holders in Russia, known by their neighbours, the native Russian peasants, on whose backs much of their wealth was secured, as "kulaks" (meaning literally, "tight-fisted"). It is ironic that a supposedly "New Testament" church was caught up in--even helped cause--large-scale social and economic injustice. Friedrich Engels' words, in his "Preface to the German Edition of 1883" of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, ring true of the Mennonite experience in Russia: "All history" Engels writes, "has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development" (472).

The class struggle that led up to the Russian Revolution had ugly effects *within* the Mennonite community as well. The rich Mennonite colonies of Southern Russia had strict laws in place to ensure the efficacious transmission of land from generation to generation. As it stood, only the first-born son would take over the farm. The "second son" was sent

away in order "[n]ot to break the farm; they had it law in the Russian colonies. It took so long to build up something" (*Blue Mountains* 210). Empire-building takes precedence over family; in the case of Jakob Friesen I, "he built the best *hof* in Gnadenfeld, maybe all Karatow, they always said. But he would leave it to only one grandson, so Isaak went" (209). It is Jakob I, we learn, who initiates the severe program of primogeniture. He has only one "feeble son to that son's [Jacob II] big two" (26). As Muttachi (wife to Jakob III) relates to her grandson (Jakob V): "your great-great-grandfather Friesen [Jacob I] said, 'Just one gets the farm; Jakob is marrying and the other goes.' So Isaak went, your great-grandfather Friesen said not one word, just gave him money and *atje* . . . .Why? Because your great-grandfather was a mouse. A soft quiet mouse, every few generations the red-blond Friesens' have one . . ." (26).

Like the "inviolate" front doors of his barn (23), great-great-grandfather Friesen presides over his *"hof"* even after death. Jacob V is "born under his face" (22), his picture in the "*ackstov*," and it is his "iniquity" that is "visited . . . upon the children to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:5 *KJV*). Following a conflated textual model from the Old Testament, Jakob Friesen I invokes an Old Testament, patriarchal authority and casts out his son's son, Isaac. Years later, Jakob III, older by ten minutes than his exiled twin brother Isaak, is "split. . .in half from head to stomach" by the "Makhnovski" of the Revolution of 1917 (17). A split, to be sure, that is felt by the Friesen family, but also throughout the narrative--even by Wiebe himself. It is a split caused by Jakob I's strict adherence to the exclusive patriarchal policies of the Mennonites which Wiebe sees as "first son, first served." Several generations later, when Jakob IV betrays his son, leaving him for dead at the hands of the GPU, the "mouse" re-appears, and this time, as the chapter's title ("Sons and Heirs") hints, the mouse is not only a coward, but also sexually "impure."

The Mennonite problem with land and patriarchy is parodied by the horrible but effective methods of birth-control practiced by the nomadic Ayerooas Indians of Paraguay. Franz Epp, David Epp Jr.'s brother, tells young John Reimer how "time and time again

over the years on the cotton field plowing he had turned up tiny bodies eaten past human recognition by busy ants: it is how they keep their families small. A hunter moves; he cannot move more than one small baby. Anthropologically that made fine sense; also while you were scraping your plow?" (154-5). As peoples and world views collide and compete with each other in Paraguay, the "end of the world nailed shut with boards" (103), it seems that Wiebe himself is split about what sort of lifestyle is "better." The Mennonite-Christian model is flawed, and Wiebe's criticism of it is thorough--the Friesen clan demonstrates this. But tribal or nomadic societies are not without their own problems. The extent to which Wiebe is seduced by the close, spiritual relation of a people to the land, and repulsed by the violence of tribal life, is evident here, as it is in *The Temptations of Big Bear* and in *My Lovely Enemy*, where James Dyck experiences the "problem" of "writing prairie Indian history" (43). Both Big Bear and Maskepetoon, pacifists that any Mennonite in Wapiti, Russia, or Manitoba could learn from, are "aware of powers beyond things" (*My Lovely Enemy* 53). Maskepetoon, as Dyck's textual re-creation shows, refuses to participate in the ritual tribal fighting of his people, choosing instead to "see" an alternative:

> *His father had told him something, though he really did not want to hear what the old man said. Every time he rode against the Blackfeet his father, who could no longer walk and lay between robes all day long and thought, would say, "Is a man's true greatness to be sung in the scalp dance? What do your powerful eyes, what do your travels to unnameable places help if you see only what everyone sees, that war is glory, that killing is revenge? You have always seen different, why can't you see different about being a great man?"* (48).

Perhaps the Friesen males in *Blue Mountains* could likewise ask themselves what constitutes a man's "true greatness." It is a question that underwrites most of Wiebe's fiction, but especially Wiebe's Mennonite "epic," a novel which explores various kinds of heroic value. For Wiebe, it is clear that "true greatness" does not involve senseless violence nor excessive wealth.

Put another way, "greatness" for Wiebe is an *ethical* matter. Francis Mansbridge notices that as "a form which from its origins has been closely associated with the middle class, the novel has always had the old puritan problem of 'how to live' closer to its heart

than any other literary genre" (48). Wiebe's moral vision is portrayed in *Blue Mountains* with a narrative sophistication that is not found in his earlier novels. As I hope to show, the *imitatio Christi* which is played out in such unearthly fashion in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is now realized in dramatic terms which begin to allow for the pressures of place and history.

In *Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy*, as in *Blue Mountains*, Wiebe is split not only on the problem of "how to live," but between a sense of place that is specific and the universal value of pacifism and self-sacrifice. The problem with this sort of split, it seems, is that "place" often inspires territorial violence in tribal societies, as it has done throughout Western history. Ownership (private property), the cornerstone of an industrial-capital economy, is in fact based upon modes of exclusion; and exclusion tends to be underwritten by violence--territory is appropriated and/or controlled by force. Wiebe seems to resolve the split, for himself, by romanticizing the landscape--seeing it as a spiritual entity--that contrasts the industrial-capital view of land which "debases" the landscape by seeing it--converting it--into property. He further privileges this romatic landscape by incorporating into it the Christian master narrative. In such a hybrid landscape God, the Great Spirit, exists as "pure speech"; and especially in *Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy,* Big Bear or Maskepetoon and his father vaguely resemble Christian pacifists. How successful this resolution is is a good question, one that I will consider more carefully in the next chapter.

Though Wiebe focuses the question of land (as property or as entity) most sharply in *The Temptations of Big Bear,* for now, it might be sufficient to say that Jakob Friesen I's patriarchal legacy of property tends to encourage possessive individualism and to be destructive, on both an individual and a communal level. Isaak Friesen, the dis/placed son, on the other hand, lacks any legacy of land; if the "Jakob" Friesens are characterized by their land, Isaak is characterized by his "landlessness," and by his laughter. His "legacy," if it can be called that, is located in *language.*

Isaak's laughter, however, is most unlike that of Jakob V, which is diabolical and derisive--the last cry of a deranged, condemned man. Isaak, as Muttachi recalls, was a "mouse" Friesen, but "he could help you laugh. . . . Like you never heard it in this house. . . . Maybe it helps to laugh if you want to start . . . " (27). Isaak, the land-less, wandering son, and his daughter Frieda, share a comic spirit and a peaceful vision of the world that passes from generation to generation in a way that Jakob I's land does not. Isaak's laughter engenders a peaceful and quiet faith: "But think always like this. . . it does come all from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty" (10). Though Isaak's credo could be criticized as quietism, when it is compared with the land-obsession of the Jakob Friesen side of the family it seems healthy, if not beautiful. These "placeless" "Kanadier" seem to know something that the Jakob Friesens do not. Perhaps holding on to a "place" too long, at the expense of belief in something beyond one's self, is malignant. Whatever the case, Isaak, we learn, is capable of "joking . . . [even] on his sickbed" (209). He is capable of what Mikhail Bakhtin, in a different context, calls the "permanent corrective of laughter" (*Dialogic* 55).

For Bakhtin, it is "laughter that destroys the epic" (23) and its hierarchical distance. Isaak's laughter undercuts the "absolute past" (15) of Friesen's "epic" *hof*. Bakhtin writes: "The absolute past is a specifically evaluating (hierarchical) category. In the epic world view, 'beginning,' 'first,' 'founder,' 'ancestor,' 'that which occurred earlier' and so forth are not merely temporal categories but valorized temporal categories, and valorized to an extreme degree" (*Dialogic* 15). The Friesens built "the first *hof* in Gnadenfeld" (23), and the conservative nostalgia that surrounds their "land" is typical of the Mennonite desire for "authority" and "plenty." This sort of thinking, according to Bakhtin, sees everything in the past as good: "all the really good things (i.e., the 'first' things) occur only in the past. The epic absolute past is the single source and beginning of everything good for all later times as well" (*Dialogic* 15). In the wake of such an "epic" past, the present is de-valued. Of course Jakob V and his ancestors have more than a little practice at this sort of negation

of history, which is a negation not only of history but of all the things of this world--especially the body. Ironically, Jakob IV, the last surviving member of the "epic" line of patriarchs, is a painfully empty figure. He loses his son and his family, and his "epic" role as creator/ancestor pathetically collapses in on itself: "Yes," he states, "I have a strong body. That is why I survived. And because I believe nothing" (193). Thus Wiebe not only inverts Bible stories, but also narrative structures. The *Blue Mountains* becomes an anti- or inverted epic; Jakob IV's story undercuts the "founding" hero of epic fiction.

Just as Isaak's laughter and faith balances Jakob IV's dour atheism, and Frieda's quiet longevity balances her cousin's (Jakob V's) violent self-destruction, Wiebe balances a reductive poetics with more productive ones. That is to say, just as the Bible can be read reductively--interpreted literally--and used as a formal shoe-horn to reduce all stories to versions of one story, one text, so can its stories be "re-told" in ways that re-vitalize and re-animate the original meaning, in spite of centuries of "interested" interpretation. This sort of "re-reading," it seems likely, would be an important activity in a faith-system which locates the "real presence" of God in language, in communication. If Wiebe tried to "scrape bare" the meaning of the Nativity in *Peace Shall Destroy Many,* he is trying to do something similar in *Blue Mountains* with the story of the crucifixion of Christ. He is trying, I suggest, to distinguish between inauthentic imitations of Christ , and an authentic *imitatio Christi,* to translate an authentic heroism, grounded in the circumstance of history and dramatic necessity.

Wiebe sets out to counter the profound reductionism of a "universalized" past and an omnipresent text by emphasizing the universal yet "specific" nature of Christ's death and suffering, by locating "meaning" in the present, too. While T.S. Eliot's "mythical method" reduced the "immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (177) into an ordered version of the past, Wiebe's narrative structure in *The Blue Mountains of China* works in the opposite direction. He tries to undo the monologic

control or order of a "literal" past, coming closer to a narrative version of what Bakhtin calls a "dialogic imagination."

The "dialogic imperative," basic to Bakhtin's theory of the novel, is defined as the "characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia."[4] Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole--there is a constant interaction between meanings. . . . Dialogue and its various processes are central to Bakhtin's theory. . . . A word, discourse, language, or culture undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute" ("Glossary," *Dialogic* 427). In Bakhtin's words, the "dialogized," "polyphonic" novel is a "heterogeneous" conglomeration of "linguistic and stylistic forms. . . . It is impossible to lay out the languages of the [polyphonic] novel on a single plane, to stretch them out along a single line. It is a system of intersecting planes. . . . [The novel is a] living mix of varied and opposing voices" (48-9). Though *Blue Mountains* seems at first to be such a novel, with language ranging from Frieda's transliterated Low German to the academic sophistry of Elizabeth's "Can-Lit" discourse, we are left, at the close of "On the Way," with a strong sense that not only John Reimer, but maybe Wiebe himself, is trying to tell us something absolute.

Though Wiebe has come a long way from the absolute monologue of *Peace Shall Destroy Many,* he falls short of a truly dialogized novel at the end of *The Blue Mountains*. This is mostly because of the presence of an artificial messiah, John Reimer, at the novel's close. Reimer does not only put forward his idea of what Christ taught, but judges others for their inability to share his perspective. For example, he instructs Elizabeth Driediger:

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[4]*Heteroglossia* is the "base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions" ("Glossary," *Dialogic Imagination* 428).

"Hate your life. Just a little more" (217). And the wooden cross that Reimer drags across Canada is a *literal* imitation of Christ, a mechanical "progress-into-text." His monologic (artificial) *imitatio Christi* becomes even more intolerable when he sends the D. G. Williams clan on their "way." It is not so much that he disagrees with Williams's obviously materialistic lifestyle, a lifestyle that reminds us of the Friesens in Russia, but that Wiebe aligns Reimer with an authoritarian narrative omniscience which in turn makes him self-righteous and judgemental. As Williams takes leave of Reimer, he says: "Na, we'll see you on our way back, in a couple of days. Charles" (217). Reimer responds:

> "Who knows," and he raised his hand in greeting as the car murmured, leaving him open across the black pavement to the valley and the mountains against the flaming sky, his hand raised in farewell as if he knew already before Edmonton Charles would find out more than he ever dreamed of driving the Cadillac much too much over the speed limit, could already hear the sirens trying to wedge a way before them into the darkness, could already see the bright lights of the hospital: that would not be nearly bright enough. (217)

Reimer's imitation of Christ is self-dramatizing, compared with David Epp's authentic self-sacrifice in "Drink Ye All of It"; it thus suffers from its secondary status as an imitation of an imitation. Even his language reveals that he is uninterested in dialogue, and far more interested in persuasion. Perhaps Wiebe is putting Reimer forward as another *imitatio Christi,* albeit a negative one, though as Wayne Booth points out, monologic novelists "never release their characters from a dominating monologue conducted by the author; in their works, characters seldom escape to become full *subjects*, telling their own tales. Instead they generally remain as objects *used* by the author to fulfill preordained demands" (xxii). Reimer seems "preordained" and co-opted by an omniscience that precludes him from having a story of his own to tell; he functions more as *deus ex machina* introduced to "wrap-up" the novel.

