

RUDY WIEBE AND THE HISTORICITY OF THE WORD

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ABSTRACT

"Rudy Wiebe and the Historicity of the Word" analyzes Wiebe's six major novels published to date: Peace Shall Destroy Many (1962), First and Vital Candle (1966), The Blue Mountains of China (1970), The Temptations of Big Bear (1973), The Scorched-Wood People (1977), and My Lovely Enemy (1983). Traditional literary critical terms and concepts prove inappropriate to Wiebe's work because they implicitly reinstate the ideological postulates Wiebe calls into question. This study therefore employs the theoretical framework developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and V. N. Vološinov.

The introductory chapter provides a synoptic view of the six novels, relates Wiebe's authorial objectives and practices to his cultural and religious background, surveys relevant critical discussions of Wiebe's work, and defines the central theoretical principles of Bakhtin and Vološinov. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Peace Shall Destroy Many and First and Vital Candle respectively, establishing that although Wiebe shows considerable interest in "the dialogic principle" at a thematic level, his overt rhetorical intentions prevent him from realizing this principle in his writing. Chapters 4 and 5 examine Wiebe's use of polyphonic narrative forms in The Blue Mountains of China and The

Temptations of Big Bear. Analysis of the inter- and intra-textual politics of these two novels demonstrates that overtly dialogic narrative forms may remain functionally monologic. Chapter 6 considers The Scorched-Wood People and Wiebe's strategy of embedding voices within other voices, a practice which compounds the "internal dialogization" of the prose. Chapter 7 discusses My Lovely Enemy as a challenge to various forms of anti-imaginative discourse, and to prevailing notions of artistic creativity. Chapter 8 focusses on the question of the provenance of "voice" and concludes that although Wiebe's novels exploit the historicity of the Word--indeed, of all words--they also bear the legacy of a monologic Christian fundamentalist model of language. An Appendix entitled "The Early History and Doctrines of the Mennonite Church" describes Wiebe's dialogue with Menno Simons' doctrines of the Word.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>PDM</u>	<u>Peace Shall Destroy Many</u>
<u>FVC</u>	<u>First and Vital Candle</u>
<u>BMC</u>	<u>The Blue Mountains of China</u>
<u>TBB</u>	<u>The Temptations of Big Bear</u>
<u>WVCF</u>	<u>Where Is The Voice Coming From?</u>
<u>SWP</u>	<u>The Scorched-Wood People</u>
<u>AC</u>	<u>Alberta: A Celebration</u>
<u>MLE</u>	<u>My Lovely Enemy</u>
<u>RWP</u>	<u>The Rudy Wiebe Papers</u>
<u>MBH</u>	<u>The Mennonite Brethren Herald</u>
<u>VL</u>	<u>A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe. Ed. W. J. Keith.</u>

## INTRODUCTION

### I

This study examines the six major novels of the Canadian Mennonite writer, Rudy Wiebe, in the light of theoretical principles derived primarily from Mikhail Bakhtin and V. N. Vološinov. In each of the six texts considered--Peace Shall Destroy Many (1962), First and Vital Candle (1966), The Blue Mountains of China (1970), The Temptations of Big Bear (1973), The Scorched-Wood People (1977) and My Lovely Enemy (1983)--Wiebe explores experiences of historical transition on a threshold between cultures where individuals are exposed to a multiplicity of competing verbal and ideological influences. Many voices, social dialects and national languages intersect in the minds of all Wiebe's central characters. More important, a plurality of voices, dialects and languages engage combatively with one another in the arena of the text. Verisimilitude requires that Wiebe's texts be linguistically mixed. However, mimetic theory offers only limited insights into the complex functions of, and relations between, the languages Wiebe employs. Bakhtin and Vološinov offer a

framework of ideas that facilitates analysis of the multi-voicedness of Wiebe's novels and illuminates the correlation between Wiebe's authorial strategies and his religious beliefs and socio-political values. Principles formulated by Bakhtin and Vološinov make it possible to demonstrate that although Wiebe records history from the point of view of societies subjugated by various forms of imperialism, he adopts the strategies of an imperialistic power when it comes to using language. Wiebe consciously participates in the verbal-ideological struggle he depicts. He appropriates the authority and semantic wealth discourses "populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 300), and endeavours to subordinate them to his own moral, socio-political and ideological objectives.

## II

Wiebe's artistic development is characterised by dramatic shifts of narrative focus, and by experimentation with a variety of styles and innovative narrative forms. At the same time, however, Wiebe's thematic interests, his character-types and his underlying plot-structures alter very little. When Wiebe reflects in Peace Shall Destroy Many

on the inviolability of Thom Wiens' basic beliefs, he might well be describing himself and his own oeuvre:

Even if the answer grew more complicated,...it could never basically change, for the basic answers were known.... Despite the varying paths he chose, he always arrived at the same ultimate point. (16, 18)

Bakhtin's distinction between "monoglossic" and "polyglossic" (or "heteroglossic") societies<sup>1</sup> makes it possible to view the plots of Wiebe's novels as variants of a single paradigm. Bakhtin differentiates between closed, single-tongued societies, which perceive their own language as the only one capable of realizing "all there is to know about the world" (Bakhtin 1981, 45); and open, many-tongued societies which presume neither that their language is internally unified nor that it offers the only valid means of verbally representing the world. Although the subject matter or content of Wiebe's stories differs greatly at a superficial level, Bakhtin's distinction brings into focus the single, underlying pattern to which Wiebe's plots invariably conform.

Whether writing about Mennonites or Metis, Inuit or Native Indians, Wiebe is intrigued by that crucial moment when the boundaries of a closed community disappear, and a monoglossic society finds itself suddenly exposed to the plurality of authoritative "other" voices which vie for dominance in the wider social world. Wiebe establishes the

paradigm in Chapter One of Peace Shall Destroy Many, as the Canadian war-planes penetrate the narrow horizon of Wapiti. In First and Vital Candle, the Inuit of Tyrel Bay, and the Ojibwa of Frozen Lake (whose spiritual disorientation reflects that of Abe Ross, who has fled from his authoritarian father) are also visited by the Canadian air-force, as well as by other White Canadian cultural institutions, such as schools, banks, and missions. For Jakob Friesen V in The Blue Mountains of China, the Communist revolution obliterates all moral and religious formulae imposed by his parents, while in The Temptations of Big Bear and The Scorched-Wood People, numerous manifestations of the "White Grandmother's" voice invade the lives of the Native Indians and Metis of the Canadian West. In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe's social purview narrows, but the pattern remains fundamentally intact: when Gillian Overton invades the body-space of the monogamous James Dyck, the boundaries of the nuclear family disappear, together with the myth of any "single simplicity" (MLE 133) in language.

The boundaries of the closed monoglossic society disappear in Wiebe's stories as a result of various forms of colonization. Because Wiebe views language as "an actual way of looking at the world" (Neuman 236), he draws attention to the role played by language in all processes of ideological and political colonization. Images of signs--verbal and non-

verbal--crowd all of Wiebe's texts. Language functions not only as a medium but also as an object of representation. In each of the six texts considered, Wiebe dramatises imperialism as a wave of alien voices and languages penetrating geographical territories and human minds, eradicating or appropriating whatever discourses have hitherto enjoyed dominance. The invading society announces its arrival by making "dreadful sounds which no one has ever heard before" (MLE 158), and by inscribing conspicuous signs of its presence everywhere on the physical landscape. At crucial, highly symbolic imperial moments in Wiebe's narratives, a loud, foreign voice or sound drowns out a familiar local sound, or an alien form of writing effaces a script traditional to a particular place. The roar of fighter planes blocks out the sound of Thom Wiens' plough scraping through the earth; the metallic clanging and screeching of the CPR drowns out the voices of Big Bear's ancestors at Old Wives Lake; Canadian Air Force jets lay vapour trails on the clear sky above Frozen Lake; and government surveyors carve imaginary grid lines across Metis houses and gardens at Red River. Through concrete aural and visual images such as these, Wiebe reifies an ongoing, undeclared, "other war"--a battle of voice against voice, truth against truth--which official historical accounts strategically gloss over or ignore.



Without exception, Wiebe's protagonists relive an archetypal moment of colonization, or (to switch to a Biblical metaphor) expulsion from the monologic "single simplicity [of] Eden" (MLE 133). Wiebe does not necessarily dramatise this moment at the beginning of each text.<sup>2</sup> Nor does he eject every character from Eden. Wiebe's juvenile characters often continue to inhabit the monologic paradise the adults have lost. Wiebe's depictions of Hal Wiens, Liesel Driediger, and Horsechild, show how children play, quarrel, eat and sleep, totally absorbed in the immediacies of adventure and physical sensation, without knowledge--and hence without fear--of the dangerous national-and world-historical events swirling around them. The children have little or no knowledge of any broader socio-historical context, and hence no knowledge of a possible larger meaning of the incidents they witness.

Wiebe's protagonists enjoy no such blissful oblivion. For them, historical change instigates radical psychic change. The second phase of all Wiebe's plots dramatises the experiences of people forced to recognize the existence of many voices and languages rather than one. Thom Wiens, Abe Ross, the Jakob Friesens IV and V, Big Bear, Riel, Dumont, and James Dyck must all endure phases of confusion and spiritual disorientation, as a result of the plurality of authoritative voices which penetrate their respective

psyches. Marginalised suddenly within a larger social sphere, they struggle to avoid becoming trapped in other people's "true" stories about them. Discourses traditionally thought to be inviolable become lost in a cacophony of alien discourses, which devalue the colonized people's most sacred beliefs, axiomatic values, and time-honoured customs.

This phase of cacophony and palimpsests is followed by a third phase: the phase of re-orientation. Near the end of each novel, Wiebe dramatizes a second breaching of a social boundary. This time, an authoritative, divine Word or non-verbal Sign invades the polyglossic/heteroglossic world inhabited by all humanity. In his first two novels, Wiebe handles this moment of revelation somewhat awkwardly: Tom Wiens discovers "Truth" (PDM 231) in the image of "the brightest star in the heavens" (PDM 239); Abe Ross hears "a voice" which seems to come from nowhere (FVC 353). In subsequent works, Wiebe dramatizes the experience of re-orientation with greater dexterity and sophistication. The penultimate chapter of The Blue Mountains of China ("The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer") narrates a half-parodic, half-serious story of a lapsed Mennonite who hears God's call in the night. At the end of The Temptations of Big Bear, Big Bear feels the "warm weight" of Chief's Son's Hand against his soul (TBB 415); and in The Scorched-Wood People, Louis Riel dies while reciting the Lord's Prayer (SWP 346).

James Dyck's spiritual reorientation occurs in My Lovely Enemy at a moment of dialogic contact between one of Donne's holy sonnets and a passage from the New Testament (MLE 250-51).