Though Magdalene Falk Redekop sees Reimer's role as "a catalyst for reflection by the rest of the group" (115), and feels that his behaviour is designed to shock the reader

into "new levels of perception," her criticism is all too domestic.[5] She does, however, recognize the "contrived, almost theatrical nature" (115) of this last chapter; she writes: "Perhaps it comes to reassure us that there is still a separation between the sacred and the secular, church and state. Reimer seems, in any case, like a Mennonite child playing church" (115). Still, Falk Redekop's criticism falls short. While she correctly suggests that Reimer is a "John the Baptist" figure (a "self-defined John the Anabaptist" she calls him), prophetically crying out in the Alberta wilderness, she fails to see that he is just as much, if not more so, a self-defined Christ-figure. Thus, when the group that collects around Wiebe cannot understand each other, when literal translation fails, the reader, like the novel's characters, can finally surrender his 'dumbfounded incomprehension"'(119) to what Falk Redekop presumes to be "the triumph of figurative *translatio*--metaphor" (119). Reimer, for Falk Redekop, stands for the (human) attempt to interpret, or the "interpretive process," a process that is flawed in that it can only ever relate the "disparate elements of the oracle," "connect the fragments" (120). In this fallen world, there is a "melancholy after Babel" due to the fact that language, even life, can only be "lived" "in part" (119). "As readers," Falk Redekop writes,

> we are wise when we know that we do not know. We have come full circle back to the realization that all our efforts are designed to bring us back to the point that Frieda has achieved without struggle: to the humbling mistakes of translation, to the warmth of community of laughter at these limitations, to the discovery of worlds that contradict our own. Wiebe uses the reading process itself to show that we are all enlarged only by recognizing our mutual diminishment. The effect of the conclusion is profoundly religious and inseparable from the idea of community and the awareness of the limits of language. (121)

Falk Redekop incorrectly suggests that Frieda has achieved and maintained her "comic" spirit and vision of the world "without struggle." Perhaps Falk Redekop did not read of Frieda's battle with cancer and the two-inch radium needles inserted into her tongue ("like shingle nails") for up to sixty-hours, or of the migrations that not only removed her from

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[5] At one point, Falk Redekop suggests that the "problem with Reimer is that he is letting his left hand know what his right hand is doing" (116).

any sense of community but also claimed the lives of several of her children. Falk Redekop also maintains that David Epp is myopic and that Reimer and Friesen, at the end of "On the Way," begin to "see." Her vision of "community," however, is as "placeless" and as textual as Peter Block's or John Reimer's; she states: "language is a means to an end--the end of making the reader intensely aware of the always-impending intersection of the ideal past and the ideal future. The garden and the city, what is lost (Gartenal, Blumenau . . .) and what can be gained (Jerusalem), are potentially the same place but for the present we are in the space between" (121). Falk Redekop de-values this "space between," and thus errs in being unable to see how David Epp validates, authenticates this world in the fashion of Christ. She too seems unable to see or deal with the "flesh" that is made word, or with the "word" that is made flesh.

Falk Redekop's denial of the present, her longing for an ideal past and future, as well as a"transcendental signifier," leads her to align Christian humility and patience with a state of "unknowability" that she feels is present, at the end of the novel, in the form of a "Socratic dialogue" (120). But as Bakhtin makes clear in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* though the Socratic dialogue was originally a dialogic genre,[6] part of a larger taxonomy Bakhtin termed *serio-comic*, the dialogic method soon degenerated into a catechizing "question-and-answer" form facilitated by the content of the dialogue, which "often assumed a monologic character that contradicted the form-shaping idea of the genre" (109-10). John Reimer, it is clear, possesses a "ready-made truth" that he would lead others to; there is not much *dialogic* about "On the Way."

All the same, the rest of the novel is, for the most part, dialogic, especially Wiebe's handling of the Crucifixion story. As he tries to "scrape bare" the meaning of the Cross,

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[6] "At the base of the genre lies the Socratic notion of the dialogic nature of truth, and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth. The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to *possess already-made truth*, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths" (*Dostoevsky's Poetics* 110).

Wiebe attempts to come to terms with the "old thing everybody understands something about" (225). Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending,* has demonstrated how human beings need patterns to order their worlds, patterns that are "concordant" with their lives. "Men," he writes, "like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations. They fear it, and as far as we can see, have always done so; the End is a figure for their own deaths" (7). Kermode sees in the Bible one such pattern; indeed, the Bible includes one of the most influential accounts of the beginning and the end known to Western Civilization.

If *Peace Shall Destroy Many* dealt with the Nativity as a story of origin, *The Blue Mountains of China* deals with the "End"--with the Cross or death. This suggestion is in keeping with Wiebe's moralistic vision and the earlier suggestion that the "novel" is concerned (like the Bible) with the question of "how to live," and it is supported by the numerous deaths that occur in the novel--Christ's life and death is not only the ethical standard against which life and death are "measured" in the novel, but also the guarantee of a "life" after death. How a person lives affects where that person is "going." Death, after all, is merely passage to a better world. Frieda sings:

> *Come now and dig my grave,*
> *For I am weary the wandering;*
> *From earth would take my leave,*
> *For I am weary the groaning;*
> *For I am called by the holy peace*
> *Of angels, whose rest can never cease.* (87)

Frieda, like her father Isaak Friesen, lives a long and difficult life, but maintains her faith in spite of hardship and land-lessness. We do not witness her death, but she is ready for it and accepts it just as she has accepted her life. "I told them," she recalls, "I had such a good visit [to Canada] but there wasn't need to spend my last days running like an unheaded chicken and meeting my Lord too tired and old even to say a hallelujah" (149).

Jakob Friesen IV, on the other hand, who has been more self-interested than Frieda, eventually loses his faith. His story began in "Sons and Heirs," where Wiebe continued to address the problems of an exclusive, authoritarian patriarchy, problems that had already appeared in embryo, as it were, between the fathers and sons of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Jakob IV spends his life haunted by guilt for betraying his son, only to find out, from John Reimer, that his son's desperate crimes were one of the causes of his own exile. Jakob IV has, albeit unknowingly, paid for betraying his son.

Nonetheless, the legacy of betrayal begun by Jakob I and continued by Jakob IV reveals the complexities of what might be called the father-son complex, a series of father-son relationships in Wiebe's novels, impossible or empowering, that includes not only Mennonites such as Peter and Pete Block or Jakob IV and V, but also Cree Indians such as Big Bear and his Young Men. In *Blue Mountains*, by the time of Jakob V, the Friesen legacy is not only inhuman but violent: Jakob V murders Escha and assaults Serebro in order to maintain what he sees as the "pure" Friesen name. But Friesen's insistence upon (an impossible) "purity" masks a dominant self-interest, a tendency to betray others (even sons) in the interest of one's self and one's property.

The willingness to betray--the "silent malignancy" of *Blue Mountains*--is present not only in the Friesen clan, but also in Samuel Reimer Sr. When Jakob IV is apprehended by the GPU in Moscow on November 25, 1929, Reimer, relieved at being left alone, exclaims: "They believed Listov! Just like that! One a night must be enough--they believed him--'and my three children here'--just like that. Ohh God, my God how marvelous are Thy ways, how he answers prayer!" (66). Reimer's language reveals his self-centered concept of God, and that he would betray his community in order to save his own skin. The construction of community is an integral problem in Wiebe's novel, a novel that concerns itself with the value of self-sacrifice--where does the "self" end and the communal group begin? Wiebe does not resolve this difficult question, although he focuses it with an

unforgettable poignancy. As David Epp Sr. points out to Balzer-Reimer[7] : "Ernst, I think Mrs. Friesen was praying too" (66).

The dialectical opposite of self-interested survival in *Blue Mountains* is David Epp's self-sacrificial death. We know, as John Reimer learns from Franz Epp in Paraguay, that David Epp's community escaped Soviet Russia illegally: "They weren't supposed to run off and when they did, the Mennonite people that stayed behind would have got it for the ones that got out. You know, sent to prison camps" (171). Epp returns to atone for the Mennonites who have escaped to China. Unlike Reimer Sr. or Jakob IV, he puts the good of the community, of others, before his own "good." It is odd that Magdalene Falk Redekop can ignore the genuine nature of Epp's action; she sees him as a "mock-heroic western hero" (107), a dreamer whose actions lead not to redemption but cynicism. But, as the chapter-title, "Drink Ye All of It," suggests, Epp's gesture is hardly quixotic.

Wiebe's chapter-title, and part of the (italicized) inset portion of the narrative in chapter nine, recall Matthew 26: 27, an important intertext for a story about betrayal and self-sacrifice. The elliptical New Testament allusions connect David Epp's sacrifice with the betrayal and sacrifice of Christ. At the Last Supper, Christ identifies Judas as the one who will betray him: "[w]hile they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you'" (Matthew 26: 26-7). Just as we "saw" Jakob V from two perspectives in chapter two, we see David Epp from two perspectives here; an external, omniscient narrative shows his position as father and as leader of the community while an interior monologue reveals a self torn between duty, loyalty, and love, between self-preservation, preservation of his family, and the preservation of the larger community. As Epp comes nearer and nearer his decision

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[7] Franz Epp disguises the identity of Samuel Reimer Sr as Ernst Balzer when he tells John Reimer (son of Samuel Sr.) of his father's self-interest. Both John Reimer and his brother Samuel Reimer eventually learn the truth about their father's "betrayal"--another manifestation of the "black vulture," the "silent malignancy" that threatens to destroy the faith and community of the Mennonites.

whether or not to "betray" those left behind in the USSR or to return and take responsibility for those who have escaped, we "hear" him repeat, turn over and over in his mind, versions of Christ's words at the Last Supper: "Across the elbow of the great Amur twelve kilometers of field and three of frozen river without being heard

> *in remembrance of me for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show*

A miracle" (130. See also 126, 128, 129, 131).

The central act symbolized in the inset narrative is the Word becoming flesh, Christ taking on a body that is in turn "broken," sacrificed for others. In the end, David Epp decides to unite his will with the Word made flesh; thus his flesh becomes Word, he re-enacts that which empowers the flesh--the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice. At the end of the chapter, he is left "waiting for the louse to come to his warm flesh" (140). If the GPU are the metaphorical vermin who will come, his flesh is also a symbol of the Word "broken" for his community. In the most literal of senses, his flesh is made word in the stories of those he leaves behind to tell of his self-sacrifice.

The double action of Epp's gesture, the flesh that becomes Word and the Word that becomes flesh, completes the cycle of authentic *imitatio Christi*, aligning Epp with his Saviour. But Epp's authentic imitation of Christ also lends authenticity to the specific, local place, undercutting the tempting universal placelessness often associated with, or imposed upon, Christianity. Back in the USSR, David Epp "thought he could see the blue line . . . of the mountains far away, beautiful as they had ever been from there. But he knew now that was only his imagination. Or romantic nostalgia" (140). Wiebe's success, in this scene, lies in the fact that this is not a "romantic nostalgia" for Calvary's "turbulence"--John Reimer represents that sort of dramatization--but a genuine sacrifice. Thus, Epp is a successful character not because his actions are a literal imitation of Christ, but because, like Christ, Epp acted out of--or upon--a love that extends beyond the perimeters of the self and into the illogic of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Epp

resists the elusive promise of a heaven on earth, of a place *beyond* the Blue Mountains where his Mennonite background has taught him "peace" lies. For horizon is "placeless," endlessly receding, endlessly deferred. As such, it resembles what Geoffrey Hartman, in the context of language-possibilty, calls a "dream of communication" (247) that we can only doubt: "It is an ever-receding horizon like Hegel's end-state, where subject and substance, real and rational, concrete and universal coincide. That end-state remains a *topos noetos*, a heaven in the form of a horizon, a glimpse of totality that converts every end into a means and so proves to be the moving principle it sought to arrest" (247-8).

Epp rejects this "placeless" end-state, an impossible dream that leads "out" of this world. Epp seems to realize the futility of following such an ideal, although it is not to be confused with his community's desire to escape Soviet Russia. Epp learns that true "peace" is not to be connected with "mocking" "greener pastures," but to be located in the present, in the contingent place, in the self: "*crossing the Lesser Khingans only the motor wheeze and too much snow and too many people and stuff and everything too much much too little black and jagged from here black in the heartless cold nothing like the thin blue sketch, beckoning from across the river the beautiful mocking blue*" (126). Epp turns from the notion of a "peaceful horizon" to the Scriptures, in which he finds the significance of the Incarnation, of the Word become flesh. But Epp interprets Christ's sacrifice in such a way as to validate the body; it is Christ's body, after all, that is "broken": "*bread and when he had given thanks he brake it and said take and eat this is my body which is broken for you this do in remembrance*" (128). The bread and wine, if we remember Calvin, become "visible signs" of God's presence in language. The "true sacrament" is present in the "verbal communication" of Epp's action and his story. Epp fleshes out the Word, and in turn his flesh becomes word, though Wiebe does not intend Epp to be Christ nor this to be a "Calvary": Epp "turned back to the candle on the table, and sat down. He hooked off his glasses. Someone must have been in here: a louse moved past a crumb on the table, of all things. He took off his mittens, pushed back the

sleeves of his sheepskin. He felt nothing. He sat motionless, watching, waiting for the louse to come to his warm flesh" (140). Epp's gesture will not redeem the world, and possibly it will not even spare his neighbours from punishment; but it helps to redeem the ideal of sacrifice by converting remembered story into lived history.

If Jakob IV and Reimer Sr. (and those like them) ultimately destroy community, Epp and his type build community. Indeed, Epp's story is the narrative centre of the novel, an authentic *imitatio Christi*. Epp risks his life not to dramatize himself as a follower of Christ, like John Reimer in "On The Way," but to *ethically* follow him. His example inspires faith: a faith that holds communities together, a faith that can be seen. If Wiebe's first Mennonite novel was profoundly aural--frogs croak, cannons boom, the words of the dead resonate beyond the grave--his second is predominantly visual. Faith, in *Blue Mountains,* it would seem, has to do with preaching or hearing God's word, but also with seeing it acted out. As James reminds us, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (*NIV* James 2: 17).

The death of Reimer's brother Samuel, which sets John "On the Way," falls somewhere short of the authentic sacrifice of David Epp, though it is still more meaningful than Jakob V's senseless death. Indeed, Samuel is an ironic figure. His death is an imitation of Christ that is not as literal or manufactured as his brother's imitation, but it is not as effective as David Epp's either. Whereas David Epp returned to his village to atone for his community's escape, Samuel Reimer is "sacrificed" by his community, which is gripped by a material lethargy and a "textualized" religion that denies the Reformation insistence on the "presence" of God in language. Samuel attempts to break out of the material complacency of his Manitoba Mennonite community, but he fails. His "call" is an imitation of text, of 1 Samuel 3, but it is an imitation that attempts to take the text *to* the world in a fashion similar to that of *Peace Shall Destroy Many's* Joseph Dueck. Joseph, it would seem, was marginally successful; Samuel is not. His death, instead of being an ethical imitation capable of inspiring faith, ends up being a textual marker, an ironic

indictment of a community whose literal biblicism and affinity for land and wealth has resulted in a denial of the "real presence" of a God who speaks anywhere but on the printed page.

In this way, Samuel Reimer's call is an important test for Wiebe's Mennonites. Is the presence of God to be located in language or in text? As shown above, in Chapter One, the Reformation insistence upon a poetic or textual faith caused a "shift of the sacramental medium from things to words" (Christopher 7). God, or faith, is inextricably connected to language and especially to the reading act. George Steiner's *Real Presences* is based upon this Protestant claim. Steiner proposes that "any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence" (3).

Samuel's community, Gartental, however, has renounced--or forgotten--the primacy of speech that characterized the Reformer's theology. In a way, as a literate and contemporary society, Gartental denies God's presence. As Reimer explains: "Sam, Abraham and Isaiah, Hosea . . . they lived in primitive times, when everybody heard their gods talking" (176). Gartental, it could be said, is no longer willing to listen. By insisting on the impossibilty of presence in speech, Gartental affirms the Derridian notion that writing, the text, "exceeds and comprehends" (Derrida 172) the activity of speech or language. But Gartental, as Walter Ong would have it, is affected by this privileging of writing. "Writing," for Ong, is the "commitment of the word to space" (7). This implies that the "word" becomes a "thing, not an event" (91). The alphabet, the basic component of writing and texts, "represents sound itself as a thing, transforming the evanescent world of sound to the quiescent, quasi-permanent world of space" (91).

In other words, God, once freed from the restrictive iconography and bureaucratic distribution of the Catholic church, is once again "imprisoned" in a physical thing--in a text. Thus Reimer's call--God speaking to man: "I am the God of your fathers, the Lord

your God. Go and proclaim peace in Vietnam" (158)--is a scandal to his community, to a church that has lost its traditional (evangelical) Reformation zeal for the "active" and "real" presence of God in language. Reimer, in the end, is served up as a lunatic in this community; he madly searches for "God," for truth, in the texts that his community has valorized. Reimer "read through the pastor's files on Vietnam and war, was working on through the Bible, subscribed to a daily and his letters to Mennonite, Quaker and other peace groups were beginning to draw pamphlets, brochures, requests, explanations, statements on marches and demonstrations and war atrocities. Paper deluged him" (169). In a comic effort to show just how thoroughly the Gartental Mennonites have been "textualized," Wiebe has the pastor insist that Samuel record the "voice" on a tape-recorder: "It's just plain, factual, repeatable, evidence. . .it's even biblical! Your voice makes such a--an incredible claim, you've got to test it" (165). Though a tape recorder would seem to be "oral" proof of the self-presence of speech, Ong maintains that electronic media--radio, telephone, television--are manifestations of a "secondary orality" that is unlike the primary orality of cultures untouched by writing or print. As such, it "has striking resemblances to the old [orality] in its participatory mystiques, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based on the use of writing and print" (136). In a moment of anger and despair at the false sense of "oral" community instigated by the television, Reimer siezes the family television set and "hurls it through the picture window" (173).

In the end, mere literalism of text dominates. A petition is signed to defuse Samuel's evangelical zeal, and his call, transcribed on a grocery list, hints at the impossibility of a Reformation sense of the presence of God in language in a modern, consumer society. Reimer dies advocating an orality that his community and his family will have no part of. Reimer's last words are: "It wasn't for you, or the--no, you can tell them all that. It wasn't any of you. Not really. Emily! You can tell them? Hey? You

hear? You hear?" (179). Emily does not "hear," and reaps material benefits from her husband's death; ironically, Sam's legacy becomes a "Chrysler or a Cadillac, or a Thunderbird" (180).

This is not to suggest that a purely oral society is preferable or even possible. Wiebe's moral and aesthetic vision seems to advocate a mixture of textuality and orality. Perhaps Frieda Friesen is the best example of this sort of blend. She can translate her stories and her faith (and they are the same) via both oral and written modes. And both, to her, are acts of faith. At the beginning of the novel, she states: "I have to be careful or I'll start making it up, they like to hear so much. What I tell I remember only through God's grace. I never wrote anything down" (7). But at the end of the novel, it is clear that Muttchi, as we learn from her daughter, Esther Williams, must have learned to write for she's "got it all written down" (208). Frieda, in a way, becomes a version of the author-in-the-text, a model for Wiebe who asserts a strong faith but also a comic vision. Though Wiebe is often tempted to authorize his male protagonists, to speak "through" them (Joseph Dueck, Thom Wiens, John Reimer), here he posits a female author-figure that is much more successful and readable than her male competitors.

If Frieda is a successful figure of the author-in-the-text, John Reimer is an unsuccessful one. His dramatic imitation of Christ is didactic and inspires judgement rather than faith, though it may stand in a *dialogic* relationship to David Epp's authentic self-sacrifice. But it seems that Reimer's story is imbalanced--too authoritative--in what , to this point, has been a textual democracy. Reimer's position as the End-figure in the novel, who brings together Elizabeth Driediger, Jacob Friesen, and Dennis Williams, makes him more likely a metonym for authorial omniscience. Reimer is a figure of the artist trying to find a way to interpret--or extend--David Epp's translation of himself into the Word. Reimer, in other words, would like to die to himself, to become the word made flesh once more in Alberta. As such, he speaks for the author-God, though he is little more than an apostle of the man (Christ/David Epp) who shed his blood for others.

It is true that Jakob IV learns about his son's death in Gnadenfeld from Reimer: "[Funk] just said Friesen seemed suddenly to--to do terrible things; he tried to kill the commissar so they executed him" (224). But here, Friesen is unable to confess his suffering, as he once did in the abandoned cloister, where, "in that nameless ruin," he confessed to the "faceless immobile man whose name and place he never knew, before whose immobile accepted suffering his own had finally broken between his teeth" (115). In "The Cloister of the Lilies," the language of sacrament is clear, as is the power of the word. And, once again, sacrifice is presented in oral-edible terms that foreground the body as the site of authentic sacrifice. But with Reimer as "Christ" at the end of the novel, true confession and redemption are impossible. The machinery creaks as Wiebe's *deus ex machina* descends to tie up loose narrative ends and sort out the genealogy (and guilt) at this unlikely family reunion. In the end, Friesen is unaffected by Reimer's imitation of Christ. He doubts Reimer's assertion that there is a possibility that "God is good," and responds: "Ah-h-h. If there is one" (225). Reimer's Christ is thus merely textual and ineffective. His presence is not redemptive but reductive.

Because Reimer lives in a textualized landscape, he remains blind to the "real" place of Alberta. He cannot see the place that exists under the palimpsest of European culture and history, over-laid upon the prairies, though, in the ditch, he does hear Coyote cry. Significantly, his understanding of Coyote is still textual, "from a novel" (226) Reimer has read. [8] Thus John Reimer is not seeing the "new" place of Alberta, but is trying to redeem the landscape, to impose the "presence" of Christ onto that new place. He "plays" Jesus in a Parkland-turned-Palestine. And so his journey is quite literally a "progress-into-text": "So finally it seemed I should walk. But I did not want people to think me a hitchhiker going somewhere. I am not going anywhere; at least not in Canada. That's the whole point" (225). "Walking with God," as James Turner points out, is a "familiar concept in

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[8] Wiebe is referring to Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, another Canadian novel that concerns itself with the construction of community.

Puritan didactic manuals" (106), texts which likewise invited action. But walking, motion, as Wiebe's novels make clear, is at least an affirmation of an ideal, even though that ideal may never be realized. The key question is walking to where? John Reimer promises to walk into an other-worldy "nowhere," into a shadow-text. Other Wiebe protagonists choose different directions: Joseph Dueck or David Epp move out of or away from the restrictive literalism of a text or a textualized landscape, trying instead to evangelize the world with their master text.

Significantly, China's Blue Mountains are both a physical and a textual "place" for David Epp, who reads about them in the Blagoveshchensk Library, and who grows up in a community overshadowed by them. Of course, the physical place "beckoning across the river" (126) mocks the Mennonite's desire for a better place, for a heaven-on-earth. John Reimer, preacher that he is, is correct in concluding that the Rocky Mountains, like the "blue" "Greater Khingan Mountains of China" (125), are a false universal: "The mountains. They look so nice, I thought sitting on those hills outside Calgary, almost like a new world, sharp, beautiful, clean. But usually when you get over there's always more of what you climbed to get away from" (226-7). Progress toward the ideal of a "pure" new world is a progress-into-text that is not only an escape from the responsibility of place, but also an escape from the "impurity" of the self and of the body. For David Epp, the Blue Mountains are replaced by an ethical ideal that is not dependent upon an unattainable place, and in which bodies are valuable, if for nothing else, as sites of sacrifice. At the Lord's Supper, Christ said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24).

If the "End," as Kermode suggests, reflects man's "irreducibly intermediary preoccupations" (7), Wiebe's "epic" may be more of a "how to live" novel than it first seemed. For Wiebe, the story of Christ's life and death--the "presence" of his sacrifice--underwrites the dialogic narrative of *Blue Mountains*. For all the members of the group which Reimer has gathered at his feet in an Alberta ditch, the question of how to live is

important, though implicit. For the most part, they seem agnostic or atheist: unable to believe in anything beyond themselves, beyond the potato chips they manufacture, the words they play with, or the land they (once) owned. For Elizabeth, authentic heroic sacrifice is meaningless: "There's too bloody much sacrifice in the world already," she states, "so many dunderheads all over the world serving others, carving their bloody way up in the World Sacrifice Association. God. We need a world where everybody can live for himself, just be himself" (216). Ironically, what this group has in common is that each, in his or her own way, has "lived for himself."

Samuel Reimer, John's brother, at the end of "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," broaches the problem of self-sacrifice in a world that seems to isolate and ignore suffering and pain as much as possible, and, in its place, valorizes material wealth. Reimer's "reformed" search for a "pure" *imitatio Christi* mirrors Thom Wiens's; it is an attempted progress out-of-text and into-world:

> Sam read. He did not know if he had been living until the voice spoke; . . . he felt flayed: skinned to the agony of the world before the words, the yet more terrible pictures, but above all before the humanness of children, women, men who must endure living. And what could be thought when you saw little ones broiled in napalm? Jesus had said, "Do good to them that hate you that you may be children of your father which is in heaven," but what did that mean when you weren't hated, rather someone across an ocean and you knew about it? (169)

Reimer scraps his "Centennial Project" hog barn in order to try and close some of the distance between the Bible and his culture, to flesh out the biblical word. But his "revolutionary" model of how to live--based upon Christ's dictum: "If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come follow me" (Matthew 19: 21)--is not taken seriously. His death is meaningless in the "Christian" terms of his community.

For Frieda or Isaak Friesen, as for David Epp, the "End" involves fear but also--and more importantly--hope. In "My Life: That's As It Was (4)," as Frieda's husband Johann dies, he points out to her that their children will ask her why they have endured the horrors and poverty of the "green hell": "we thought we couldn't raise our children when

they took the German and the Bible lessons away in school. Maybe we were wrong, maybe we were right, but we believed it. Here we have land, we have had quiet here; peace and quiet. They're old enough now; they can decide" (148). Johann's faith involves language, text, and land, but it also involves an agency and freedom that the Jacob Friesen dynasty would not allow. In addition, many of those who learn of David Epp's heroic, *ethical* imitation of Christ are affected by his story. His actions inspire faith and result in a willingness to follow Christ in "real" places among "real" people. Thus his life does not become a placeless imitation of text, but a re-contextualized imitation of Christ's self-sacrifice, a translation of his own life into Stalinist Siberia.

Still the problem for Wiebe, as for his characters, continues to be the difficulty of realizing ideals in this world; the ideal of sacrifice cannot repudiate the present moment. As with Thom's "Star" in *Peace,* the ideal and the real must merge, just as the body and the spirit, the word and the flesh, must unite in the "true" Nativity. In differing ways, Mennonites such as Peter Block or John Reimer have tended to misread Christ's sacrifice, literally following him into a text that exists apart from, and even antithetical to, landscape or place. Wiebe criticizes this false, textual "imitation." "Wherever Mennonites had lived," Wiebe's narrator states, "whether in Canada or as far back as story and strong memory could depend on Russia, there had always been such village names: Gartental, Blumenau, Rosenfeld, Friedensruh. Each word was a place; it contained no word context for anyone; it was. So Schoenbach. . . . The well being what it was, the village simply named again their thoughtless faith" (96-7). This process of endless renaming is, in fact, a blindness to the new place, an imposing of the old onto the new. As such, it is a conservative unwillingness to leave the "body" of the old place, or just as likely, a refusal to confront the real body as it is, in its real place. And so the ideal name--the imagined word--becomes a substitute for the thing-in-itself, a "presence" which obliterates any new place, as it looks further on, over the horizon to the ever-receding "Blue Mountains."