Whether the transcendently authoritative Sign appears in verbal or non-verbal form, whether it crystallises as a direct quotation from the Scriptures, or sounds as a fleeting Biblical echo or allusion, it performs a pivotal role in the lives of all Wiebe's protagonists. The divine Word or Sign quells the tumult of voices and languages in the protagonist's consciousness, by offering an ultimate criterion against which to gauge the meaning and authority of all utterances. In the minds of Wiebe's protagonists, the world's many human voices and languages cohere into a single hierarchy, a new, effectively monoglossic linguistic order, ruled by the divine Word or Sign. Wiebe's protagonists discover (or, in some cases, rediscover) that the divine Word or Sign, not any single human utterance, comprises the sole, fully adequate tool for "realizing all there is to know about the world" (Bakhtin 1981, 45).

Because Wiebe's principal characters all live through variants of the same story, other members of the dramatis personae are confined to a limited number of roles. For example, the villainy of Wiebe's villains almost invariably

consists in their intervention between the protagonist and the divine Word or Sign. Wiebe's "intervening figures" include Deacon Block in Peace Shall Destroy Many; Adam Ross in First and Vital Candle; the minister of Samuel Reimer's local church in The Blue Mountains of China; Governor Morris who blocks out the sun in The Temptations of Big Bear; the priests and Riel himself in The Scorched-Wood People; Aaron Dyck and Old Hildebrandt in My Lovely Enemy. The voices of these intervening characters may dominate the closed monologic community, or they may sound amongst the plurality of equally valid voices which invade the awareness of the protagonist. In either case, they block the protagonist's direct apprehension of the divine Word or Sign.

Each novel also contains a mystical, other-worldly "teacher-figure," for example, Joseph Dueck, Josh Bishop and Sally Howell, John Reimer, Big Bear, Louis Riel (at times), Jesus, and the mortician who presides at Ruth Dyck's funeral. The divine Word or Sign often enters the text in the mouth of these characters. "Reader-figures" also perform a vital function in Wiebe's novels, guiding the reader of the text toward semantic goals predetermined by the author. The reader-figure combines with the protagonist in Thom Wiens, Abe Ross, Louis Riel, and James Dyck, while Kitty MacLean, Wiebe's most famous reader-surrogate, remains a relatively minor player in the dramatic historical events

depicted in the novel.<sup>3</sup>

As well as observing certain set patterns in his plotting and characterisation, Wiebe's novels all, in various ways, counterpose two models of time: one linear and tied to history, the other circular or cyclic. Dates and references to the unprecedented, irreversible nature of events construct time in the linear manner conventionally employed in historical discourse. The circular model manifests itself most clearly in Wiebe's references to the cycle of the seasons, and to the annually recurring festivals of the Christian calendar. The regular rhythm of these occurrences suggests that some things never change, despite superficial appearances to the contrary. As well as pointing to the possibility of certain permanent, extra-historical truths and values, Wiebe's novels all posit an end-point of human history, a moment beyond which the socio-historical processes of discovering Truth does not continue. The protagonist's epiphanic experience of the super-human Word or Sign works as a closing device in each of the six narratives examined in this study.<sup>4</sup> By resorting repeatedly to this particular closing strategy, Wiebe imparts an apocalyptic quality to the final pages of his novels. Each ending implicitly prefigures the final Revelation predicted in the Bible.

## III

Does this extraordinary consistency of vision and method indicate that Rudy Wiebe remains complacently ensconced in a closed monoglossic Christian community? Is he locked, as it were, in the first stage of one of his own plots? From statements Wiebe has made in many interviews and essays, and from the very fact that he writes and publishes novels, it would certainly appear that his intention is precisely not to remain aloof from the wider socio-historical world.

Wiebe engages with that wider world not by letting it "into" his life but by venturing "out" from the Mennonite Brethren community. Wiebe vehemently and consistently opposes that part of the Mennonite church which attempts to separate itself from secular society or from other Christian churches:

Are you going to cut off any possible effect you could have on other people, in an attempt to preserve your own integrity? When you do that, do worse things start happening to you? They probably do--I think they do. So I myself want to live in the world that is now, because that's where everybody else it's hurting is living.  
(Cameron 149).

Mennonites who attempt to barricade the non-Mennonite world

out<sup>5</sup> threaten to barricade the voice of Jesus in, a practice contrary to Jesus' command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), and to Menno Simons' understanding of the Word as "a universal/Catholic/ecumenical force, not a parochial or provincial spirit" (Littell 16).<sup>6</sup> When conservative Mennonite groups erect physical and linguistic barriers between themselves and the outside world, they enclose the Word in a static, unitary cultural and historical field. Fixed customs and cultural traditions carry the Bible down through time in a cocoon, its authority and semantic stability shielded both from the vicissitudes of history and from unpredictable alien cultural influences.<sup>7</sup> By securing a single, fixed context for the Word, they attempt to protect its authority from the assault of alien discourses, and to limit its potential semantic diversity.

In an editorial published in The Mennonite Brethren Herald on January 11, 1963, entitled "Church Prospect 1963: Writing," Wiebe states that "the written word is still the most effective means of spreading the gospel" (3). He makes this point in the context of a broader argument for more active proselytizing in the English language on the part of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Recognizing that the Mennonites' message must compete with "thousands of voices clamouring for attention" (Wiebe 1963, 3) and with radio,

television and other forms of modern entertainment, Wiebe sees a particular need to implement evangelical "outreach" (Wiebe 1963, 3) using discursive forms which do not bore or repel the unconverted. Without suggesting that Wiebe's artistic motives stem exclusively from a desire to proselytize, it remains valid to say that Wiebe's novels and short stories function as vehicles carrying Jesus' teachings into the lives of his readers.

Unlike a sermon or religious treatise, the novel does not preach only to the converted or address a specialised readership of theologians. Its utility lies in its capacity to scatter the Word into the territory of "others," the "average Canadians" (Wiebe 1963, 3) not addressed by more traditional forms of religious literature. Wiebe's novels transmit the Word into an unforeseeable variety of discursive and historical contexts, where its meaning and authority become open to negotiation. The usual boundaries insulating the Word from "other" words disappears. By their very existence, as well as through the stories they tell, Wiebe's novels liberate the Bible from "the dungeon of a single context" (Bakhtin 1981, 247).

However, Wiebe stipulates repeatedly that the novelist's Christian witness must be indirect:

The more consciously and directly the novelist tries in his novel to preach a certain truth he holds to be



valid, the less it will arise out of the stuff of the novel itself, the poorer the novel will be, and the less likely he is to convince anyone.... This is a fundamental principle of all art, that some of the most important things we as human beings must understand cannot be gotten at directly. They can be seen and shown only by the indirection of art--by metaphor; by symbol, if you like. That is why fiction is so important. (VL 42, 44)

In "Giant Fictions and Large Meanings," Sam Solecki draws attention to Wiebe's indirect proselytizing as it manifests itself in "characters and stories...form and content" (7):

he has sought characters and stories to communicate, or even to get a hearing for his basically Christian vision.... We can speak of Wiebe's vision as searching, novel by novel, for the appropriate ecumenical mode (and this is a matter of both form and content) within which it will be given a sympathetic hearing by an audience wider than the one already receptive to an explicitly and dogmatically Christian fiction. (7)<sup>8</sup>

Solecki's point can be extended: Wiebe searches also for a language capable of commanding the attention of non-Christian readers, a language they will find palatable, non-alien and yet authoritative. Wiebe can and does speak directly to fellow members of his church. The tone and style of his Editorials in the Mennonite Brethren Herald, or of articles he has published in other Christian journals, differs markedly from his manner of handling language in his novels and short stories. But Wiebe clearly recognizes that he cannot proseletyze directly to those who read his novels:

The most important things he [the novelist] would say simply disappear if he attacks them head on and blurts them out. They can be said only by indirection. (VL 44)

Bakhtin, like Wiebe, recognizes that in certain historical and cultural circumstances, the novelist must transmit the

authoritative Word indirectly:

By no means all historical situations permit the ultimate semantic authority of the creator [artistic or divine] to be expressed without mediation in direct, unrefracted, unconditional authorial discourse. When there is no access to one's own personal "ultimate" word, then every thought, feeling, experience must be refracted through the medium of someone else's discourse, someone else's style, someone else's manner, with which it cannot immediately be merged without reservation, without distance, without refraction.... The direct, unconditional, unrefracted word appears barbaric, raw, wild. Cultured discourse is discourse refracted through an authoritative and stabilized medium. (1984, 202-3)

In Wiebe's case, New Critical aesthetics<sup>9</sup> collude with the Mennonites' tradition of respecting individual conscience, to condemn coercive Christian proselytizing in the novel. Across the course of his career as a novelist, Wiebe devises new, indirect voicings of, and favourable contexts for the Scriptural Word. In his first two novels, and in the final chapter of The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe does not entirely resist the temptation to assert "the direct, unconditional, unrefracted word" (Bakhtin 1984, 204). Across time, however, he devises more elaborate and more subtle ways of speaking indirectly, and of refracting his rhetorical message through the voices of "others." In The Temptations of Big Bear and the first twelve chapters of The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe harnesses the documented utterances and the social dialects of numerous "others," to create authoritative vehicles and favourable framing contexts for the Word. In The Scorched-Wood People and My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe's indirection becomes so complex and

obscure that the Word breaks into fragments whose meaning and relative authority depend greatly on the reader's existing verbal-ideological predilections.

Throughout his writing career, Wiebe's rhetorical purpose remains the same: he never loses sight of his initial assumption that "the written word is still the most effective means of spreading the gospel" (Wiebe 1963, 3). However, his manner of accomplishing this objective steadily evolves over time. He begins in Peace Shall Destroy Many by addressing his readers much in the same way as a teacher speaks to a pupil, but as his understanding of the socio-political dynamics of verbal communication develops, he begins to eschew the role of authoritative possessor of the absolute truth, and to invite his readers to join him in a dialogic search for that truth.<sup>10</sup> More and more, Wiebe's rhetoric implicitly concedes to Vološinov's view that

it is not a mute, wordless creature that receives such an utterance, but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences--his so-called apperceptive background--exist encoded in his inner speech, and only to that extent do they come into contact with speech received from outside. Word comes into contact with word. The context of this inner speech is the locale in which another's utterance is received, comprehended and evaluated; it is where the speaker's active orientation takes place. (Vološinov 118)

From First and Vital Candle onwards, Wiebe attempts to hypothesize the non-Christian reader's inner speech, but until The Blue Mountains of China, he does not succeed in stimulating his audience into active dialogue with his

texts. To the extent that he achieves this objective in his middle and later novels, he ensures that any assent his readers may give to his message arises voluntarily. Such assent would be as much a product of the reader-interlocutor's existing inner speech as of Wiebe's text, which invades the psyche from without.

As Wiebe hypothesizes the responses of his reader-interlocutors, he must envisage the Word from the point of view of an "other." The process of writing thus activates a process of testing the authoritative Word against certain powerful hegemonic discourses which sound in the social world, and which dominate the posited reader-interlocutor's awareness. To the extent that Wiebe identifies imaginatively with his socially-alien interlocutors, he does not remain confined in a closed, monologic, narrow church society. Instead of locking himself in the first stage of one of his own plots, he oscillates back and forth between stages two and three, repeatedly testing the authority and renovating the meaning of the Word.