Chapter Three

A "Desperate Placelessness":

Land, Paper, and the Impossibility of Translation

in

The Temptations of Big Bear

With *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Rudy Wiebe shifts his attention from Mennonites to native North Americans. As he "documents" the Cree Chief Big Bear's life between the years 1876 and 1888, his break with the transplanted European culture of the Mennonites seems clear. But there are elements of Big Bear's story, as told by Wiebe, that are of a piece with his earlier "Mennonite" novels: in both *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and *The Blue Mountains of China*, native and European cultures coexist uneasily in the same land. And if, as I have argued in the two previous chapters, the story of Christ's life--especially his birth and death--is an important intertext for these two novels, the same seems true of *The Temptations of Big Bear;* as Robert Kroetsch sees it, Wiebe's Big Bear is another version of "our Saviour" (Neuman 235). Thus, Wiebe continues to interrogate the question of presence and place in *Big Bear,* where the problems of language and land are foregrounded, but this time in the context of a "historical" novel that deals with the Canadian North-West around the time of the Frog Lake Massacre and the Rebellion at Batoche. Though Wiebe masterfully guides his narrative to successful and original ends, the same questions that appeared in *Peace* and *Blue Mountains* reappear: what is the relationship between a poetics of presence and the accidents of place? Is the integrity of the local place authorized or obliterated by the transcendent "presences" of God, of the Great Spirit, or of the "Great Mother the Queen"? Is translation possible between an oral culture that exists in a landscape and language imbued with presence, and a literate culture that exists "on" and "in" the pages of a literal, textual landscape?

Already, in Wiebe's first novel, Big Bear figures as a remembered presence. Thom Wiens learns that an outcast of Wapiti, Herman Paetkau, is living with Madeleine Moosomin, the "great-granddaughter of Big Bear, of whom Thom had never heard" (11). Significantly, it is a woman who educates Thom, teaching him about the history of the land that he and his culture "husband" as farmers: "the woman. . . told of the great Indian who had ruled the Plain Crees [sic] as a true monarch; who had signed the treaty with the white man and given up a territory as great as many European countries; who, in his old age, could not prevent his blood-maddened warriors from massacring nine white men at Frog Lake because they believed the Great White Mother had betrayed their contract. Hearing her tell of Big Bear, Louis Riel, Wandering Spirit, Thom glimpsed the vast past of Canada regarding which he was as ignorant as if it had never been" (111). This is almost an outline of *Big Bear,* a fair indicator of the direction that Wiebe's fiction will take in the future. And, as W. J. Keith has pointed out in *Epic Fiction: The Art of Rudy Wiebe*, the similar interest between author and protagonist in Wiebe's novels shows how Wiebe "seems to feel a strong need to identify himself with his principal characters" (77), whether Thom Wiens, Joseph Dueck, John Reimer, or even Big Bear.

But Keith's conclusion might be varied: if Wiens, Reimer, and perhaps even Big Bear, to some degree, can be seen as imitating Christ, it may be that Wiebe's characters follow a master narrative just as much as he himself does, as he identifies with Christ in living out his Anabaptist convictions. If this is the case (and it is likely), Wiebe's perpetuation of a "Continuing Apocalypse" (Kroetsch, cited in Neuman 235) would seem so powerful as to blind him to any other "story." This does not seem to bother a critic like Glenn Meeter, who states that "Wiebe has given us a thoroughly convincing picture of [Big Bear's] inner self, of a soul at once Indian and Christlike" (58). Meeter ignores the pre-emptive tyranny of this sort of syncretistic view, and feels that "Big Bear's character as presented is, even more, a living example of John Reimer's teaching" (58). Big Bear's

character, however, even though refracted through a Christian master narrative, is never as one-dimensional or as strawy as is John Reimer or his teaching.

Still, in the passage from *Peace*, it seems that Thom's disquiet about his own cultural ignorance is coincident with Wiebe's. Wiebe was born and raised in an area of northern Saskatchewan that Big Bear and his tribe once inhabited: "Of course, thanks to our education system," Wiebe writes, "I had been deprived of this knowledge when I was a child: we studied people with history." One result of this cultural effacement, in Wiebe's terms, is an "anger . . . which has ever since given an impetus to my writing which I trust it will never lose" ("On The Trail" 134). Another result, perhaps less obvious, is his requisite interest in the archaeology of the "local" place.

Kroetsch, in an interview with Wiebe and Shirley Neuman, first suggested that Wiebe is an archaeologist ("Unearthing," Neuman 230). In *Labyrinths of Voice,* Kroetsch defines the archaeoloist as one who sees *"the thing in its place what we want to do is record exactly where it's sitting where it's found and not make any assumptions not disrupt the ground and then read from there"* (9). In *The Lovely Treachery of Words,* Kroetsch continues: "In this postmodern world, we trust a version of archaeology over the traditional version of history. History, in its traditional forms, insisted too strongly on a coherent narrative. . . . Against this *over*riding view, we posit an archaeological sense that every unearthing is problematic, tentative, subject to a story-making act that is itself subject to further change as the dig goes on" (24). History, culture, and even the literary text can be understood using the method of archaeology. The historian, like the author, creates history which, as Linda Hutcheon points out in *The Canadian Postmodern,* is then "accepted as 'how things actually happened', with the historian in the role of the recorder" (15). History, Hutcheon continues, is a "construction. . . made by the historian through a process of selecting, ordering, and narrating" (15).

But if Wiebe's poetics are grounded in an archaeological sense of the contingencies of place, they are also underwritten by the (Christian) universal of God's presence, which

is manifested in a "place" called Heaven and in the textual "presence" of the Word. This fundamental bifurcation exists in Wiebe's novels as a tension between what he sees as the universal and the particular, and forms the double-foundation upon which his poetics is grounded. Thus, as Wiebe "unearths" Big Bear and his Cree culture, he discovers a land that authorizes the language of the Cree, and conversely, a land which itself is authorized by Spirit. If Big Bear is present in the land, then, he is part of the aggregative presence-in-place, himself a "spirit-of-place," which intrigues Wiebe, draws him into the land, the same land that Wiebe himself was born in. Yet Wiebe "finds" traces of Big Bear not so much in the landscape as in "texts" that contain parts of his story. So Wiebe is split between the myth-making power of an orality that is closely connected to the land, and the rational technologies of writing which produce texts.

That Wiebe is interested in a land which hosts a theological "presence" should not be a surprise. While the Old Testament promise that God would lead Israel out of Egypt and into a "good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3: 12) was only one part of a complicated salvation history, the land, or being-in-the-land, became a concrete manifestation of God's promise and continuing "presence" for Israel. But land also constitutes national identity, just as much if not more so than it does the worship of a "unique" God. Thus Wiebe's Anabaptist ancestors, a "religious nation without a country," in order to identify themselves and to counter their "placeless" migratory history, "manufactured" a past and a presence "in" the land by renaming new lands in the image of the old ones. In other words, these displaced Europeans tried to "write" a history for themselves over, upon, and oblivious to the existing land and its indigenous people and stories.

Of course, this over-writing is not unique to the Mennonites, but part and parcel of an enlightenment, capitalist world-view. Wiebe, however, seems to recognize the similar sense of "presence" in language shared by the native culture that is "written-over" and the Anabaptist European culture that does the "writing." No doubt, one of the reasons that the

that the story of Big Bear and the plight of his people attracted Wiebe was the native assumption of "presence" in language. Indeed, the native culture portrayed in *Big Bear* is what Walter Ong calls a culture of "primary orality," that is, a culture (that was) "untouched by literacy" (*Orality and Literacy* 5-6). In such a culture, "[o]ntogenetically and phylogenetically, it is the oral word that first illuminates consciousness with articulate language, that first divides subject and predicate and then relates them to one another, and that ties human beings to one another in society" (178-9).

By contrast, the culture of the "Whiteskins," the invading or dominant culture, is a literate one, a culture in which writing has developed as a "'secondary modeling system' dependent upon a prior primary system, spoken language" (*Orality and Literacy* 8). Ong points out that writing initially did not "reduce orality, but enhanced it" (10); that is, writing and speaking were essentially equal. Gradually, however, from about the mid-sixteenth century on, a "relentless dominance of textuality" (10) was felt by a culture which had just witnessed the "Reformation" of a corrupt Latin Vulgate testament by Erasmus' publication of a Greek New Testament in 1516. Thus, writing comes to be valorized over oral verbalization; it is taken more seriously. Texts, after all, are "permanent." Yet writing, for Ong, the "commitment of the word to space" (7), is a technology, a "particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity" (12) that "consumes" and "destroys" the memory of its antecedents, and deconstructs not only the idea of self-presence in speech, but also the community constructed around orality. Writing, for Ong, is therefore a technology that detaches and alienates.

According to Dan Latimer, in his Introduction to an essay excerpted from Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, this sort of logo/phono/centrism constitutes a "horror" of the "material basis" upon which not only writing is based, but also upon which "all spirituality and all dignified superstructures depend" (Lattimer 166). A horror, to be sure, that Wiebe's Mennonites, but especially his Mennonite males (Thom Wiens, Peter Block, Jakob Friesen V), enact in trying to mortify their material bodies. The written word, like

the body, is stuck in--limited to--the material of this earth, the local place, whatever "transcendental" man may want to believe. Still, he will idealize speech, uncoupling it from any material signifier, raising it to the plane of absolute Presence, the Word of God. God speaks, even if human beings have to take dictation.

Objecting to this bias of "godly" self-presence in language, Jacques Derrida rejects the historical prejudice which sees writing as secondary. Writing, he suggests, is primary; it liberates in its endless deferral, its play between signifiers and signifieds. Writing, Derrida points out in *Of Grammatology*, "comprehends language. Not that the word 'writing' has ceased to designate the signifier of the signifier, but it appears, strange as it may seem, that 'signifier of the signifier' no longer defines accidental doubling and fallen secondarity. 'Signifier of the signifier' describes on the contrary the movement of language: in its origin, to be sure, but one can already suspect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as 'signifier of the signifier' conceals and erases itself in its own production" (7). Writing is then "supplementary," or, as David Arnason puts it, the "'sign of the sign' while the oral sign [the phoneme] is the 'sign of the thing'" (4). Writing deconstructs the "self-presence" or "subjectivity" that Ong and most of Western Philosophy has granted speech: "by virture of hearing (understanding) oneself speak--an indissociable system--the subject affects itself and is related to itself in the element of ideality" (Derrida, *Grammtology* 12), an ideality that masks a "deficient originary"; without speech, the subject no longer experiences its own "presence," no longer exists.

Thus, for Derrida, the notion of "presence" that is written into what he calls the "book" represents a "natural totality [which] is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopedic protection of theology and of logocentrism" (18). The opposite of the "book" is the "text," which does not need to be "comprehended," "thought within an eternal presence" (18). Evidently, then, Derrida rejects Reformation theology and logocentrism--the whole poetics of presence--arguing instead for the "exteriority" of writing: "[t]he written signifier is always technical and representative. It has no constitutive

meaning" (11). Indeed, for Derrida, writing is a way to undo three thousand years of Western ethnocentric and logocentric "conspiracy." Writing testifies to the absence of any "fixed origin" or center: "when speech fails to protect presence, writing becomes necessary. It must be *added* to the word urgently. I have identified in advance one of the forms of this addition; speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institution or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 144). Supplementarity is thus connected to the concept of "play," an inexhaustible field of "infinite substitutions" that take "the center's place in its absence" (Derrida, "Structure" 289). Play, Derrida writes, "is the disruption of presence" and the deconstructor of an "ethic of archaic and natural innocence, an ethic of a purity of presence and self-presence in speech" which seeks "the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin" ("Structure" 292), an origin, Derrida points out, nostalgically sought by Levi-Strauss [but also by Wiebe's Mennonites].

Strangely, however, Western ethnocentrism still privileges speech over writing even as it employs a writing-over-speech hierarchy to evaluate "primitive" cultures. It is generally assumed that a literate culture is more sophisticated (more enlightened, more rational, more civilized etc.) than an oral one. This might be explained by the fact that one way Western historians and cultural anthropologists have assessed different cultures is in terms of their technologies: their metals, weapons, farming instruments, or ability to write. But at the same time that writing is seen as a technology which makes a culture superior, it also marks that culture's break with a pre-technological, "pre-writing" era, an era lost to "modern" civilization. In a fashion similar to Ong, the structural anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss privileges such a past, evoking a nostalgia that rejects the notion of writing as a primary or superior mode of signification. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that the "primary function of writing, as a means of communication, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings" (35). "Writing," for Levi-Strauss,

> is a strange thing. It would seem as if its appearance could not have failed to wreak profound changes in the living conditions of our race, and that these transformations must have been above all intellectual in character. Once men know how to write, they are enormously more able to keep in being a large body of knowledge. Writing might, that is to say, be regarded as a form of artificial memory, whose development should be accompanied by a deeper knowledge of the past and, therefore, by a greater ability to organize the present and the future. Of all the criteria by which people habitually distinguish civilization from barbarism, this should be the one most worth retaining: that certain peoples write and others do not. (34)

Writing, as Levi-Strauss concludes from his observation of the Nambikawara, "seemed to favor the exploitation rather than the enlightenment of mankind" (35). Though Levi-Strauss's argument may be hyperbolic, and based on limited data, it is clear that writing *can* be used to exploit and enslave. This is part of Wiebe's own nostalgic yearning for self-presence in language which has anti-imperialist implications in *The Temptations of Big Bear*. In other words, Wiebe might well see Derrida's advocacy for writing as the product of a book-based, French, intellectual imperialism.