#### IV

The evolution of Rudy Wiebe's style may be described as a search for suitable voices and languages through which to

refract and reflect upon the authoritative Word. To analyse more precisely the indirect means by which Wiebe attempts to realize his evangelical authorial objectives, it is necessary to elaborate further on the relevant theoretical paradigms. Bakhtin and Vološinov have each devised a system of terms and concepts which can usefully be applied to the six texts considered in this study. It would be cumbersome to define every theoretical term in the abstract in advance, particularly since their respective meanings emerge most clearly within the context of concrete discussions of specific texts. However, before such discussions can be entered into with any degree of rigour, the main conceptual and terminological framework of the larger theoretical system should be surveyed, noting the points where it connects with Wiebe's authorial practices.

Bakhtin grounds his theory of the novel on an oral paradigm of language. He maintains that

language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written)... Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of these utterances. These we may call speech genres. (Bakhtin 1986, 60)

For Bakhtin and Vološinov, words exist only in the form of concrete sayings or voicings, in the particular contexts in which human beings engage in dialogue with one another.<sup>11</sup>

Bakhtin and Vološinov both oppose Saussure's theory of language which they claim divorces language from "the

historical process of Becoming" (Vološinov 105). In contrast to Saussure, whose synchronic approach to language privileges la langue over parole,<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin's and Vološinov's theories of the utterance give precedence to parole, and hence to the diachronicity of language.

Vološinov argues vehemently that

the very essence of language is revealed in its history; the logic of language is not at all a matter of reproducing a normatively identical form but of continuous renovation and individualization of that form via the...utterance. The reality of language is, in fact, its generation. (56)

Bakhtin and Vološinov both place tremendous emphasis on the political struggle implicit in this ongoing socio-historical process of renovating and individualizing language. Bakhtin's description of this process tacitly invokes a metaphor of the utterance as a micro-cosmic political empire:

The word does not exist in a neutral impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (1981, 294)

This "difficult and complicated process" manifests itself most clearly in the novel. Bakhtin distinguishes the novel from all other literary genres on the basis of its

openness to historical change.<sup>13</sup> Mutable, capacious, stylistically heterogeneous, "the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted" (Bakhtin 1981, 3). Bakhtin argues that while other genres resist historical change by ossifying into fixed canonical forms, the novel celebrates its own historicity--its ongoing process of becoming--by perpetually reinventing itself. Bakhtin calls the novel a "secondary (complex) speech genre" (1986, 61), because it renovates itself by absorbing or appropriating other varieties of utterance:

During the process of their formation, they [novels] absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others.... They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole. (Bakhtin 1986, 62)

The novel can extend its boundaries "outward" by absorbing other speech genres, much in the same way as imperial nations extend their sphere of influence into alien territories. But textual empires, like political ones, become increasingly difficult to administer as they grow larger and more complex. Unless the novelist takes measures to control the reader's perception of the authority and meaning of the appropriated genres, things fall apart, the centre cannot hold, and semantic anarchy is loosed upon the reading public. Primary speech genres may strive to address readers directly, by-passing the mediating influence of the

author. Thus, the novel's expansionary, decentring, outward-grasping colonisation of other genres creates an equal and opposite need to consolidate power centripetally and control meaning from a single authorial centre.<sup>14</sup> As Bakhtin explains,

The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language.... But at the same time there does exist a centre of language (a verbal-ideological centre) for the novel. The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found in any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the centre of organisation where all levels intersect. The different levels are to varying degrees distant from this authorial centre. (1981, 47, 48-9)

Two opposed tendencies thus collide in the novel:

centripetal forces (which promote structural coherence, stylistic homogeneity and semantic unity) and centrifugal forces (which foster fragmentation, stylistic heterogeneity, and semantic plurality).<sup>15</sup> All concrete manifestations of language participate in, and may also re-enact, this "contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (Bakhtin 1981, 272). In the novel it takes the form of a struggle between the "monologic" principle (activated by authorial practices which suppress semantic plurality by asserting the sovereignty of one unitary language and its concomitant unitary belief-system<sup>16</sup>), and the "dialogic" principle (activated by authorial practices which release "heteroglossia," the multi-voicedness and semantic plurality latent in all concrete utterances<sup>17</sup>).



A brief chronological survey of Wiebe's six major novels reveals that from Peace Shall Destroy Many in 1962 to My Lovely Enemy in 1983 the "two embattled tendencies" struggle more and more violently. Initially, the monologic principle dominates, but never entirely eliminates stylistic heterogeneity or semantic diversity from the text. Except for its four Preludes, Wiebe's first novel, Peace Shall Destroy Many, appears largely devoid of the linguistic diversity celebrated by Bakhtin. The orthodox typographical format of the text, its unremarkable layout in paragraphs of narration interspersed with dialogue, gives Peace Shall Destroy Many the appearance of a monologic narrative in the author's own voice. Any fissures in the language of the text serve Wiebe's rhetorical purposes and are thus subordinated to the general monologic thrust of the novel.

In his second novel, First and Vital Candle, Wiebe extends his social and ideological purview beyond the bounds of the tight-knit Mennonite community scrutinized in Peace Shall Destroy Many. The language of First and Vital Candle reflects this expanded horizon: Wiebe takes several hegemonic speech genres of the cold war era into his authorial custody, where he subjects them to rigorous moral interrogation. Wiebe clearly hierarchizes the voices and languages discernible in the text. None escapes the overt control of his authorial will. At this early stage in his

career, Wiebe does not entirely exclude speech diversity from his writing, but he never allows it seriously to jeopardize the reader's perception of his monologic religious and moral vision.

In the two novels which follow, however, Wiebe shifts into a multi-voiced narrative mode, and the tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces intensifies dramatically. With The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe makes a very obvious break away from anything that resembles a unitary style. The mixing of languages in the text reflects the turmoils experienced by characters located on many political, psychological and cultural thresholds: revolution, war, captivity, migration, the physical hardships of pioneer life, and the spiritual crises of religious sensibilities in secular social contexts. Several narrators of different ages, beliefs and cultural affiliations articulate the Mennonites' splintered experience of history ranging over four continents and approximately a hundred years of time. In the final chapter of the novel, however, Wiebe abruptly reasserts his authorial control by defining a single moral criterion for evaluating all speech and action in the text.

In The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe creates his most intricate mosaic of voice zones.<sup>18</sup> Linguistic decentring of the narrative reaches its apogee in this text, where any

semblance of stylistic uniformity is totally obliterated. Wiebe shatters unities of narrative, character, tone, point of view and--most important--language, to place his readers in the midst of a violent struggle between contending encodings of truth. The Temptations of Big Bear works as a textual microcosm of the tumultuous, culturally plural Canadian West between 1876 and 1888. Wiebe extends his authorial domination over vaster, more diverse and minutely discriminated linguistic domains than in any preceding or subsequent work. But again, the final thrust of the novel remains monologic because Wiebe offers a single criterion for hierarchizing the voices of the text. Wiebe counters every additional dialogizing device he introduces with an equally effective means of repressing dialogue.

Although The Scorched-Wood People and My Lovely Enemy mark Wiebe's return to monologic narrative forms, both texts contain many embedded voices. They also allow more than one criterion for gauging the authority and meaning of the characters' utterances. In The Scorched-Wood People, Wiebe appears to indulge in a strident rhetorical defence of Louis Riel, yet closer inspection of the manner in which Wiebe refracts his authorial voice through a labyrinth of other voices reveals a profound ambivalence which disrupts the semantic coherence of the text. Wiebe attempts to restore semantic order at the end of the novel, but the success of

this endeavour remains open to question.

Semantic coherence also breaks down periodically in My Lovely Enemy, as Wiebe temporarily abdicates his position at the centre of authorial control. In substantial portions of the text, Wiebe releases heteroglossia by placing the onus on readers to participate actively in the process of creating its meaning. Wiebe explores the notion that meaning issues from the dialogic engagement of the words on the page with the various, ever-changing contexts in which readers interpret those words. Meaning therefore retains "a certain openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present" (Bakhtin 1981, 7). However, Wiebe counters the potential heteroglossia of the text of My Lovely Enemy first, by introducing an omniscient narrative voice in the latter sections of the novel; second, by bringing in an authoritative teacher-figure; and third, by invoking the authority of the Bible to effect semantic closure.

By different means (and perhaps not entirely deliberately) Wiebe may periodically relinquish semantic control to the many and various "others" who speak in, and engage with, his texts. But without fail, he also recoils violently and abruptly at certain key points in each novel from the logical consequences of surrendering authorial

control. In all of Wiebe's novels, his desire for democratic freedom and open-minded dialogue conflicts with his yearning for the monologic certainties of a unitary moral, metaphysical, and linguistic order. This conflict between dialogic and monologic impulses not only intensifies over time, but also manifests itself in a wider and wider variety of ways. The contest erupts on an increasingly large number of planes or battlefields in the text, and the outcome is not necessarily the same on each one. Wiebe's texts become increasingly destabilised by the fluctuating centrifugal and centripetal forces Wiebe activates; at any given moment, one or the other might prevail.

Shifting to a classical metaphor, one may say that from his first novel to his sixth, Wiebe navigates an increasingly treacherous course between Scylla, the many-headed, many-voiced monster of unbridled dialogism; and Charybdis, the inward-pulling whirlpool of monologue. Critics have already touched on this tension between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in Wiebe's work, but no one has yet attempted to use it as a basis for a systematic, detailed study.<sup>19</sup> Sam Solecki and Robert Kroetsch have both noticed Wiebe's "confrontation with Word/word" (Kroetsch 1978, 14), but have not explored this aspect of Wiebe's writing other than in a brief, rather cursory way.<sup>20</sup>

Ina Ferris' article, "Religious Vision and Fictional Form: Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China," makes a shrewd and rigorous analysis of the conflict between Wiebe's urge to articulate his "transcendent, timeless vision" and his artistic commitment to "mundane reality in all its concreteness, confusion and complexity" (Ferris 89). Ferris certainly registers the tension between monologic and dialogic vision in The Blue Mountains of China. She condemns Wiebe's heavy-handed attempt to bestow supreme authority on the language of John Reimer in Chapter 13, arguing that "the authentic voice of the chapter belongs to a fugitive from another mode--to old Jakob Friesen" (96). Although she does not use Bakhtin's terminology, Ferris's "other mode" corresponds to the dialogic mode.

David L. Jeffrey places a positive value precisely on the feature Ferris most vehemently condemns: Wiebe's abrupt shift from dialogic to monologic language. In "A Search for Peace: Prophecy and Parable in the Fiction of Rudy Wiebe," Jeffrey comes to grips with several of the same questions as this study addresses, and he certainly makes many illuminating observations. However, Jeffrey does not invoke Bakhtinian theory beyond pointing to the fundamental distinction between monologic and dialogic discourse. His article attempts no rigorous analysis of the complex internal politics of Wiebe's texts.

Similarly, Pierre Spriet's article, "Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China: the Polyphony of a People or the Lonely Voice of the Fringe?," underestimates the ambiguity and mutability of Wiebe's relationship with the voices which speak in the text. Spriet reads The Blue Mountains of China as "the story of the dispersion of a tribe" (59). He emphasises the centrifugal rather than the centripetal aspects of both the story and the language of the text. Spriet invokes Bakhtinian terms such as "dialogic" and "polyphony" without realizing the extent of their incompatibility with his other, more traditional literary critical postulates. Although aware, for example, of the "dialogic" interspersal of narrative voices in the text (63), Spriet follows Dorrit Cohn in positing a hard and fast dividing line between Frieda's first-person narrative and the third-person omniscient narration employed in the other chapters. Spriet can thus make the astonishing claim that Wiebe "makes no comment of any kind" (63) in Frieda's story, but "clearly feels with the [other] protagonists and does not even try to hide his sympathy" (60). Although he uses some of Bakhtin's terms, Spriet grounds his case on monologic models of discourse and society.<sup>21</sup>

The present study endeavours to refine understanding of Wiebe's linguistic practices by making extensive use of the classificatory system developed by Bakhtin in Problems

of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Bakhtin divides discourse into three main species, each of which may be subdivided into types, which in turn submit to further division into varieties.<sup>22</sup> Because Wiebe's texts will be analyzed with reference to this classificatory system, it is reproduced in synoptic form Table I.<sup>23</sup>

TABLE I: Bakhtin's Classificatory System

- I. Direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively toward its referential object, as an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority.
  
- II. Objectified discourse (discourse of a represented person)
  1. With a predominance of socio-typical determining factors
  2. With a predominance of individually characteristic determining factors
 } Various degrees of objectification
  
- III. Discourse with an orientation toward someone else's discourse (double-voiced discourse):
  1. Unidirectional double-voiced discourse: when objectification is reduced, these tend toward a fusion of voiced, i.e., toward discourse of the first type.
    - a. Stylization;
    - b. Narrator's narration;
    - c. Unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intentions;
    - d. Ich-Erzählung.
  
  2. Vari-directional double-voiced discourse: when objectification is reduced and the other's idea is activated, these become internally dialogized and tend to disintegrate into two discourses (two voices) of the first type.
    - a. Parody with all its nuances;
    - b. Parodistic Ich-Erzählung;
    - c. Discourse of a character who is parodically represented;
    - d. Any transmission of someone else's words with a shift in accent.



3. The active type (reflected discourse of another): the other discourse exerts influence from without; diverse forms of inter-relationship with another's discourse, as well as various degrees of deforming influence exerted by one discourse on the other.
  - a. Hidden internal polemic;
  - b. Polemically coloured autobiography and confession;
  - c. Any discourse with a sideward glance at someone else's word;
  - d. A rejoinder of a dialogue;
  - e. Hidden dialogue.

While Bakhtin's description of the Species I is self-explanatory, the other two species require further clarification. Species II corresponds to what conventional literary criticism calls "dialogue" or "the direct speech of characters." From time to time, Bakhtin also refers to Species II as "compositionally marked dialogue," to indicate that punctuation and other typographical markers delineate the words of the characters from those of the author or the narrator. Bakhtin views the direct speech of characters as objectified "bounded objects" which exist inside the jurisdiction of author's utterance, in a state of subjection to the author's "higher authority" (Bakhtin 1984, 187).<sup>24</sup> Compositionally marked dialogue plays a vital role in all Wiebe's novels, and deserves to be analysed in some detail. In his first two novels, such dialogue is particularly important, being his principal means of objectifying the language of others.

From The Blue Mountains of China onwards, Wiebe explores more and more rigorously the artistic and rhetorical potential of the types and varieties of double-voiced discourse belonging to Species III. To understand the appropriative strategies Wiebe employs in his middle and later phases, it is essential to grasp the concept of "hybridity" or "internal dialogicity," which Bakhtin describes abstractly as follows:<sup>25</sup>

What we are calling a 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 genres, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems.... There is no formal--compositional and syntactic--boundary between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence. It frequently happens that the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction--and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents. (1981, 304-5)

Bakhtin differentiates between "unidirectional" and "vari-directional" double-voiced discourses (Types 1 and 2 within Species III) on the basis of what he calls the "dialogic angle" (Bakhtin 1984, 182). The dialogic angle defines the degree to which the author's intentions differ from those of the other who speaks in the utterance in question. In Type 1 (stylization), there is

an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations. Stylization stylizes another's style in the direction of that style's own particular tasks. It merely renders those tasks conventional. (Bakhtin 1984, 193)

In Type 2 (parody), the dialogic angle widens, as it were:

The author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast to stylization, parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. (Bakhtin 1984, 193)

Bakhtin's concepts of stylization, parody and the dialogic angle prove indispensable to analysis of Wiebe's authorial practices in The Blue Mountains of China, The Temptations of Big Bear, The Scorched-Wood People, and My Lovely Enemy.

In all parody and stylization, the author "refracts" his or her intentions through the words of an other. Bakhtin's description of "refraction" clarifies the concept of the "dialogic angle," while at the same time highlighting the imperialism implicit in all stylization and parody:

The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were, through language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates.

The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works...rather he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien.... (1981, 299-300)<sup>26</sup>

Vološinov's theory of the utterance as "an arena of the class struggle" (23)<sup>27</sup> implies that elements of stylization

and parody characterise all language use. In Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Vološinov describes the utterance as a space or field where rival accentual systems clash, as speakers appropriate words "already populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 300). If one social group seizes a monopoly over language, so that one set of standards or norms entirely prevails, the verbal sign system ossifies. It becomes "uniaccentual" (Vološinov 23), and "inevitably loses force" (Vološinov 23). But as long as social struggle continues within the arena of the verbal sign, language "maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development" (Vološinov 23).

In the process of re-writing history and recontextualizing passages from the Scriptures in his novels, Wiebe constructs verbal and non-verbal signs as sites where rival social factions contend to assert rival meanings. He redeems from semantic death the clichéd word or phrase, the stock dramatic situation, the too-familiar historical event. By pulling these exhausted, ossified signifiers back into the arena of public debate, Wiebe resuscitates them and restores their power to trouble the mind. Wiebe thus exploits the historicity of words--but only up to a point! At a certain moment near the end of each novel, he makes an abrupt turn-around, attempts to quell social struggle within the arena of the utterance, and

endeavours to subjugate all verbal signs to the authoritative Scriptural Word.

Wiebe's attempts to reassert authorial control do not always succeed, either rhetorically or aesthetically. Authors might succeed in refracting their authorial intentions through the voices and languages of others, but as Michael Holquist points out,

there are other refracting media as well, including that mass of alien words present not in the object but in the consciousness of the listener. (1981, 432)

The meaning of a text can never remain entirely in the author's control, as Wiebe found out when the Mennonite community erupted into a furore after the publication of Peace Shall Destroy Many.<sup>28</sup> None of Wiebe's novels lacks devices for limiting heteroglossia: such devices are arrows in the quiver of all rhetoricians. Only in My Lovely Enemy does Wiebe's rhetoric self-consciously begin to delegate author-ity to readers, and encourage them to act as co-creators of the meanings "in" the text. Even so, My Lovely Enemy is arguably marred by the measures Wiebe takes to repress heteroglossia at the end. Wiebe cannot yet fully allow

the primacy of context over text [which ensures that] at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and in that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically

impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. (Holquist 1981, 428)

Despite Wiebe's intense interest in the dialogic principle, his rhetorical purposes force him to repress the heteroglossia of his own texts.

Nor has Wiebe yet written a "polyphonic" novel. Bakhtin defines "polyphony" as "a plurality of fully valid voices" (Bakhtin 1984, 34). He uses the term to describe the authorial practice of giving voice to "a plurality of equally-valid consciousnesses, each with its own world" (1984, 7). Bakhtin hails Dostoevsky as "the creator of the polyphonic novel" (1984, 7), a distinct variety of secondary utterance which neither hierarchizes the heteroglot voices it contains, nor subordinates any of these voices to that of the author:

A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author's word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters. (Bakhtin 1984, 7)

Although Wiebe uses polyphonic narrative forms in The Blue Mountains of China and The Temptations of Big Bear, neither novel functions polyphonically.

It must be emphasised that Wiebe and Bakhtin attach

entirely different values to polyphony. For Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is a micro-cosmic democracy, a textual model of a political utopia. Polyphony brings liberation from the oppression of closed, naive monologic consciousness. In Wiebe's novels, however, polyphony carries negative associations. It evokes anarchy, chaos, insanity, nihilism, a terrifying disintegration of meaning. For Wiebe, polyphony gives voice to the "void of splintered dogmas" (PDM 235).

In addition, although Bakhtin applies the term "polyphony" only to discourse, it proves useful also for describing other fields in which "a plurality of fully valid voices" can be heard. Polyphony may manifest itself not only in the space of a text, but also in the psyche of a character (polyphonic consciousness), or in a geographical space occupied by a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous society.

Wiebe's distinctive vision and method warrant extending Bakhtin's definition of "polyphony," and reversing the positive connotations he attaches to the word. Strictly speaking, it is impossible not to impart new semantic nuances and values to words in the process of inserting them into new contexts. However, in a study of this kind, which must conform to predetermined standards of clarity and

conceptual precision, it is necessary to hold dialogizing tendencies in check by defining and stabilizing terminology. By noting all departures from Bakhtinian usage, this study seeks not to exempt itself from, but rather to participate self-consciously in the ongoing process of renovating and individualizing words "already populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 300).



NOTES TO CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin indicates that "polyglossia" denotes more than one national language, while "heteroglossia" refers to the "internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language" (61). Bakhtin applies these terms both to the actual state of language (its homogeneity or diversity) that pertains in a society, and to the myths that society holds about its language.

2. In First and Vital Candle, for example, Wiebe postpones his presentation of this moment until Chapter 16.

3. This classification of Wiebe's characters into four main groups differs from, but is consistent with, George Hildebrand's groupings in "Rudy Wiebe: the Anabaptist Vision and the Usable Past" (1977). Hildebrand divides Wiebe's characters into those who live "in a state of nature," those who live "in a state of sin," the "searching pilgrim[s]," and "the redeemed" (34-5). These four groups correspond respectively with those described in the present study as "the naive, monologic unfallen (children)," "the intervening characters," "the teacher-figures," and "the reader-figures."

4. In Far As the Eye Can See (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1977) 123-5, Wiebe parodies the use of the deus ex machina device, but at the same time questions its ability to effect total narrative closure. Premier Peter Lougheed, "the perfect deus ex machina" (123), descends onto the stage in an immense coal scoop, to the sound of creaking machinery. His speech seems at first to put an end to the struggle between the farmers seeking to preserve their land and Calgary Power who want to strip-mine it for coal: "This project would disturb too much prime agricultural land. Therefore, at this time my government will not give approval to Dodds-Round Hill development" (124). The farmers think they have won. Wiebe appears to have closed the story. However, John Siemens re-opens the narrative by reaccenting Lougheed's speech, and drawing attention to the loophole it contains: "Can't you see? He's given you three years, at most" (125). Lougheed's stress on "not" deflects attention from his qualifier "at this time" (124). The struggle has not by any means ended.