Wiebe would seem to agree with the arguments of Ong or Levi-Strauss in his evocation of the "primary orality" of the Cree culture. "Words are not just sound," Big Bear says at one point in the novel (314). Later, as he tells the Court and a sceptical European culture, "A word is power, it comes from nothing into meaning and a Person takes his name with him when he dies" (398). In Big Bear's death, Wiebe laments the loss of Cree values (their lifestyle and unified cosmology) just as much as he laments the debasement of Big Bear's view of language, to the extent that his novel "has more in common with elegy than with epic" (Williams, *Queens Quarterly* 143). Put another way, the "burden of Wiebe's novel," as David Williams says, is the revival of a metaphoric vision of the world that would once again "make it comprehensible to modern man" ("Ancestor" 314). Thus *Big Bear* resembles what Linda Hutcheon describes as a *modern* novel, characterized by its "search for order in the face of moral and social chaos" (*Canadian Postmodern* 2).

But ironically, Hutcheon sees *Big Bear* as an example not of modern but of postmodern fiction, possessed of an "urge to trouble, to question, to make both

problematic and provisional any such desire for order or truth through the powers of the human imagination" (*Canadian Postmodern* 2). As an example of the postmodern form of "historiographic metafiction,"[9] *Big Bear* is supposed to question how we read and write history, how texts and facts are produced. Linda Hutcheon writes:

> What a novel like . . . *The Temptations of Big Bear* suggests, by its very form as well as its content, is that what language refers to--any language--is a textualized and contextualized referent: the Big Bear we come to know is not really the Big Bear of actuality (for how can we know that today?) but the Big Bear of history texts, newspaper accounts, letters, official and unofficial reports, but also of imagination and legend. The very fabric of the novel refuses any naive separation of fictional reference from that of so-called "scientific" descriptions of the past. . . . But it also refuses, just as firmly, any formalist or deconstructive attempt to make language into the play of signifiers discontinuous with representation and with the external world. . . . There was a Big Bear, a famous Cree Indian orator and leader--though we can only know him from texts. The novel is both a referential inscription and an imaginative invention of a world. (*Poetics* 144).

Hutcheon does not seem to see that Big Bear and Wiebe may share a belief in a transcendent poetics of presence in language which is not problematized in the novel. What is problematized, it seems to me, is the more orthodox, secular, white concept of order, not Wiebe's own Anabaptist projection of order onto Big Bear's life and times. In this sense, Big Bear may be both a *modern* and a *postmodern* novel, which would fit my larger thesis that Wiebe, like his poetics, is split between a unifying, totalizing, ordering sense of universal presence and an arbitrary, fragmentary, archaeological sense of local place.

Wiebe's novel might then be split not only between presence and place, between speech and writing, but also between the modernist need to assert order and a timeless aesthetic autonomy, and the postmodern need to subvert order or closure through self-reflexivity and awareness of the "constructedness" of history. In a way, the form and

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[9] Historiographic metafictions are "those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages. . . . In most of the critical work on postmodernism, it is narrative--be it in literature, history, or theory--that has usually been the major focus of attention. Historiographic metaficiton incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historio*graphic meta*fiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking the forms and contents of the past" (Hutcheon, *Poetics of Postmodernism* 5).

content of Wiebe's novel reveal this tension. In *Big Bear*, the railroad represents the "progressive," technological imposition of White culture upon native culture and land, an imposition which Wiebe does not seem to support. Indeed, the railroad "cuts" the land, "splits it open" (201); to Big Bear, its sounds are "unendurable, as if intent now to split his awareness into unfindable pieces" (136). As Kroetsch writes in *The Lovely Treachery of Words,* the railway, "in Wiebe's book--the iron horse of 1885--announces the arrival of a new story--of dustbowl economics, of life and death on the reservation" (29). Yet, in "Passage by Land," Wiebe endorses this sort of imposition. He states:

> The space must be broken up somehow or it uses you up. . . . to touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader's mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer build a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. A poem, a song will not do it. You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build a giant artifact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction. (44)

In making clear his predilection for fiction, Wiebe thus identifies his story-making with the very technology he deplores. For writing is a form of railroading; it is an imposition of a certain type of *ethnocentric* order. By sharing an "imputed belief in the symbolic landscape of the Great Plains" with his protagonist, Big Bear, Wiebe believes he can communicate--or "adopt"--his "native inheritance" (Williams, "Ancestor" 314, 316). But it is a fine line to walk, between sympathetic understanding of Big Bear and his Cree, and the repetition of "Whiteskin" appropriation.

Marjorie Fee concludes that Wiebe, for all his nostalgia, unwittingly does the latter. She writes that, "[d]espite his great attention to red culture and to historical fact, Wiebe is, ultimately, inevitably, both criticizing white exploitation and re-enacting it. . . . Writing is, as much as railway building, an act of conquest" (28-9). For Fee, as much as for Levi-Strauss, writing is a technology of enslavement. But at least part of Wiebe's novel suggests it is so. As David Williams puts it:

> the apparent nostalgia of *The Temptations of Big Bear* is also for that "round, good Earth," for a world view lost to history. The nostalgia is Wiebe's as much as it is Big Bear's. Since the artist's particular obsession is history, and since the strategy

> of his narrative is both imaginative and documentary, an unresolved tension overtakes his work. The Regina trial manuscripts, the newspaper clippings, the letter of Edgar Dewdney, and the matter-of-fact historical sub-chapters become so many surveyor stakes, the same steel rails which have destroyed the round, good world. So art, intentionally or not, lends formal justification to the historical process: mechanical surveys in both realms bring about the end of myth. ("Ancestor" 314-5)

Wiebe's Big Bear, on the other hand, holds to an ideal of language as power which resists the impositions of new technologies. Ironically, Wiebe's own ancestors held to a radical understanding of the presence of God in speech which was then made incarnate in writing. Reformed theology mediated this contradiction through an incipient theory of reader response, whereby God's presence is extended from speech into the text via the reading act. Thus Christ, as in Calvin's treatise on the Last Supper (see above, 5-9), came to inhabit--be actually in--the biblical narrative, and to be reconstituted in the readers who partook of the Word as sacrament in the Reformed communion. This "word-based piety" meant that the reader who made "a devoted study" of Scripture "encountered the Real Presence in biblical promise" (Christopher 12).

In the Reformation, then, theology embraces the technology of print. But Big Bear's world view is unmediated by print or by the act of reading. Because Cree culture has no scriptures, Wiebe must then seek to express an original, pre-history which would pre-date even his Anabaptist ancestors and the advent of print. Thus, it could be argued that native culture, for Wiebe, provides such a pre-history, a time of "plentitude and authority" (Spivak xix) in which God's presence is not only understood but experienced in "concrete" ways, *in the land.* Wiebe can then laminate the Mennonite longing for divine "presence" with the enviable Cree being-in-the-land, a pantheism where more than just a "voice" is in the land. And *The Temptations of Big Bear* can become a secular scripture, after the fact, that the Cree never had for themselves. The reader of such a scripture, it would seem, encounters "the Real Presence" of Big Bear in much the same sense that Calvin meant of Christ.

Big Bear, it seems, is one of the last indigenous spokesmen for the presence of Spirit in speech, found nowadays in writing, but reconstituted in the act of the reader. To the author, "The Great Spirit" is in the land that Big Bear lives upon, in the words he speaks, and in the animals he hunts. But the presence of "The Great Spirit" is written into the novel in such a way that it seems to conform to the Christian master narrative. Hence the epigraph to the novel from *Acts* 17: "God who made the world and all that is in it, from one blood created every race of men to live over the face of the whole earth. He has fixed the times of their existence and the limits of their territory, so that they should search for God and, it might be, feel after him, and find him. And indeed, he is not far from any of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being." Big Bear's experience of "The Great Spirit" in the land thus conforms to Wiebe's own sense of a god who is also "not far from any of us," and in whom we "live, and move, and have our being."

For both white and native cultures, language is the primary site of contact with that which is beyond the self: God, "The Only One," "The Great Spirit." So, when Big Bear, near the end of his life, realizes "[i]t was time now. To lie down; to finish the long prayer to the Only One that was his life. . ." (414), it is possible to hear echoes of Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians: "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6: 24); or to the Thessolonians: "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5: 17). In addition, the rhythm and cadence of the *Pater Noster* can be heard in Big Bear's prayer: "Our Father, The main One, I have to name you first. All things belong to you. Look on our hunting. All Spirit Powers, I beg a good life for our People, I beg your blessing on everything. Forgive us for being hungry, I thank you that you have let us see food again. I ask you for a good running. . ." (126). Of course, Wiebe is looking for common ground to Christian and native culture, but his notion of prayer is decided by a Christian master narrative. Though Cree and Christian cultures are in many ways separated by competing ideologies, they share a theology of the Word that Wiebe

sees as parallel, especially in terms of praying. As Big Bear says, "A word is power, it comes from nothing into meaning" (398).

The native understanding of presence, however, moves beyond the Reformation understanding of presence in language and text. For Big Bear, there is a spiritual presence in the land which empowers and animates it, a presence that, as Marjorie Fee notes, underscores the native peoples' "autochthonous claim to the land" (18). Nonetheless, the native sense of "presence" in language is similar, if not identical to, their sense of "presence" in the land. Thus, Walter Ong's description of "primary orality" comes close to describing Big Bear's understanding of both land and language. In Ong's terms, "the real word, the spoken word, in a profound sense is of itself bound to ongoing, lived human existence, and thus is of itself aggregative, or unitive. . . . The spoken word, however abstract its signification or however static the object it may represent, is of its very nature a sound, tied to the movement of life itself in the flow of time. . . .The real word, the spoken word, is always an event . . . an action" (*Interface* 20-1). For Big Bear and his culture, land is also "aggregative" and tied to the movement of life, "eternally variable and forever again the same" (*Big Bear* 29). Is it is from the land that life originates, and to the land that life returns. Near the end of his life, Big Bear "felt the granular sand joined by snow running together, against and over him in delicate streams. . . . Slowly, slowly, all changed continually into indistinguishable, as it seemed, and everlasting, unchanging rock" (415). Rock, we learn with Kitty McLean, "is the grandfather of all, the first of all being as well as the last" (314-15), in a sacred landscape that cannot be possessed. As Big Bear refutes Governor Morris, he says: "No one can choose for only himself a piece of the Mother Earth. She is. And she is for all that live, alike" (28).

The white culture--distinct from Wiebe's Anabaptist culture of the Word--sees things differently, of course. Though Big Bear says that "Land was not like paper" (72), the documents which are embedded in the narrative expose the European prescription that land is only a palimpsest to be written over and controlled by the intrument of writing:

> *NOW THIS INSTRUMENT WITNESSETH, that the said "Big Bear," for himself and on behalf of the Band which he represents, does transfer, surrender and relinquish to Her Majesty the Queen, Her heirs and successors, to and for the use of Her Government of the Dominion of Canada, all his right, title and interest whatsoever, which he has held or enjoyed, of, in and to the territory described and fully set out in the treaty commonly known as "treaty Number Six"; also all his right, title and interest whatsoever to all other lands wherever situated, whether within the limits of any other treaty heretofore made or hereafter to be made with Indians, or elswhere in Her Majesty's territories. To have and to hold the same unto and for the use of Her Majesty the Queen, Her heirs and successors forever. And does hereby agree to accept the several benefits. . . .* (132-3)

By writing "over" the land, the whites are alienated by their own technology from the space they inhabit. And, for all their faith in the permanence of their "Instrument"--*"To have and to hold the same unto and for the use of Her Majesty the Queen, Her heirs and successors forever"*-- it is clear to Big Bear that whites are changeless only in changing:

> But they were not rock either, for rock was the oldest, eternal grandfather of all things who stayed in his place and you could be certain of him. Whites were only certain in changing. . . . They never had rest. Surveyors sticking in poles with wires and government agents sending messages and missionaries talking talking to stop stop stop stop and settlers ripping up the land and knocking down trees and wolfers dashing about scattering poison and killing wolves and buffalo. Even the police were always packed down under things they had to do right now, to go, to make some person do something. It ran in his head like a sore, they were always moving though no one had died at the old place--maybe whites quickly made a place sick?----one fort and then another, build this, tear that down. He had tried to unravel this desperate placelessness--they built houses that couldn't move and yet they seemed always moving placelessly. (101-2)

Wiebe is not so didactic, here, as to point out that the Whiteskins' orientation is towards private property and product, concepts so foreign to Big Bear and his world that they cannot be named or translated, much less understood.

It is clear in Wiebe's novel, however, that the principle of private property, of possessive individualism, competes with, and outdoes, the native understanding of communal sharing. Property underwrites the language of the Whiteskins, just as it underwrites their documents, their economic agenda, and their idea of landscape. Big Bear is judged a traitor because he has broken his "allegiance" and "duty" which, the Court rules, are "owed to the Queen" (355). The problem of language (and cultural) translation in *Big Bear* thus extends--is based upon--the inability of ideology to be transferred from one

culture to the other. "Translate" is the past participle of the Latin *transferre,* meaning to "convey or take from one place, person, etc. to another" (OED). The impossibility of translation between the two cultures is underwritten, then, by the ideological difference between possessive individualism and communal sharing. Big Bear is bewildered by the notion of property and the "placeless" structures of capitalism. The government, he says,

> sends us nothing but these things that think themselves men. They bring everything crooked, they take our lands and sell them and clap their hands on their hips and call themselves men. Men! Years before the treaty we heard the Hudson's Bay Company had sold the land to the Government. When, from whom had they ever received it? I know they sold what was not theirs for more money than all the People have received after eight years of treaty, and besides that the company still has more land than all of our reserves together. The railroad that strangles the land has even more than that. At Where The Bones Lie the Governor Dewdney has built his new house, he told me, and the land there was sold for so much money that, if we could touch it, we and our children and all their children after would eat beef twice a day as long as we live. What are these crooked things that we see around us while we dig for gophers with sticks so we have a few bits to put in our children's mouths? (205).

Conversely Big Bear's vision of the "white sickness" and "Little Man" at the Sand Hills, like his own "bundle vision" (62-6), is a prophetic gift to Fish and the other native leaders that leads to a sequence of gift-giving in which Fish and the leaders repay the gift of words with property that they will not reserve to themselves. By contrast, the Mounties who "Maintain the right to always get [their] man" (151) have their own ideology laid bare by "Commissioner Macleod [who] began the legend at the fort he named after himself" (151). Heroism for the white culture means possessing oneself, while heroism for the Cree means giving oneself away.