5. As Wiebe points out in his Preface to Peace Shall Destroy Many, the early Mennonites were "restrained from open proselytising" (8). E.K. Francis describes how a tradition of withdrawal grew out of--but outlasted--the legal and physical restraints to which Wiebe refers; see In Search of Utopia: the Mennonites in Manitoba (Altona, Manitoba: D. W.

Friesen, 1955).

6. The term "Catholic" in this instance does not refer specifically to the Roman Catholic Church, but denotes broadness, universality.

7. In "Unearthing Language," Wiebe remarks on the isolation of the Paraguayan Mennonite settlements, and their attempt to

live in the patterns of the old Russian Mennonite villages still: they're exactly the same and the villages are named the same...--they try to recreate as much as they can in the South American desert the life of Russia and its social patterns. I suppose coming to them was for me really like being able to go back to the Russia that my parents had lost forever, and just talk with the people the way they talked then. (Neuman 228-9).

8. See also George Hildebrand: Wiebe "seeks culturally more recognizable means by which to speak to an audience beyond the hermetic world of evangelical Protestantism" (1977, 1).

9. In "The Artist as a Critic and a Witness," Wiebe adheres to the New Critical assumption that a work of art should not mean but be, and that because form and content are inseparable, a literary work cannot be paraphrased: "A work of art is: it is simply too complex to paraphrase and explain fully, satisfactorily" (VL 40).

10. This progressive shift in Wiebe's rhetorical strategy can be explained in part by the evolution of his understanding of how humankind might engage with the Scriptures. Between 1963 and 1967, when he taught at the Mennonite College at Goshen, Indiana, Wiebe experienced the Word for the first time in a creative, intellectually adventurous context--a context which might be described as authentically dialogic. Reflecting on this crucial period some fifteen years later, in an interview with Shirley Neuman and Robert Kroetsch, Wiebe's language evokes the excitement of this first glimpse of the dialogic possibilities of the Word:

[When I published my first novel] my pattern of thinking was still pretty...fundamentalist or Christian in the sense that my major stories came from a certain kind of fairly narrow understanding of what the Bible was talking about, which is how I grew up. In some ways, I've simply never found a better way of thinking

about the world. I think part of what you see in The Blue Mountains of China, Shirley, is a wider way of understanding the world-views the Bible presents to us. That is due--I wouldn't want to underestimate it--to the time I was in the United States teaching at a small Mennonite college. There, for the first time and over an extended period, I encountered men and women of real perception who had thought through a lot of these things, really literate Christians who saw themselves as Jesus' followers and at the same time were acquainted with the thoughts of others and had brought that kind of understanding to bear on what it means to be a Christian.

The best thing that ever happened to me was the meetings we had every two or three weeks in one home or another--seven or eight of us, a psychiatrist, a couple of theologians, a couple of literary people. (Neuman 242-3)

11. The term "dialogue" embraces a far greater range of interlocutory situations than two people speaking to one another face to face. For Bakhtin, the term "dialogue" includes all forms of verbal interaction, aided or unaided by technology.

12. Synchronic studies concern themselves with the linguistic system as it stands at a particular point in time; diachronic studies examine the evolution of language across time. "La langue is the system of a language, the language as a system of forms, whereas parole is actual speech, the speech acts which are made possible by the language" (Culler 29). Culler argues that Saussure never "deceived himself into thinking that language exists as a series of totally homogenous synchronic states" (37), but rather recognized fully that "because it is arbitrary the sign is totally subject to history, and the combination at a particular moment of a given signifier and signified is a contingent result of the historical process" (36). In reaction to this recognition, Saussure adopted the synchronic model as "a methodological fiction" (Culler 37).

13. See "Epic and the Novel," The Dialogic Imagination, 3-40.

14. The "polyphonic novel" is an exception to this rule, being a form of secondary utterance whose internal politics are democratic. See Bakhtin 1984, 5-46, for definitions and analysis of the polyphonic novel. Wiebe's particular manner of dramatizing and evaluating polyphony is discussed later in the present chapter, and in Chapter 3.

15. For further discussion of centripetal and centrifugal forces, see Michael Holquist, Introduction to The Dialogic Imagination, xviii, and Holquist's Glossary in the same work, 425.

16. See The Dialogic Imagination, pp. 385-6, 425 for explanations of the term "belief system."

17. In Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist's English translation of The Dialogic Imagination, the term "heteroglossia" takes on different meanings in different contexts (thus illustrating the dialogic principle). It appears twice in the Glossary and many times in the body of Bakhtin's text. Emerson and Holquist translate "raznorečie," "raznorečivost," and "raznojazyčie" as "heteroglossia." "Raznorečie" appears in the Glossary under the heading "Heteroglossia" and refers to the potentially infinite semantic plurality of any a given set of words, which exists as a result of the infinite array of contexts into which it might be incorporated: ("Heteroglossia: The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance....All utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of matrix of forces practically impossible to resolve" [428]). "Raznorečivost" also appears under the heading "Heteroglossia" in the Glossary, but is defined elsewhere by Bakhtin as a "mix of varied and opposing voices" (49). "Raznojazyčie" appears in the Glossary under the heading "language [jazyk]" and denotes "many languages," or, in Lotman's terms, many "communication system[s] employing signs that are ordered in a particular manner" (Holquist 430). "Heteroglossia" may therefore validly be used to denote many voices, many languages, or many meanings (voicings, interpretations) of a given utterance. Bakhtin's clearest description of the relationship between these different senses of the word "heteroglossia" occurs in The Dialogic Imagination, p. 324-25. To avoid possible confusion, the word "heteroglossia" refers in the present study to semantic plurality ("raznorečie"); and terms such as "multi-voicedness," "speech diversity," or "stylistic heterogeneity" will denote the mixing of voices and languages manifest in the text ("raznorečivost," "raznojazyčie").

18. "A zone is a locus for hearing a voice," (Bakhtin 1981, 434). Voice zones are discussed in more detail in relation to First and Vital Candle in Chapter 3.

19. Numerous critics have pointed to the presence of either centripetal or centrifugal tendencies, but very few have discussed the relationship between the two. Most reviewers and critics mention the didacticism of Peace Shall Destroy Many and First and Vital Candle, and the fragmentation of

The Blue Mountains of China and The Temptations of Big Bear.

20. See Robert Kroetsch, "Mirror, mirror, show us all," Rev. of The Scorched-Wood People, Books in Canada 7/1 (Jan. 1978), 14; and Kroetsch's remarks on Wiebe's belief in the "'Capital-W' Word" (Neuman 236). See also Sam Solecki, "Giant Fictions and Large Meanings: the Novels of Rudy Wiebe," Canadian Forum 60 (March 1981), 5-8, 13.

21. Jeffrey and Spriet are the only two critics who have applied Bakhtinian theory in a more than passing way to Wiebe's writing. Other critics have addressed the question of Wiebe's double-voicedness using theoretical models other than Bakhtin's. See Sherrill E. Grace, "Structuring Violence: 'The Ethics of Linguistics' in 'The Temptations of Big Bear'," Canadian Literature 104 (Spring 1985), 7-23; George Hildebrand "The Anabaptist Vision of Rudy Wiebe: a Study in Theological Allegoresis," diss. McGill University, 1982.

22. See Bakhtin 1984, 185-199, for explanation of these species, types and varieties.

23. Taken from Bakhtin 1984, 199.

24. For further discussion of the other's speech as a bounded object, see Bakhtin 1981, 41-50; Bakhtin 1984, 186-189.

25. See also Bakhtin 1981, 429.

26. See also Bakhtin 1981, 432.

27. Although Vološinov divides the social world on the basis of class, one may validly view the verbal sign as an arena of struggle between social groups differentiated according to other criteria.

28. See Wiebe's remarks to the public response to Peace Shall Destroy Many, in "The Skull in the Swamp," Journal of Mennonite Studies 5 (1987), 8-20.

CHAPTER 2: PEACE SHALL DESTROY MANY

Breaking Open the Capsule

I

Rudy Wiebe opens Chapter One of his first novel, Peace Shall Destroy Many, with a symbolic breaching of the narrow horizon of a closed, monologic world. In the spring of 1944, Thom Wiens ploughs his wheatfield in the isolated Mennonite farming community of Wapiti in Northern Saskatchewan. Suddenly, a group of Canadian fighter planes comes roaring out of the south. They pass overhead, terrifying the plough horses and engulfing Thom's world in their noise. The planes are engaged in a training exercise. They pose no physical threat to Thom. What they signify, however, is that World War II has arrived. Thom can no longer dismiss the war as just another story on the radio, a far-away turmoil fought by other people somewhere else. The planes are tangible, irrefutable evidence that the war--world history--is here, for everyone, now. No one escapes it! "The boundaries of the community disappear"<sup>1</sup> for Thom, and with them, the myth of

its monovocality. His mind opens to other voices and languages, other constructions of the social and moral universe than that unitary truth imposed by the tyrannical voice of Deacon Peter Block, who attempts to reproduce in Wapiti the allegedly simple, monologic, Edenic world left behind in Russia. As Block's hold over Thom's mind diminishes, he finds himself spiritually liberated but morally disoriented, unsure of how he should respond to Canada's "call" to join the armed forces.

Wiebe tells the story primarily, but not exclusively, from Thom Wiens' point of view. Thom's consciousness serves as a field where rival voices and conflicting social forces struggle for dominance. Wiebe brings two main contestants onto "life's real battle-field: the soul of man" (PDM 162-3):<sup>2</sup> Deacon Block, who advocates a rigid adherence to cultural tradition and a total separation from the secular world; and Joseph Dueck, Wiebe's mouthpiece, who advances the possibility of practising Christianity without denying historical change or cutting oneself off from the broader social world. These two figures respectively personify the monologic and dialogic principles.

## II

As his name suggests, Block cements the separate Mennonite families and individuals of Wapiti into a monolithic community. He insists that they always "present an unblemished front to the world" (205). Denying, speaking over or physically removing any voice which dares not say "amen" to his own, Deacon Block so dominates the people of Wapiti that it comes close to being a monovocal community. Church policy "originated almost exclusively with Block" (68), his "big voice covering" (36) all. In a tantrum worthy of Jove, Deacon Block shouts down all dissent at a church meeting: "the Deacon's voice overwhelmed all, steel eyes flaming. Joseph's voice was snuffed; the sound and the look a bolt to blast everyone" (60).

Against Deacon Block's ideal of a monovocal church with himself as the sole spokesman, Wiebe's ideal church community permits multi-voicedness. When Block challenges Joseph's Dueck's right to voice disagreement on the grounds that he has only been in Wapiti nine months, "Thom surged to his feet. 'He is a member of this church and can speak!'" (61).