Ironically, the communal society of the Plains Cree is a much better imitation of a "Christian" community than the communities of the colonial Christians. And, although Big Bear is clearly pagan--he resists conversion just as he resists signing away his land[10]--"the ultimate irony. . . lies in the fact that Big Bear's 'paganism,' however distant from the

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[10] Big Bear is not baptised until he is in prison, where he accepts "that little water left for [him]" (408). However, as W. J. Keith points out, Big Bear's "acceptance of the Church at the close of the novel. . . is a bitter token of his defeat" (76).

forms and teachings of Christianity, is basically far closer to the message of Christ than the perfunctory pieties of the white characters in the novel" (Keith, *Epic* 76).

In *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property,* Lewis Hyde elaborates on this idea of a "gift economy." He suggests that "[e]very culture offers its citizens an image of what it is to be a man or woman of substance. There have been times and places in which a person came into his or her social being through the dispersal of gifts, the 'big man' or 'big woman' being that one through whom the most gifts flowed. The mythology of a market society reverses the picture: getting rather than giving is the mark of a substantial person, and the hero is 'self-possessed,' 'self-made' " (xiii-xiv). Gifts, Hyde notes, flow between giver and receiver, creating a community that is interrelated because of the three related "obligations" of a gift: "the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate" (xv). The idea of the constant motion of a gift is in keeping with the idea of an active or vital landscape, and is connected to the idea that the spoken word flows in time. All three concepts share the assumptions that "things" are "in motion," and that objects seen as inanimate by whites can possess both a spiritual and an animate vitality which serves to interconnect the tribe to itself and the Person to his environment. Indeed, "unlike the sale of a commodity, the giving of a gift tends to establish a relationship between parties involved" (xiv).

Hyde goes on to show how the contemporary notion of "Indian giver" is in fact a misunderstanding of the native concept of gift. An "Indian giver," Hyde writes, is anyone who is "so uncivilized as to ask us to return a gift he has given" (3). The opposite of an Indian gift, which "must always move," for Hyde, is really the "'white man keeper' (or maybe 'capitalist'), that is, a person whose instinct is to remove property from circulation, to put it in a warehouse or museum (or, more to the point for capitalism, to lay it aside to be used for production)" (4). The Whiteskins' sense of property is such an appropriation, a "removal" that would assert order by controlling the circulation of "gifts." Indeed, the gift is destroyed by the conservative, static forces of capital-making. Thus, Sherrill Grace's

argument about the nature of language and linguistic violence in *The Temptations of Big Bear* is based upon a proposition that is fundamentally reversed. When she says that Wiebe, in *Big Bear*, makes us "see the violence of 1885, understand how language, with the ideology it supports, creates the conditions of that violence" (20), she suggests that it is language itself that underpins a capitalist economy and the violent imperialist appropriation sanctioned by it. I would argue the reverse, that the socio-economic structures of such an economy find in language another way to support and perpetuate its own agenda, another power structure to be used to justify its expansive imperialism. Thus as J. M. Coetzee writes about the colonization of South Africa, the language of religion and production are shown to be merged, and the land turned into a commodity: "those deserve to inherit the earth who make best use of it. Thus in the theory of 'double right' propounded by Governor John Winthrop of Massachusetts, the rights of cultivators, who clear and settle the land, always take precedence over the rights of nomads, who merely hunt over it" (3). The North-West was settled not for rhetorical reasons, as Grace would have it, but for predominantly economic ones: language, like religion, was a helpful tool or technology in this task.

The capitalist sense of the land as private property is diametrically opposed to the native understanding of land. Big Bear sees that the rectilinear habits of the Whiteskins are destroying the "circle of sun and sky and earth and death" in which he stands "complete" (129). Travelling into Winnipeg, where he is to be imprisoned, Big Bear

> saw then that straight lines had squared up the land at right angles, broad lines of stark bleached bones had been spread straight, pressed and flattened into the earth for him to ride over. . . . As far as he could see, wherever he looked the world was slit open with unending lines, squares, rectangles. . . . He could not comprehend where he was. He suddenly recognized nothing where he knew he had ridden since he was tied in the cradleboard on his mother's back, where he had run buffalo since he could fork a horse. He was seeing; the apprehension which the settler-clustered land of Manitoba and Winnipeg's square walls and gutted streets had begun drove like nails into the sockets of himself and his place was gone, he knew Earth and Sun which had been his gifts to accept and love and leave to others were gone, all gone. (409).

Big Bear's sense of dislocation seems almost a modernist's sense of loss or "moral and social chaos" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 2). How closely Big Bear's sense of dislocation is shared by Wiebe is an important question; is Big Bear another mouthpiece for the conservative discontent of the author? Marjorie Fee seems to think this is the case. She suggests that Wiebe's ideas about native culture can be connected to Romantic theory. "Native people," she writes, "are so rarely depicted as individuals because they must bear the burden of the Other--of representing all that the modern person has lost. The white turns to nature to assuage a hunger: the Indian becomes the guide, helper, or shaman. . . . They provide, for a brief spell, a return to what is being actively destroyed around us" (29).

Fee's comments ring true of the nostalgia in Wiebe's novel, although Big Bear, in Wiebe's more dialogical structure, also possesses an authentic individuality that might surprise. All the same, there is a latent possibility in *Big Bear* that the Indian's lifestyle is superior to the Whiteskins'. At the close of the twentieth century, with the environment all but destroyed by industrial-capitalism economies, perhaps Big Bear's example of how to live is "better." Whatever the case, Fee's argument exposes the Romantic ideology of nomadic life, such as is evoked in scenes of Kingbird's pseudo-sexual encounter with the mare (53-6), of Big Bear's buffalo hunt (128-32), or of Kingbird's horse-stealing (81-6), where the action of the scene is romanticized to the point of obfuscation. Indeed, masturbating a mare, slaughtering buffalo, and "counting coup" in order to steal a buffalo runner may be less honorable feats in native culture than they are in the imagination of a Whiteskin author or film-maker. For deeds like this betray a very patriarchal understanding of the "great, round Earth" which exists solely for the male.

Wiebe portrays Big Bear's last buffalo run in this sort of romanticized, sexualized language:

> There were only two now, one bull and the great cow intent in the rhythms of drums, of himself and his runner and suddenly the bull broke, stumbled, rolled out of it like legs snapping and then there was only the cow, floating nearer wave by

> wave, growing large beside him streamed the tuft of her tail, the rolling leap of muscle in her hindquarters and he felt life surging like sweet water within her, her heart in that violent, happy thunder as she ran true the great curve of earth, as he drifted to her shoulder and his arrow for an instant pointed her like the giant constellation of the wolf road points the sky at night and instantaneously it grew in her. . . (128-9)

Beginning as a buffalo slaughter, the scene ends in the heavens, in a metaphoric assertion of a Romantic unity; and the sentences--long, breathless clauses, strung together, urgently, climactically--suggest the discourse of symbolic sexuality and ritual. After killing the cow, Big Bear, watched by Coyote, "sees" a "fountain of blood growing in the ground there like a prairie lily opening upwards and swelling higher as if it grew soft and thick, and higher so he put out his hand to stop that" (130). For a moment, it seems that we are back with Thom and Annamarie in a sexualized landscape, "walking along the fringe of the valley" (*Peace* 44) from where Thom flings a stone into a pool, "using his entire body in a flare of viciousness that spurted and died" (47). This is, it appears, the sort of landscape that a "real" man would like to inhabit. And so the dying buffalo cow "settled her mountainous body down for him with one long sigh" (129). The female is for the male, till death do her part. Domination, it would seem, is not unique to the culture of capitalism. Not unique, that is, to a world view which is really a projection of internal contradiction in the author's own culture.

While Fee's equation of the representation of the native in Canadian fiction with Romanticism is troubling, it is nonetheless telling. "The simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature," Fee writes, "can be explained to some extent . . . by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land. It also explains the general lack of interest in Native culture and history: we want to be them, not understand them" (24). And Romanticism, for Fee, "supplies us with a further explanation: the Indian stands for a dispossession larger than his own" (24). In addition, Fee points out that Wiebe is himself a member of a "fringe" ethnic group, and is thus further tempted to identify with Big Bear's "marginalized" position. Yet Romanticism is related to the "political ideology" of nationalism, and both can be traced "to the struggle for German

unification, when the native culture was used to justify the creation of a state whose borders followed the cultural borders of language and 'race'" (Fee 17). Nineteenth-century conditions in Germany parallel the conditions in the nineteenth century of Wiebe's novel:

> [r]ecent studies of romanticism and nationalism relate them to urbanization, the Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of new elites connected with shifts in the economy of Europe. An uprooted populace detached from the traditional stable loyalties of the pre-industrial period was given new, "higher" national loyalties to replace the old personal fealty, a written culture to replace the oral one, a literary past to replace a communal one, and an aesthetic of nature to replace the lost, real nature. (24).

Fee perceptively connects the shift from oral to written culture with nationalism; and if we remember the displacement suffered by the Mennonites (a predominantly German group), the fact that they remained primarily "pre-industrial" or agrarian until as recently as Wiebe's generation, and that they have become a primarily "textual" culture (cf. Sam Reimer's Gartental), the evidence suggests that not only Wiebe, but also the Mennonites, long for a "lost, real nature." Robert Kroetsch sees this nostalgia as a "dream of Eden" (*Lovely Treachery* 32). As such, it is the "one meta-narrative that has asserted itself persistently in the New World context" (31). Asserting this "dream," "Wiebe's thought" evidently "falls into the Romantic tradition" (Fee 26).

But if Wiebe can be criticized for his Romanticism, he can be praised for his remarkable sympathy towards the native culture. It would be a reader as dull as Francis Dickens' journal entries reveal him to be, or as inept as Major-General T. Bland Strange, who did not sense that Big Bear and his Cree know, at least in part, a "better" way to live than the Whiteskins, whose ideal of progress amounts to violent appropriation and genocide. One way that the actual violence of appropriation is hidden, that the "crown and dignity" of the Queen are preserved, is accomplished by turning the land into paper, which the native tribes then sign away. In this manner, White culture uses its chirographic "power" against an oral culture. But the seemingly just rhetoric and emphasis on legal contract mask a gross injustice. The specious display of fairness is put on mostly for the sake of a "benevolent" Queen mother and the consciences of her white history-makers.

Power, for the "Whiteskins," is absolutely located in document, and in the military that "guarantees" the paper, transcriptions, and treaties that stand in, speak for, the absent "Crown." As Governor Morris expresses it metonymically to Big Bear, "when you hear my voice you are listening to your Great Mother the Queen" (21). Thus, the "transcendental signifier" of the Whiteskins' economy, the "Crown," comes to be present in the paper that represents the Queen, and is grafted onto the prairie landscape, even though, as Kitty McLean points out, Big Bear "had never so much as seen the Grandmother" (386).

Land, for the Queen's culture, lacks an integral "presence," and is invested with an external "power" by those who control or own it. Paper, like land in the world of the "whiteskins," is property. The basic conflict in *Big Bear*, then, is ideological: between the dominant colonizing culture of the Whiteskins and the invaded culture of the Indian; between the capitalist idea of property and the communal notion of a "spiritualized" landscape. At his trial, Big Bear maintains that the land was given to his people as a "gift" from "The Great Spirit." In Big Bear's words, his tribe were "free because the Master of Life had given us our place on the earth and that was enough for us" (398). Yet Justice Hugh Richardson maintains that the land is owned by the Queen. "This land," he informs Big Bear as he passes sentence, "never belonged to you. The land was and is the Queen's. She has allowed you to use it" (399). Though the language barrier between English and Cree impedes justice at Big Bear's trial, the diametrically opposed world views of the "Whiteskins" and the "People" make translation impossible: the two cultures possess incompatible views of the land.

It may be that the Whiteskin need to own and to impose order upon the land is not only part of a capitalist master-narrative, but also the result of a (national) fear of disorder, of disunity. Indeed, as Kroetsch suggests in *The Lovely Treachery of Words,* the writing of "shared stories," of dominant "meta" or master "narratives," has "traditionally been basic to nationhood" (21). The fear of disunity thus incorporates the anxiety of size felt by those

who would reduce Canada to unified totality. As Edgar Dewdney writes: "It is all so vast, so laid out in unending curving lines that you can begin to lose the sense of yourself in relation to it. . . . it can drive a small man to madness, this incomprehensible unending at any point seemly unresisting and unchecked space. To control, to humanize, to structure and package such a continent under two steel lines would bring any engineer headier joy than the lyric prospects of heaven" (114). Dewdney's masculine insecurity towards the land and its resistance to imposed order are revealing; an "engineer" seeks a rational, linear "unity." Of course, Derrida has his own understanding of the notion of "engineer," an idea that is "theological": "The engineer," he writes, "whom Levi-Strauss opposes to the *bricoleur,* should be the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon. In this sense, the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it 'out of nothing,' 'out of whole cloth,' would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself" ("Structure" 285). Such a creator sounds a lot like the Judeo-Christian "father-god," and the Whiteskin appropriation of Cree land, like the writing of colonial history, resembles this creation *ex nihilo*. But the land of the Cree resists this imposed, rectilinear logic, the logic of the Whiteskin that would turn land into "paper." For "Land," Big Bear states, "was not like paper; wind did not blow it away nor water rot it" (72). All the same, the land eventually does give way to the invading, mastering technology, though beneath the veneer of the engineer's technology the land prevails, however obscured.

The close connection between paper and property is sharply felt by Big Bear and his tribe. At Carlton, Big Bear states:

> All I see is the little piece of land I must choose and then never leave unless some Farm Instructor says I can go. What is that, when I must have the mark of such a thing on paper to walk on the land they have borrowed? I feel as if I have choked. I love The One Above, I ask That One whom we love to help me. If we respect and honour the Queen because of her great work on the Earth, how much more must we honour the Earth? Is this Queen more to us than the Earth? The proper way to live with the Earth is to give each one the right The First One gave every one man. Let every man walk where his feet can walk. (199-200)

This migratory lifestyle and spiritual sense of landscape do not transfer to the Queen's culture. And, although few Whiteskins seem to understand Big Bear's Cree world view (Kitty McLean--another one of Wiebe's "wise" females--seems to understand it best), Big Bear is on to the Whiteskins' "over-writing." In a plea to the Indian leaders for solidarity, Big Bear says:

> I know how it was done. While Governor Morris was speaking a man was writing words on a paper beside him. When the Governor had finished the People said what we wanted and the man wrote down those words too. After we had done speaking they placed a paper before us to make our names on, but we refused until they had given us a copy of the words which we could send around among our people to hear what they said, for words written down always say the same thing. But they would not let that; it was not necessary they said, we could trust them, so then we made our names. They went to Battleford and sent back a copy which they left us, and after they went to Ottawa they sent another copy. And then we found that the words no longer said the same thing; then we found that half the sweet things were taken out and all the sour left in, and we knew we would never stand on the same place with the white man in our land. But to this day we wait for the white man, that he will fulfill his first promise. That is what we know about the treaty. (200)

Big Bear articulates the "duplicity" of Whiteskin language and texts, but he seems unable to understand how "presence" in language can become relative, even to the point of dishonour and fraud, in order to lay claim to the land and to "extinguish" native rights to it.

The Whiteskins desacrilize Big Bear's landscape by turing it into paper. In a manner similar to that of Thom Wiens, Peter Block, or John Reimer, General Morris and company see the landscape as "paper," as textual, and thus can ignore its specific originality. The most obvious manifestation of this practice in the novel (as in history) is seen in the treaties which Big Bear refuses to sign. Once the New World is mapped, it is known, charted--written into existence. Wiebe opens his novel with this problem of writing, of reducing a life and a landscape to paper. Even the "Honorable Alexander Morris" sees it: "Once he would have thought those twenty-seven His X Marks under Sweetgrass and James Seenum made little difference, but no longer. Not after the several hundred thousand square miles to which he had finally and forever extinguished, as the Prime Minister liked to say it, all native rights" (9-10). To Morris and the Imperial culture

he represents, the land is little more than a textual facsimile, to be collected like a book--and a vast, bad book at that, something to be endured. But a book, all the same, out of which great wealth could be extracted. Wiebe makes excellent use of the "hide-bound" consciousness of Morris who thinks: "Who could imagine so much land? Even ignoring all that disappeared in blue distance beyond the treaty boundaries which he himself had only seen as squiggles of rivers on paper and would never see otherwise; even after driving over it at an unending trot day after day along trails winding up and down and right and left and through and over under the relentless sky, he could not" (10). Morris is blinded by an overriding master-narrative, which threatens (or pretends) to be a universal way to view the world. He is blind to the local place and people, over which he and his culture "write" their latest palimpsest. As the figure that opens the novel, he is an important index for the novel and of the Whiteskin need to appropriate land. Near the end of his opening interior monologue, he asks himself, "Who would sign away such a land?" (11). His answer is revealing--it leaves no doubt that the "paper shuffling" which represents the Whiteskins' attempt to textually appropriate the land is mere charade. The signatures of Big Bear and other Indian chiefs are meaningless, as impermanent as the paper upon which they are written. Morris's answer to his own question makes it clear that the treaty-process is corrupt and unilateral; he thinks to himself: "As if they had a choice" (11).

Unlike the native sense of place, which unifies the community and the self, the "paper" culture functions according to a possessive individualism which fragments the land, the community, and even the self. David Laird's reduction of the natives and their land to paper and property leaves no doubt about this:

> He had factual data that would look just fine on the Annual Report, 1877:
>
> *The number of Indians to be paid was as follows:*
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | Head Chiefs | 10 at $25 | $250 |
> | Minor Chiefs and Councillors | 40 at 15 | $600 |
> | Men, women and children | 4,342 at 12 | 52,104 |

> Not quite $53,000 for a bit more than fifty thousand square miles of grass and hills. A down payment, actually, but complete with rivers, valleys, minerals, sky--everything, forever. Rotting buffalo. (69)

Laird is another of the Queen's "paper men," men like Governor Morris or Edgar Dewdney, or William McDougall in *The Sorched-Wood People* who, in a meeting with Gabriel Dumont, "like any paper man, hadn't heard a word; he was too busy thinking about his own words pondered so long, written so carefully; he was ploughing through the snow to throw the weight of his paper into the case and thereby prove once and for all everything that had to be proved" (16).

Thus, the textual, paper reality of the Whiteskin's capitalism destroys the land and language of the Cree, forcing them to be aliens in their own land. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin show in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures*, "[t]he most widely shared discursive practice within which . . . alienation can be identified is the construction of 'place.' The gap which opens between the experience of place and the language available to describe it forms a classic and all-pervasive feature of post-colonial texts. This gap occurs for those whose language seems inadequate to describe a new place, for those whose language is systematically destroyed by enslavement, and for those whose language had been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power" (9-10). At least two of these conditions apply to the decimated culture of the Cree.

Though *Big Bear* may be flawed by nostalgia and ideological wishful thinking, it is nonetheless brilliant in its portrayal of the competition between Whiteskin and Cree languages. Of course, it is not much of a contest; it is clear from the start who "wins." All the same, Wiebe splits his narrative between what Sherrill Grace, working from a theoretical base which includes Roman Jakobson, Tzvetan Todorov, and Julia Kristeva, calls the metonymic and metaphoric poles of language.

Grace holds that, ultimately, *Big Bear* is "more than a novel about violent confrontation between two races, two cultures, two ideologies, which led to the historical

defeat of one and victory of the other. It goes much further in order to explore the gap between signifier and signified, and as a text it situates the reader in that space between two conflicting discourses, quite literally in the cross-fire where he can be told another history, where he can experience another human being, and where, through structure and language, his secure sense of separate identity and inviolable assumptions will be shattered" (8). The reader's "education" is brought about by Wiebe's manipulation of two different types of narrative: the "horizontal" narrative of contiguity (Jakobson's metonymic pole), and the "vertical" narrative of substitution (Jakobson's metaphoric pole). Metonymic narratives are predominantly "realist" narratives, and, as Kristeva suggests, use "non-poetic (symbolic) rationalist language" (Grace 9-10). Metaphoric narratives, on the other hand, are more "semiotic"; as Kristeva puts it, they contain"the instinctual and pre-verbal drives manifest in rhythm and intonation" (Grace 10). This type of language includes most poetry, surrealist art, and modern fiction. The metonymic or symbolic narrative tends to have a "highly ordered, repressive, rationalist, style," while the metaphoric narrative tends to be poetic, to "unsettle, shatter, and destroy not only syntax, but the identity of the transcendental Western subject or ego which is guaranteed in syntax" (Grace 10).

While Grace is more certain than I am that modern ficiton tends to be metaphoric, and traditional novels metonymic, her discussion of *Big Bear's* language is helpful. Wiebe's novel is clearly split between these two "poles" of language. She suggests that the Whiteskin culture functions as a horizontal narrative of contiguity (metonymy). "This narrative," she writes,

> is fixed in time and place by the dated headings of the chapters, and it is carried forward through the exposition and description of a narrator-chronicler who comes forward at several points to provide connections, facts, names and dates, and general information necessary to an understanding of the historical and public events. . . . In addition to providing this essential linear logic and information, the familiar rational discourse of the horizontal narrative reminds us that we are listening to the White version of the story--not surprisingly, the narrators, including Wiebe as chronicler, and the voices behind court document, diary, or newspaper, are White. (12)

Competing with the "metonymic" discourse is the language which functions as a "vertical narrative of substitutions" (12). This "poetic" or "metaphoric" language "disrupts" the "linear progression of the horizontal narrative" in order to ensure that Big Bear's story--a death-story--is heard "in," alongside, the colonial narrative of Whiteskin progress. Jakobson's two language poles are represented in Wiebe's "split narrative"; thus "the style of the White speakers, from Morris down to the Canadian volunteer, is predominantly metonymic, denotative proposition" (Grace 15). These are, after all, "literal-minded men" (14). By contrast, the style of Big Bear and the Cree speakers is more that of "parable," of metaphor, which explodes the rational, postitivist discourses of the Whites. The explosion, for Grace, creates "a linguistic space between opposed peoples," and forces "the reader to occupy that ground, then batter him from both sides with words, some rational and familiar. . . others rhythmic and strange" (20). Through it, we are to experience the Other, "to understand, to hear, Big Bear's words at the same moment as [the reader] is able to understand how bizarre and irrelevant such words must sound to Justice Richardson" (Grace 18).

Earlier, I suggested that Grace's argument was based upon the false premise that language underwrites the structures of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution. Though language plays an important, even essential, part in supporting captialist ideology, it is not, in the end, a cause of it. That would be too simple. Grace's theory, as charming as it is, and as correct as it is in its analysis of Wiebe's split narrative, is also myopic in its assumption that "through the shattering of his own syntactic identity, the reader knows what it means to be the victim of White language and law" (19). While Grace's conclusion is optimistic in favor of the power of fiction, it seems facile to suggest that the reader (and probably a white reader) can "identify" with the Other. Though it is based upon a bleak assumption, one of the questions asked by "marginalized" post-colonial cultures is how authentic (or possible) is textual identification with the story or person of the Other? If it is impossible, is the only alternative to write autobiography? The answer might lie

somewhere between these extremes. We can learn from Big Bear's story, but identification with the victimized Other suggests an omniscient agency that is traditionally reserved for a figure of *author*ity. As Fee concludes: "Writers who do not want to allow their readers to escape must force them out of either identifying with the Native characters or reducing Indians to the exotic" (29).

Though Grace's argument is tempting, its logic is flawed. Jakobson also writes that "it is generally realized that romanticism is closely linked with metaphor" (27), which aligns Wiebe's "metaphoric" or "disruptive" version of native language with what Marjorie Fee calls the "literary Indian" (29)--the tendency of Canadian writers to construct "Indians" who are Romantic apparitions invented in the absence of a dominant nationalism. Metaphoric language is thus an assertion of unity, of hierachical fusion--whether Cree paganism and Christian presence, or Platonic duality. Though Wiebe's treatment of Big Bear is sympathetic, his character in Wiebe's novel is inevitably influenced by Wiebe's Christian master-narrative and Romantic longing for "place." Grace ignores the fact that writing, too, is an act of conquest, and that a textual identification with the "Other" might be more a cultural wringing-of-hands or conscience-clearing. We may "identify" with Big Bear and learn from the impossibility of translation at his trial, but what about the "rope around his neck"? or around the necks of his Young Men? Does Grace's reader feel that? A metaphoric identification with the rope is much different than a literal one. Sympathetic identification, as Fee points out, can be a literary re-enactment of appropriation.

The real merit of *The Temptations of Big Bear* lies rather in the novel's dialogism, in Wiebe's use of dialogic structure to organize the heteroglossia of Big Bear's story in such a way as to expose the falsity of a unilingual culture and the authenticity of Big Bear's story. Wiebe's ironic "double-voiced" narrative restores other meanings to Big Bear's words. Wiebe resists the monologue of the "book" and incorporates into his novel "a multiplicity of 'language' and verbal-ideological belief systems--generic, professional, class-and-interest group, tendentious, everyday and so forth" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic* 311).

Thus the language of *Big Bear* ranges from the Government's inflated prose, which is structured to hide the real agenda of the Queen, Morris, or Judge Richardson, through Dewdney or Dickens or the ironic language of the Canadian Volunteer, to Big Bear's elliptical thoughts and words. And Big Bear himself points to the linguistic imperialism of metonymy when he recalls the language of the treaty-makers: "So first the Governor that came here and stood upon this hill above Fort Carlton called upon The Great Spirit to witness the treaty. Then he invoked the name of the Queen, and finally he mentioned himself, the Governor Morris. After mentioning these three names, the Governor made a treaty not for the sake of his Government but on account of the First One, The Almighty Spirit, and the Grandmother" (198). The contiguity of these terms does not conceal their essential lack of identity, nor their essential power-relation. Governor Morris, in pretending to speak Big Bear's language, appropriates Big Bear's terms for God as the equivalent of his own. And this, not so much that he can equate himself with Big Bear as to try to persuade Big Bear that they are on the same--white--side. But by choreographing such a large cast of speakers, Wiebe ensures that, as Bakhtin maintains, the "incorporated languages and socio-ideological belief systems [of the novel], while of course utilized to refract the author's intentions, are unmasked and destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality" (*Dialogic* 311-12).

In *Big Bear,* authorial intention, or the distance of an author from his "languages," forms an important "second story." To Bakhtin, "The author manifests himself and his point of view not only in his effect on the narrator, on his speech and his language (which are to one or another extent objectivized, objects of display) but also in his effect upon the subject of the story--as a point of view that differs from the point of view of the narrator. Behind the narrator's story we read a second story, the author's story" (*Dialogic* 314). Thus Wiebe, albeit un-intentionally, "tells" his own story, in addition to telling Big Bear's.

How could he do anything else? All these languages are "refracted" through him. In one way, this accounts for the overlay of Christian theology present in Wiebe's novel.

The split nature of Wiebe's novel, its double-voiced, double-styled language, and the bifurcation of Big Bear himself, is achieved, in part, by what Bakhtin calls "hybrid construction." Hybrid construction is "an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological belief systems" (*Dialogic* 304). Big Bear's prayer, which begins with "Our Father" (126) can be heard in such a way, as can be his last words to the Court: "I ask the court to print my words and scatter them among White People. That is my defence!" (400). Wiebe's Big Bear speaks the language of white "Christians" and Imperial Law, respectively. Of course, all of Big Bear's words in court, his words in the treaty signing ceremonies, his words with traders, in short, all words as we read them in Wiebe's text, are refracted through translators. One result of this is that two cultures simultaneously lay claim to his words, leaving Big Bear in a linguistic no man's land between two cultures, on a linguistic border that splits our sense of his subjectivity.