It is vital to notice that Thom's words do not



necessarily condemn monovocality per se. Wiebe discriminates between two kinds of monovocality, differentiated according to the circumstances under which they come about. If one tyrannical voice drowns out all other voices, then the community becomes a microcosmic totalitarian state. But if monovocality arises out of a genuine consensus between all individuals speaking freely, it signifies group solidarity, social harmony and political equality. This ideal comes closest to being realised when the members of the church sing together: Thom "felt that everyone in the building stood separate yet united, one body crying with one voice to the great known worthy of worship" (50). Wiebe here offers an image of agreement which retains its dialogic character.<sup>3</sup>

Deacon Block maintains his power over the people of Wapiti not only by shouting loudest, but also by intervening in their dialogue with God. Block assumes the role of sole mediator between the Scriptures and the congregation:

He shows us how to live the Bible.... 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. (218)

Block also controls Wapiti's dialogue with the outside world. He is invariably elected as a delegate to the annual Mennonite General Congress, and as one of the few senior men who speak English fluently, travel far afield or own a radio, he claims a superior ability to interpret the larger

world to Wapiti. As a result,

The men agreed on all matters, their opinions on any occurrence outside their own community being formed by general surveys of one Mennonite German weekly and by what Deacon Block told them. (29)

Deacon Block wishes to keep in place the language barrier which separates the German-speaking Mennonites from the wider, mainly English-speaking Canadian society, and from the Cree-, French-, and Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Wapiti area. By staunchly resisting the encroachment of English, Block represses linguistic diversity in the Mennonite community, thinking to protect his people from the hegemony of the "other's" language. Block thunders against Joseph Dueck for addressing an ethnically mixed audience of young people in the English language instead of in the High German language traditionally reserved for religious matters. Dueck's choice of English signifies the value he places on evangelism. By addressing his audience in English, he attempts to reach outside the narrow circumference of the German-speaking community. For Block, however, the church community cannot exceed the limits of the ethnic community. He places more weight on reiterating the Mennonites' cultural differences from "others" than on disseminating Jesus' teachings to fellow human beings.

By choosing to speak one national language instead of another, a speaker signifies his or her membership--or

desired membership--in a particular social group. To Deacon Block, the Mennonites' use of English signifies their blending into Anglo-Canadian culture. Yet through Joseph Dueck, Wiebe inserts the signifier "English language" into an alternative system of meaning, where it points to the speaker's evangelistic values. In Peace Shall Destroy Many, Wiebe argues that by spreading the Gospel to others, one imitates Jesus' Apostles far more effectively than by segregating oneself linguistically from prospective converts. Spiritual belief, not a special language, forms the basis of Mennonite social identity. Wiebe envisages the English language as a form of common ground, a shared linguistic space where the diverse ethnic groups might meet and enter into dialogue. One of the historical stories the novel dramatises--and, most important, participates in--is the Mennonites' appropriation of the English language for their own evangelical purposes. Wiebe himself spoke only German until he entered school at the age of six.<sup>4</sup> His choice to use English in Peace Shall Destroy Many implicitly repudiates Deacon's Block's policy of linguistic apartheid, and signifies Wiebe's determination to reach as wide an audience as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Block's repression of dissenting voices and his resistance to the English language form part of his campaign to promote monologic vision and language in the

Mennonite community. As Block's vision of the Wapiti Mennonites as "a people apart" collapses, so does his myth of Mennonite solidarity. Whether they stay at home or leave to fight abroad, members of Wapiti's Mennonite population experience the World War as a cause of bitter division in their own community. Some discover their main loyalties lie with the nation of Canada, while others like Block become more entrenched in their belief that the Mennonite community is--or should be--separate. Ironically, Block's staunch avoidance of the war abroad involves him in a war at home on two fronts, against the Canadian laws concerning military service, and against the more liberal Mennonite factions which no longer automatically object to participating in war. Despite Block's efforts to repress diversity of opinion, Wapiti experiences a group identity crisis, a re-evaluation of the criteria of their social identity. Concealed intra-group conflicts emerge into view, culminating in the violence which erupts in the barn on the night of the children's Christmas play.

As well as repressing the Mennonites' dialogue with other social groups, Block also upholds the monologic principle on the diachronic plane. By rigidly upholding the traditions of the fathers, Block disallows the possibility that voices in the present might have a right to re-evaluate the traditional moral code. Block elevates cultural

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traditions to the status of absolute moral laws. He bluntly denies the cultural relativity and historical contingency of his own moral absolutes:

The great matters of moral and spiritual discipline have been laid down once and for all in the Bible and our fathers have told us how we should act according to them. They cannot change.... Most do not care if they break the tradition because to them it is not an absolute standard of right and wrong. In Rome, they sheepishly follow the Romans. But our fathers found the correct way of acting. Through the years, this action has developed into our culture. If we do not follow them in their way, then we stand in grave danger of losing our eternal salvation. That is why we are so rigid about certain matters in the church. The Russians around our villages in Russia had traditional ways of acting too, but when they came to Canada and once knew about acting differently, they let the old way slide because the new way suited them better here. But we hold that our actions are eternally important; our fathers found the right moral and spiritual action. (202-3)

Wiebe offers glimpses of this mythical world of "the fathers" to show the spurious nature of the moral standard Block invokes.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Joseph Dueck gives voice to the possibility that even if the "the fathers" in nineteenth century Russia had found a morally correct mode of living, their code of behaviour was right and good only in that particular context. Under different socio-political circumstances, in other historical contexts, the same actions might not be right at all.

The Second World War poses a seemingly unprecedented moral dilemma for the Mennonite community. Strict pacifists, Mennonites traditionally avoid participating in war at all

costs. In the past, in the Russian Mennonite farming villages, "right was right and wrong was wrong. Any situation could be quickly placed into one or the other category" (21). But in Canada in 1944, "the circumstances are more involved" (47), both in a legal and a moral sense.<sup>7</sup> Canadian law requires each adult male of military age in Wapiti to make a personal moral choice whether to take up arms against Canada's enemies, or join the Restricted Medical Corps, or avoid any form of participation by proclaiming their conscientious objection. Deacon Block and his son, Pete, invoke the ways of the fathers, but abuse the Mennonite ideal of pacifism, by using it as a convenient excuse to stay safely at home on the farm to reap (as if incidentally) the considerable financial rewards of growing food under favourable wartime market conditions. The Blocks refuse to concede to the effect of context on the meaning of a given action; that is, they refuse to concede to the historicity or the dialogicity of signs. Their mechanical adherence to the Mennonites' traditional response to war denies the possibility that a given action, whether verbal or physical, signifies different things in different circumstances.

Deacon Block's manner of speaking confirms his adherence to the monologic principle. In private dialogue as well as on public occasions, Block makes long, formal,

didactic speeches, in which archaic diction and sonorous rhythms invoke the dignity and irrefutable authority of the past. In dialogue, Block interrupts and speaks over his interlocutors, monopolizing the floor to such an extent that dialogue becomes monologue. Block's name, for the most part, aptly describes his speech: uniform in style, and with a texture free of the disjunctions which commonly betray hesitation, deceit or uncertainty, Block's utterances have a weighty, monolithic quality.

However, near the end of the novel, Wiebe opens a gap between Block's inner and outer speech, and shows at the same time that Block represses the voice of the "other" in himself. Block's monologue begins to break apart when he speaks to Thom of his own past in Chapter 15. Dashes interrupt the smooth flow of his syntax, and a long silence conceals the "terrible thing" (203) that happened long in his past. When Wiebe incorporates Deacon Block's inner speech into the text, it becomes fissured by questions, doubts, accusations, evasions and confessions. The style of Block's inner monologue, which may more accurately be described as a dialogue with himself, contrasts markedly with the sure, serene equanimity of his monologic outer speech:

Only when he [Block] was through the burst of his emotions did his falsity strike home. Had he protected

Elizabeth?--from a bad marriage but not a shameful death.... As he threw a forkful of hay on the load, he was praying, Father give me grace to keep quiet--that I do not lie outwardly more than is necessary--for the sake of people such as this. Sinkingly, he knew he need say nothing, ever, and yet his whole life would be one long-drawn perjury. But his action had been right! Elizabeth had weakened, miserably; what good could now come of exposing her sin? (204)

Wiebe signifies the collapse of Block's authority by letting his outer speech disintegrate into incoherent fragments:

Block stared lifeless, his mouth forming, inanely, the words, "Elizabeth--Louis--what do you know--"  
.... He said hoarsely, "God forgive her--and you--" And me, he added, in the clamouring silence of his heart.  
(208)

In a number of respects, Wiebe's handling of language in Peace Shall Destroy Many creates a distance between his own narrative voice and the monologic voice of Deacon Block. As Wiebe tells of the outside world breaking into Wapiti, his language loses its monologic quality:

The whole yard burst into a chaos of squealing pigs, flying, squawking chickens, Carlo barking, Hal screaming "Bang! Bang!" and the cattle stampeding, milk jetting from swinging udders, towards the safety of the barn to crash against its closed door in a convulsion of bodies.... From where Thom stood, one cow looked very bad.... Her calf would be dead after that. (22)

The discourse of war invades the normally tranquil discourse of the pastoral: "burst," "chaos," "screaming," "safety," "jetting," "crash," "convulsion," "bodies," and "dead" are scattered amongst "yard," "pigs," "chickens," "cattle," "milk," "udders," "barn," "cow," and "calf" (22). Wiebe's syntax, too, reflects a collision of two styles. After a simple, unadorned opening principal clause, the first



sentence fragments syntactically, as eight irregularly-spaced present participles shatter the unified pastoral tableau of "the whole yard" into its diverse constituent images. Through Wiebe's mixing of different styles and discourses, the text of the novel re-enacts the opening process it depicts. Diverse linguistic elements invade the discourse of the novel just as the fighter planes violate the seclusion of Wapiti.

Pete Block says, "It'd be nice to just stay in the bush--never go out" (28). Wapiti is behind a bush, or rather, an immense expanse of bush and sparsely-populated distance. But physical barriers cannot shield Wapiti from the knowledge of the war. The radio brings the discourse of the war into private homes, effectively annexing Wapiti into the larger context of world history:

It seemed beyond comprehension to sit at supper in a log farmhouse in Canada and listen while men, at that very moment, tore each other for reasons none really knew: to listen while a landing craft exploded, and the voice of the announcer choked, "--out of the sky--parts of bodies falling--masses of water..." ...A whole world listening to men killing themselves savagely. (42-3)

Again, Wiebe's text re-enacts the processes of penetration and fragmentation it describes. Here, and again in Chapter 8, the CBC radio broadcast inserts itself intrusively into the narrative. It invades the text of Wiebe's novel, in the same way as the radio repeatedly breaks through the barriers Block erects around Wapiti.

Peace Shall Destroy Many is Wiebe's most stylistically uniform novel, yet its homogeneity is not as complete as it might seem. Even at this early stage in his writing career, Wiebe incorporates what Bakhtin calls "extra-literary genres" (1981, 33) into his text. The different voices and languages which speak in the text of Peace Shall Destroy Many implicitly signify Wiebe's rejection of the monovocality urged by Block.

### III

As Block's name connotes the monologic principle, Joseph Dueck's evokes the dialogic. By urging the Mennonite community to contend with the fact that times have changed, and that they no longer have exclusive control over the meaning of their traditional code of behaviour, Dueck draws attention to dialogic possibilities on both the synchronic and the diachronic planes.

Dueck causes Thom and other young people in the community of Wapiti to understand that even the most sincere conscientious objectors find themselves participating in the war involuntarily. The option of not participating no longer exists, as Annamarie Lepp explains:

it was fine to say, "We can have nothing to do with war" when...wars were skirmishes on the next

quarter and the king who led his troops to a day's victory won. Then it was possible --[not to join in. But] the whole world is now in it. We can't avoid it. Father raises pigs because the price is high: some men charged up the Normandy beaches last Tuesday with our bacon in their stomachs. (47)

Joseph Dueck pushes Annamarie's argument to its moral conclusion:

Given a war situation, we Mennonites can practise our belief in Canada only because other Canadians are kind enough to fight for our right to our belief. The godless man then dies for the belief of the Christian! (60)

An unprecedented historical situation--the Second World War --makes ambivalent the morality of the Mennonites' traditional refusal to fight, which previously had been only right. The action itself does not change, but its meaning becomes subject to reinterpretation in each new historical context. As Thom vacillates over whether he should take the measures necessary to gain legal exemption from the Canadian war effort, Wiebe explores what Bakhtin might call diachronic dialogicity, the ongoing social process of reinterpreting any known event or traditional course of action.

Dueck also argues that no society in the twentieth century can live its history entirely alone. Despite being insulated from the outside world by vast tracts of uninhabited bushland, Wapiti's history is not autonomous, but bound into the larger context of the history of the Canadian nation and the world. Under Joseph's influence, the

Mennonites of Wapiti begin to understand that they must contend not only with "the shock of the new,"<sup>8</sup> new but also with the shock of socially alien interpretations of their behaviour. The Second World War brings a powerful, invasive "other," into their lives, an "other" who claims an equal, if not superior right to confer meaning on their actions. The legal authority of the state comes into direct conflict with the moral authority of the Bible, transforming the act of non-participation into a non-verbal pun. "Non-participation" fits into two completely separate systems of meaning, each recognized as supremely authoritative by the society which propounds it.

Dueck draws attention also to the plurality of linguistic sign systems which operate in all societies. His letter to Thom highlights the many languages spoken in Wapiti:

"Dear Thomas:

"You asked me why I wrote 'Thomas' to you when I never spoke so formally. Well, to tell you the truth I really did not know how to write your name, since in Wapiti it's spoken 'Tom' in English and 'Thom' in Low German and 'Thomas' in High German. You can assume therefore that I am writing in none of these languages but the correct Biblical form of the name as given in the King James version: the name of the man whose eyes were open but could not see." (160)

It is vital to notice that although Dueck draws attention to Wapiti's linguistic plurality, he does not grant the languages equal status, but privileges an English version of the New Testament as most authoritative and paradigmatic.

A similar pattern emerges with respect to the formal properties of Dueck's utterances. His controversial talk to the youth meeting takes a dialogic, question-and-answer form:

"I outlined my ideas in the form of questions. First: what is the basic force of the Christian's life? Using Scripture, I tried to give the answer as Love..." (60)

Joseph engages in dialogue with the Scriptures. The Christian formulates the questions; the Bible answers them. However, Dueck's dialogue with his audience--and Wiebe's dialogue with his readers--remains strictly pedagogical: "someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error;...it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil" (Bakhtin 1984, 81).

Although Joseph Dueck functions as Wiebe's main proponent of the dialogic principle, Wiebe never entirely realizes that principle in Dueck's utterances. Dueck's letter to Thom in Chapter 12 provides the clearest example of this contradiction. The letter opens by situating itself in a dialogic context: "you asked me why I wrote..." (160). Dueck obviously answers a question posed earlier by Thom. The letter identifies itself as a rejoinder, an utterance in an ongoing interlocutory exchange. Dueck's letter also performs the vital work of dialogizing the word "peace," but such dialogization has the ultimate aim not of abolishing the semantic/linguistic hierarchy, but of replacing one

privileged meaning/language with another. The dominant interpretation of "peace" in Canada in 1944 opposes "peace" to physical warfare between nations. Wiebe dialogizes "peace" by setting against this dominant secular definition, a number of common Christian alternatives: Matthew's "Blessed are the peacemakers" (162); the expression "to hold one's peace" (162); the peace of social harmony; the "state of safety and blessedness" promised by God to Israel in the Old Testament (162); and the "horrible joke" of the angels' "Peace on earth" which was followed by the slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem (162). The word "peace" resembles an object pulled between several gravitational fields. In different contexts, in different speech genres or discourses, the meaning of the word changes. However, Wiebe does not let "peace" float between discourses in a state of semantic non-fixity. He closes the dialogue between the differing voicings of "peace" by inserting the word into the context of Jesus's teachings:

"According to Christ's teaching, peace is not a circumstance but a state of being. The Christ-follower has the peace of reconciliation with God and therefore the peace of conscious fellowship with God through God in Christ. Peace is not a thing static and unchanging: rather a mighty inner river (read Isaiah 48:18) that carries all outward circumstances before it as if they were driftwood. This was the peace Christ brought; he never compromised with a sham slothful peace, as we want to. He said, 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' He brought no outward quiet and comfort such as we are ever praying for. Rather, he brought inward peace that is in no way affected by outward war...

But I must stop preaching!" (162-3)

As the King James version of the Bible provides "the correct Biblical form" of Thom's name, the teachings of Jesus, supported by Isaiah, provides the privileged definition of "peace." Only with the aid of this definition can the paradox implicit in the title of the novel be resolved.

The style of Dueck's letter, and many of his other extended utterances, has a monologic, sermon-like quality. Despite proclaiming themselves rejoinders in dialogue, or taking the form of a series of questions and answers, Dueck's utterance bear all the marks of authoritative discourse, a variety of monologic language which Bakhtin describes as follows:

Authoritative discourse...remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert: it demands, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial.... Its semantic structure is static and dead, for it is fully complete, it has but a single meaning, the letter is fully sufficient to the sense and calcifies it. (1981, 343)

Wiebe presents his central message in the form of Dueck's letter, thus setting it off from the "ordinary language" of the rest of the text. This special demarcation helps impart a monologic, authoritative quality to Dueck's discourse. The letter ceases to function as a rejoinder in a dialogue between two characters, and takes on the qualities of explicit moral instruction addressed directly to the reader. In Bakhtin's terms, Dueck's letter sounds as direct, unmediated authorial discourse.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Dueck's "But I

must stop preaching!" (163) betrays Wiebe's own awareness that his proselytizing has become too overt at this point in the text.

#### IV

The monologic aspects of Joseph Dueck's speech reflect Wiebe's inability to embrace all the ramifications of the dialogic principle, despite his misgivings about monologic vision and language. As Wiebe's hero searches for "the path of God's revelation" (237), he finds the polyphonic "void of splintered dogmas" (235) no less repugnant than "one man's misguided interpretation of tradition" (237).

Thom fears that by deviating from the ways of the fathers advocated by Deacon Block, he will inevitably fall, like Hank and Herb Unger, into moral nihilism. Hank boasts of shooting down "Nazi pigs" strictly for fun; Herb is lazy, bitter, unco-operative and openly contemptuous of his neighbours. Interestingly, the pertinent quality of Herb Unger's speech is its elusive ambiguity and semantic openness. Through double-entendre and neutral intonation, Herb refuses to commit himself to any single meaning, and thus evades Thom's efforts to defeat him in debate: "He spoke in that peculiarly expressionless voice that he could



employ of such occasions; to each of them his words meant something quite different" (99). If Block's voice epitomises the oppressive effects of monologic vision, Herb Unger's utterances point to the danger which lies at the opposite extreme.

The plurality of accents latent in Herb's unaccented discourse hints at the consequences of applying the dialogic principle to the Bible. What happens to the meaning and authority of the Scriptures if one concedes to the multi-acculturality, the historicity and cultural contingency of all verbal signs? In theory, God's Word could dissolve into a cacophony of conflicting relative truths and moral laws. Pastor Lepp convinces Thom that "the teachings of Christ, rightly applied" (87) offer the solution to all moral problems; the Bible carries these "teachings" down through history. But if the Bible can be re-interpreted in each context of re-reading--by reinflecting its words, ranking its parts into new hierarchies, and annexing it into new historical and verbal context--how may Thom know whether or not he applies Jesus' teachings "rightly"? The dialogic principle, taken to its furthest extreme, contends that all readings are equally authoritative and semantically "right."

Wiebe glimpses, but does not rigorously investigate these questions in Peace Shall Destroy Many. He retreats

from a vision of a polyphonic Bible via the notion of the "literal" reading. In Peace Shall Destroy Many, a literal reading of the Bible releases whichever meaning appears most "natural" in that particular cultural and historical context. For example, Thom argues that "the Bible teaches 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' That means, if you're concerned about your own salvation, be concerned about his too" (195). Thom interprets "neighbour" not in the metonymical sense of "humanity-in-general." He refuses to be forced, as was his older brother, David, to go to far away places such as India in order to love his neighbour. In Thom's mind "neighbour" denotes the particular neighbours he finds about him in his own historic and culturally specific context: namely the Moosomins and the Mackenzies and the Labrets.

By introducing the Bible to neighbours whose history and culture differ radically from his own, Thom places the Bible in a new context of interpretation. Thom conducts the Bible classes on his neighbours' "home ground," rather than in the church or school buildings which, in their minds, signify "foreign territory." In their own homes, the Métis children annex the stories into their own culturally- and historically-determined systems of meaning, releasing in the process, hitherto suppressed meanings of the text:

As he [Thom] was drawing near the close, nearly discouraged, some strange biblical detail caught at

small Judy Mackenzie and she, tongue loosened apparently by the home surroundings, for she had never before spoken even when questioned directly, asked with wide eyes, "Mr Wiens, you ever eat grasshoppers?"

"Why--no--I--" nonplussed

Proudly, "I did one, last summer. Phooey! They're terrible salty!"...But strangely, when the laughter eased and he explained that Palestinian locusts were quite different from Canadian grasshoppers and that the diet of "locusts and honey" meant that John, living in the wilderness, ate only such food as the region naturally provided, Jackie Labret asked quietly,

"Did he live like us when we go huntin' in summer -- berries and fish and stuff?"

The unexpected parallel amazed Thom. "Why yes, Jackie. John the Baptist lived like that, simply, eating what God provided. He was too busy doing his job to be concerned with nicely cooked meals."