This failure of translation in *Big Bear* is best seen in Big Bear's trial, where speech and documents are de- and re-contextualized in such a way as to "prove" Big Bear a traitor. But the Whiteskin legal language is irrelevant to a native person; one of the charges against Big Bear is that he "did conspire, consult, confederate, assemble and meet together with diverse other evil disposed persons" (353). Though this language may be enough to indict a white person, it in fact describes everyday social relations in tribal society. As F. Beverly Robertson, Big Bear's lawyer, puts it: "the Indian, apart from his band, cannot live. He is not free, when he sees mischief done, to say, I will leave here, go among other people. His life is his band, and what else has my learned friend to rest this case upon except that Big Bear was with" (382). The missing words, presumably "his band," reveal the conflicting social structures that are implicated in Big Bear's trial. The Whiteskin

definitions apply to a social organization based on individualism, not on communal being. So Scott's question--"did he continue to associate" (386)--is meaningless in Big Bear's social context. Magistrate Richardson's Pilate-like question, "what was his duty" (389), is undercut and exposed by his unwitting pun when he says, "If men *band* themselves together" (392). On Big Bear's side, this condition of mutual incomprehension is revealed in the translator's inability to render the concept of treason-felony in Cree. Big Bear responds to the "translated" charges as follows: "there is nothing true when they say I tried to steal her hat. How could I do that. Or knock it off, as Poundmaker said they told him, by throwing sticks at it. . . . I didn't know she had a hat and I never wear hats, what would I want it for to make me steal it, women's hats are nice but a man would be drunk" (387). Big Bear, however, had already recognized this impossibility early on; he tells his translator Peter Houri: "I understand what he [Richardson] wants to tell me, and you understand, but we haven't been given words or signs for it, so just let him say his white things" (355).

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel provides an excellent way to account for such conflicting language/value-systems represented in both Big Bear's trial and in the larger context of Wiebe's novel. In his introduction to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* Wayne Booth identifies in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel

> an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere. This Zoroastrian clash is present in culture as well as nature, and in the specificity of the individual consciousness; it is at work in the even greater particularity of individual utterances. The most complete and complex reflection of these forces is found in human language, and the best transcription of language so understood is the novel. (*Dostoevsky* xviii)

And the novel is particularly well suited not only to the ironic or double nature of language, but also to the competition of ideologies behind different languages: "During its germination and early development, the novelistic word reflected a primordial struggle between tribes, peoples, cultures and languages--it is still full of echoes of this ancient

struggle" (*Dialogic* 50). Without question, Wiebe's novel tells another version of this on-going struggle, grounded not in pre-history, Greece, or Rome, but in the Canadian North-West.

The "struggle" between languages, or the ability of a single language to mean different things in different contexts--what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia or Kroetsch calls the "lovely treachery of words"-- is obviously present in Wiebe's novel via the multiple points of view contained in the narrative, but especially in the newspaper stories following the trial of Big Bear, in which the reporters refuse to take Big Bear's *literal* meaning. Each reporter writes a version of Big Bear that is different, and that reveals a willingness to read an alien meaning into Big Bear's words. The account in *The Globe* suggests that the rebellion in the North-West is little more than an unfortunate glitch in Canadian history, and that, in a spirit of (liberal-humanist) amelioration, Big Bear and the other imprisoned leaders have seen the error of their ways and are now "making" something useful out of themselves. "Big Bear," we read, "is learning to be a carpenter" (400). The account in Toronto's other paper, *The Toronto Mail,* is less a "factual" restatement than it is a bald attempt to trip Big Bear up in his language and extort from him "evidence" which would be considered the "true" account of Big Bear's involvement in the rebellion, not to mention valuable grist for the journalistic mill. Like Big Bear, Poundmaker recognizes the duplicity of White language, the importance of context, and points out to his interlocutor that "it was sometimes hard to say what the truth was, but [Big Bear's] looks told more than his words" (404). Words, in the Cree language, are guaranteed by a "presence" that ensures "true" communication. A presence, Poundmaker hints, that is absent in white "texts" like the newspapers or treaties. Thus, in both cases, these reporters can "re-write" Big Bear in their own terms.

Of course, Marjorie Fee accuses Wiebe himself of re-writing Big Bear too, though Wiebe's agenda is generally sympathetic and his treatment far more sophisticated than his

documentary sources. Wiebe, after all, tells "two" stories. In his own comments upon the double nature of language, Bakhtin states:

> This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can actually sense their presence at every point in the work. . . . the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his works, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (although he might be a *biased* third party). (*Dialogic* 314)

Wiebe, it seems, is a biased third party in his novel. His attempt to reinstate Big Bear, to renovate his presence-in-place to something more "Christian," is done with a keen awareness of "speech diversity and language stratification" (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 315), with a respect for the local place, but also with a deep-seated loyalty towards the Anabaptist theology of the Word.

Wiebe cannot help but be biased: writing is an act of conquest--an author constructs a narrative in a certain way, out of arbitrarily selected fragments, which in turn convey the subject of the narrative, its themes and concerns, but also the author's own attitudes and value systems. In Wiebe's case, his Christian values appear to superimpose themselves on Cree legend and history. So, when Wiebe cannot see how these two cultures and ideologies might co-exist (as history proves), the "Apocalypse" continues. Indeed, Big Bear's apocalyptic vision reminds us of Thom Wiens's, and both contain traces of a fundamentalist Christian Last Judgement. As Thom dreams:

> he saw sparks falling as hail and where each fell flames burst. The wind jelled with smoke. He saw trees like patriarchs, limbs now yearning in petition where they had stood triumphant half a thousand years; and they moaned in terror, rooted immovable before the scourge. Then they blistered in light as fire raced to the tip, and dripped orange and blood-red into the black swamp-water as branches dropped hissing down. The fires ran together in gruesome patterns until all before him was a furnace moaning and crashing and hissing and breaking where the very light blotted his vision to blackness. (*Peace* 164)

Here, as in the apocalyptic vision related in the epigraph to *Peace,* from Daniel 8, a great end looms. Big Bear tells us, even before the final failure of translation between two cultures in his trial, of the coming apocalypse:

> I saw everything grey. I saw the valley of the Great River empty, with very few trees; and then I saw Fort Carlton as anyone can see it right now if he stands on the coulee hill above the valley; all the buildings and high wall, and I could see nothing there at all but black scattered around, wide, with a little smoke going straight up as of wood resting after burning too fast. I don't know when that will be. I tried to see better and I think there were places where snow lay on the ground. But it was all grey, there weren't any leaves, and smoke was all I could see where there should have been Fort Carlton. (*Big Bear* 206)

Big Bear's vision hints at an inevitable cultural annihilation, at the impossibility of white and Cree cultures to co-exist in any place except perhaps a text such as Wiebe's: the land must become paper. All Wiebe can do for Big Bear is to re-inscribe a version of him into a new "text," to make him present in the Reformed sense, in an original "scripture." Wiebe, in essence, re-plants, *re*-places Big Bear in the "word," in a textual landscape imbued with "presence." That Wiebe is tempted by the "Continuing Apocalypse" is evidence of his dominant Christian master narrative, with its famous beginning and ending. In falling back upon--re-telling--the pattern of the Great End, what Frank Kermode calls a famous "*saecula,*" Wiebe projects its "neat, naive patterns onto history" (Kermode 14) and his narrative. But, as Kermode points out, "apocalyptic thought belongs to rectilinear rather than cylical views of the world" (5), which makes Wiebe's task of fitting the rectilinear logic of White culture onto the circular land and world of Big Bear as impossible as it is to square the circle. While the "round, good Earth" is apparent in his text, it is also obscured by a linear master narrative which orients itself toward an "apprehension of perfection" that may not occur "in time," but can occur in the repeatable temporality of the text.

Conclusion

Unlike Pierre Falcon of *The Scorched-Wood People*, Big Bear, upon his death, is not elevated to an "other-worldly" vantage point. Big Bear, we read, is returned to--subsumed by--the landscape: "Slowly, slowly, all changed continually into indistinguishable, as it seemed, and everlasting, unchanging rock" (415). Presence and place join, re-join; the "complete circle" of the "beautiful world" momentarily unites the ideal with the real. Yet Big Bear's death and return to the earth is not as clear cut as it seems. "For a long time," Big Bear thinks, "he stared at the tiny world *coming to him* and for an instant he thought he would see, at last . . . but what he saw was the red shoulder of the sun at the rim of Earth, and he closed his eyes" (415, my italics). There is at least the hint of (Christian) resurrection in these lines, however mediated it is by pagan myths of eternal return, even though Big Bear is denied any glimpse of heaven. Still, Big Bear's "spirit" is re-located in the landscape in such a way as to valorize the local place and give that place "voice."

Pierre Falcon, on the other hand, speaks from a universal, omniscient vantage point; he is, in a way, "pure" speech--a sort of "body-less" word telling a "biased" history. "Grandfather [Falcon]," Riel asks, "how long must one live before he can speak for the dead?" Falcon answers: "I am nearly old enough to sing for them" (36). By the time Falcon narrates his story, he is not only "old enough," but placed in a heaven beyond time. Here, he becomes a (prophetic) voice, singing his "epic" of the Metis:

> During my lifetime I was given many songs, and I have often prayed to the Good Father who made the world and us all, who are to tune ourselves to love so that we may adore Him in all eternity: I have prayed, give me this song of Riel. . . . Give me this song too so that when in the century to come our people lie in the miserable trench of poverty and humiliation and disease and perhaps despair, when troubles surround them like automatic rifles they can sing a sing of faith, of belief in vision for which the mud on their feet gives them no evidence. I prayed for that for some years, and that song of Riel was not given me until I lay on my deathbed. (140)

The narrator Falcon is as "placeless" as Wiebe's version of Riel, who, as he is hanged, thinks: "and the earth fell away, he was free, O God free" (346). Since Riel is more likely

dead, neither he nor Falcon can "speak" until they are "resurrected" in Wiebe's text. *The Scorched-Wood People,* for all its sympathy to the Canadian North-West and the rebellion at Batoche, is once again imprinted by the Bible, especially in its use of Judeo-Christian prophetic and messianic tradition and history. As Susan Whaley points out, "Riel comes to be identified with David, the Israelite poet-king" (*Rudy Wiebe* 42). Wiebe's use of Christian typology, in *Big Bear* as well as in *Scorched Wood*, thus conditions his habit of binary thinking; the indigenous story, like Old Testament history, is rewritten in terms of the Christian "fulfillment" of history.

At the same time, Wiebe's developing poetics leads him towards a nearer inscription of the body and the material culture of the local place. There is nonetheless a persistent danger, in the old "poetics of place," of retreating "away from" and "out of" the literal body, and into the realm of spirit, a place from which Falcon can observe the career of his grandson to his death in 1885, and the Metis people "[e]ighty years later [when] they would be known simply as 'road allowance people,' having no place whatever except their clanking wagons, their rusted cars on the placleless public roads" (*Scorched* 328). Gabriel Dumont, then, remains as a spokesman for "place"; as J. M. Kertzer notes, he is the "man of deeds", as opposed to Riel, the "man of ideas" (or visions), and Falcon, the "man of words" (xiii).

Interestingly enough, *My Lovely Enemy* seems to take us in a different direction--towards the "dick" of its protagonist's surname. James Dyck, who "dialogues" with the bodyless dead, states: "there can be nothing on earth as peaceful and rewarding "as working with the dead" (1). And he does so not only in the "textual" context of "making" "nineteenth-century western Canadian Indian and fur trade" history, but also in Calgary's Palliser Hotel, where he is preoccupied, even obsessed, with "bodies beginning" (64) and with the impossibilty of reconciling the body to the spirit. Dyck interrogates his vision of Christ, an apparition that enters his hotel room in Calgary and observes him and Gillian in bed:

> we're . . . born between the faeces and the urine, 'beginning' my ass, how come it overwhelms us like this, runs us down like a herd of horses, why such a power in the mind and between the legs that it rams us into some body space where there's nothing but spinning and overwhelming sensation, huh? Anybody would have to be 95% dead not to want this, to tear down buildings to get this once you know how good it is. Did you ever feel that, better than you ever felt anything? We just know your perfect remembered words of ambiguous wisdom, dropped here and there to all those ordinary people suffering the usual stupid events of their usual stupid lives, tralala, words words--where are the stories of you standing somewhere pissing like I suppose even you had to and suddenly your mind spins aside and this big schlong here in your hands as a pipe hammering you for attention? Do you know how that feels, huh? (81)

Dyck is a more articulate--perhaps "braver"--inscription of Thom Wiens, the virgin who must come to terms with his own sexuality. Though Dyck has transgressed many of the taboos on body in place in his home villiage of Vulcan, he is haunted by the spectre of repression. As if to compensate for the elevated "placelessness" of Riel or Falcon, Dyck is stuck in, limited to, a world of "flesh" that, in the end, is much less interesting than the worlds of Wiebe's earlier, middle novels. By dissociating the Flesh from the Word and the Word from the Flesh in his last two novels, or by representing each pole in isolation--the Word in *Scorched-Wood*, the Flesh in *Enemy*--Wiebe loses the tension or energy that compels narratives such as *Blue Mountains* or *Big Bear*. In these middle novels, Wiebe demonstrates not only the inability, but also the need, to merge the "universal" with the "particular," presence with place, language with land. As Wiebe describes characters such as Joseph Dueck, Thom Wiens, David Epp, Frieda Friesen or Big Bear, characters who attempt to mediate between presence and place, he in fact tells the "same" story, though in more complex and rewarding ways. And that story, regardless of national or cultural contexts, tends to be a Christ-story, celebrating and testing the value of heroic self-sacrifice and non-violence. In an interview with Shirley Neuman and Robert Kroetsch, Wiebe himself confesses his own artistic history: "A lot of people say that really every writer has only one story to tell and he tells it in different ways. There may be some truth in that" (Neuman, "Unearthing" 234).

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