As he spoke, Thom sensed a new element of contact with the children which he had not brushed before. He could explain John's great urgency as he waited and taught in the Jordanian wilderness, preparing a way for the Redeemer, and the children found a kernel of truth in his story. Thom could but marvel at the attention on the faces before him, and the strange path by which it had arrived there. (189)

The Métis children's interpretations have value primarily because they provide Thom with an opening to explain the monologic "right reading" of the Scriptures. The indefinite article in "a kernel of truth" implicitly concedes that a story might hold more than one valid meaning. And yet, by invoking the notion of "arrival," Wiebe implies that until the children find the same kernel of truth as Thom already possesses, their Christianity must remain not quite authentic. Although Wiebe cannot tolerate the monologism of Block's Bible, which remains semantically locked in the dungeon of a single cultural and historical context, neither can he fully allow the Bible's heteroglossia. In Peace Shall Destroy Many, only pedagogical dialogue takes place between

different social groups on the synchronic plane.

Nor, as the novel's dual time scheme demonstrates, does Wiebe give free rein to the dialogic principle on the diachronic plane. The narrative structure of Peace Shall Destroy Many establishes two models of time: one linear, the other circular or cyclical. The main narrative takes place in historical time, between spring and Christmas, 1944. Each day, the radio brings news of the latest disasters and victories on the European front. No-one can foresee precisely what will happen next; history offers no precedent of a war fought on so huge a scale. The dialogic principle feeds on a linear model of history such as the main narrative of Peace Shall Destroy Many presents. Each unprecedented moment offers a new context in which to understand the meaning of events and words. However, Wiebe structures his narrative in a manner which creates a counterpoint between temporal linearity and circularity. The circular model does not deny the dialogic principle but it does repress heteroglossia (or realized dialogicity) by diminishing the importance of the unprecedented elements in context of interpretation. The four Preludes, which correspond to the four seasons of the year, together with the annually recurring Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter, envisage history as a series of circles, a series of repetitions of the same paradigmatic events. This

circular model, by emphasising the respects in which history repeats itself, creates the theoretical possibility that different generations will arrive at the same fundamental conclusions, the same perceptions of truth, value, morality and meaning. Again, Wiebe acknowledges the possibility that many voices may independently arrive at the same unitary truth, and that "agreement [may] retain its dialogic character" (Bakhtin 1984, 95). By constructing time as both linear and circular, Wiebe attempts to reconcile the dialogic principle with the eternal truths and values of Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

And at the end of the novel, Wiebe reaffirms the existence of a timeless Truth-with-a-capital-T. As the fighter planes breached Thom's narrow social horizon in the novel's opening scene, the concept of eternal, extra-historical Truth breaks into Thom's field of vision, in the form of the star which, in the children's Christmas play, appears in the night sky. Wiebe breaks the capsule of limited vision twice, in other words: once when the boundaries of the Wapiti church community are broken open, and a second time when the boundaries of the multi-voiced secular historical world suddenly vanish--"the curtain was opening" (231)--to reveal a transcendent, extra-historical context, in which ultimate, monologic Truth, Value and Meaning come into being.

A similar recoil from the dialogic principle occurs with respect to the Word. Driving home from the play, and from the violent travesty of the play which erupts afterwards in the barn, Thom yearns to undo linear history, go back to the distant past, and recover the lost original meaning of the Word:

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 has done, their feet in the dust of Galilee. (237)

Wiebe envisages the ongoing process of renewing the Word dialogically as an eternal approach to this postulated original authoritative Word. This proviso that dialogic processes of discovery must always have a postulated anchor or goal signifies Wiebe's reluctance to relinquish monologic vision.

## V

Although Wiebe begins to explore the dialogic principle at a thematic level in Peace Shall Destroy Many, he shows little interest at this stage in devising effective means of activating it in his text. Wiebe does not as yet heed his own advice about speaking indirectly: on many occasions in Peace Shall Destroy Many, the historically concrete story offers too thin a camouflage for Wiebe's monologic moral and socio-political rhetoric. Almost all the dialogue manifest

in the novel takes the form of "compositionally marked dialogue,"<sup>11</sup> and Wiebe allows little or no doubt as to where he stands in relation to each of the voices which speak in the text. Peace Shall Destroy Many contains no "great dialogue" in which characters and author participate with equal rights" (Bakhtin 1984, 71). Wiebe endeavours to dominate the voices which speak in the text no less than Deacon Block endeavours to rule Wapiti. And as Block tries to mediate between Wapiti and the outside world, Wiebe attempts to mediate between the characters' primary utterances and his readers. Any dialogic elements which enter Peace Shall Destroy Many do so not through Wiebe's deliberate authorization, but as a result of the moral, ideological and linguistic predispositions of his readers.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2: PEACE SHALL DESTROY MANY

1. Wiebe uses this expression when describing his own experience of suddenly expanded horizons in Neuman 232.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all page numbers appearing parenthetically in Chapter 2 refer to Peace Shall Destroy Many (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962).
3. Bakhtin discusses Dostoevsky's presentation of "agreement which retains its dialogic character" in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 95.
4. J. M. Kertzer, "Biocritical Essay," The Rudy Wiebe Papers First Accession: An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Libraries, ed. Jean F. Tener and Appollonia Steele (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1986) ix.
5. Cf. W. J. Keith's discussion of the question of Wiebe's sense of audience in "Where Is the Voice Going To? Wiebe and His Readers," paper delivered at the conference on "Mennonite/s Writing in Canada," May 1990.
6. Herman Paektou's illegitimacy, and Deacon Block's lack of guidance during childhood show the spurious nature of Block's myth of the wisdom of the fathers.
7. In the First World War, all Mennonites living in Canada were automatically exempted from military service under the terms of the Mennonites' original immigration agreement with the Dominion Government. But those who entered Canada between 1923 and 1930, in the second great migration from Russia, were admitted on the understanding that they were legally obliged to participate like any other Canadian citizens in the defence of their country. Wiebe establishes that the Mennonites of Wapiti came to Canada in the second wave of migration. For a more detailed analysis of the complexities of the Russländers' legal and moral position, see E.K. Francis, In Search of Utopia: the Mennonites in Manitoba (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955) 232-42.
8. This term was coined by the art critic, Robert Hughes, whose book and television series on modernist painting were entitled The Shock of the New.
9. Species I in Bakhtin's classificatory scheme.
10. Wiebe creates a similar tension between sameness and difference by giving Biblical names to his characters. As Joseph Dueck points out in his letter to Thom, the



individuals concerned may in some respects be strikingly similar to their Biblical namesakes, but be strikingly different in other respects.

11. Species II in Bakhtin's classificatory system.

### CHAPTER 3: FIRST AND VITAL CANDLE

#### How Shall We Speak About History?

##### I

First and Vital Candle contains all the ingredients of a popular adventure romance: a strong, self-sufficient protagonist, a diabolical antagonist, pristine northern-wilderness scenery, colourful depictions of Native peoples and their customs, a suspenseful plot punctuated by scenes of violence, and a love affair which ends with the death of the main female character in a spectacular natural disaster. Wiebe searches for characters and stories which might command the attention of a wider, more diverse readership, an audience not (consciously) interested in moral or spiritual matters. Wiebe's protagonist, Abe Ross, professes not to be interested in such matters. Compared with Thom Wiens, a devout Mennonite, Abe Ross is a character with whom a wider variety of readers might imaginatively identify. First and Vital Candle traces Abe's gradual discovery of his deep need for love and a fixed spiritual orientation amidst the fear, greed and alienation of North American capitalist society during the Cold War era. By focussing on a "modern

Everyman" (Keith 1981a, 33), Wiebe dramatises the relevance of Jesus' message of love and peace in such a way that "the person who is non-religious...can say, Yes, that is a possible experience" (Cameron, 157).

In his characterisation of Abe Ross, Wiebe demonstrates what Bakhtin calls "an acute awareness of the interlocutor, the addressee to whom it is directed" (Bakhtin 1984, 205). Like all rhetoricians, Wiebe "takes into account the other's possible reactions, the other's possible reply" (Bakhtin 1984, 205). In fact, on one level, First and Vital Candle is precisely about the reactions of an interlocutor. Instead of ignoring or denying the fact that many readers feel intimidated by any discourse that resembles a sermon, Wiebe focuses directly on this problem. He pre-empts, parries, and explains the non-Christian reader's possible objections to Christian rhetoric, indeed to anything that resembles an overt message in a work of art. Non-Christian readers see reflected in Abe their own hostility or indifference towards the word of God. However, as Wiebe explores the reasons behind such hostility, he intimates that it conceals a deeper ambivalence.

Through Abe, Wiebe dramatises the conflicting needs of all who search for meaning, whether they search in the world of verbal or non-verbal signs. Abe's situation is analogous

to the predicament of readers, as they attempt to orient themselves amidst the possible systems of meaning that pertain in the text. Abe runs from the tyrannical monologic voice of the preacher, yet he cannot tolerate the dissipation of meaning which polyphony, unhierarchised heteroglossia, ultimately implies. He resists the authority of any single permanently sovereign voice, yet yearns to find some sort of linguistic centre, or some stable hierarchy of languages for conferring meaning on the world. Similarly, Wiebe's hypothetical non-Christian reader recoils from any work of art that parades its message too overtly, yet cannot quite suppress the lingering hope of finding some spiritually sustaining kernel of meaning in the text.

Like Peace Shall Destroy Many, First and Vital Candle presents a thesis, but it does so far more self-consciously than the earlier novel. In First and Vital Candle, Wiebe dramatises the many pitfalls which face evangelistic Christians such as himself. In secular genres such as the novel, the Word of God enjoys no insulation from ordinary human words. Outside the protective cocoons of ritual and sacred space, the novel transmits the word of God to an unforeseeable variety of socio-historical contexts where it must stand up against, or be vanquished by, the full force of the wider world's sovereign discourses. An emblematic image in First and Vital Candle is the sign "Jesus Saves,"

squeezed between "Big Auction Every Day. 2 pm New and Used Clothing" and "Schnitzler Good Sausages and Meats" (FVC 20).<sup>1</sup> How might Wiebe make "Jesus Saves" stand out from all other truths which assault his readers' awareness, without resorting to the strident, tyrannical rhetoric of Adam Ross, who "thunder[s] what...the Lord had stomped into him" (299)? Having articulated his commitment to the ideal of non-aggression in Peace Shall Destroy Many, how might Wiebe begin to implement that ideal in his relationship with those who read his novels?

In First and Vital Candle, Wiebe endeavours to solve this dilemma by re-attuning the ear of the reader. Instead of speaking more stridently and directly, turning up the volume as it were, he attempts to re-sensitize his readers' receiving apparatus. Wiebe "positions" readers carefully in the hope that they might hear an old message from a new angle. He breaks the English language into its component speech genres, which he sorts and evaluates against the moral criteria articulated in Jesus' utterances.

Although First and Vital Candle lacks the conspicuous internal borderlines which give The Blue Mountains of China and The Temptations of Big Bear their collage-like appearance, it contains a network of intersecting linguistic boundaries, some typographically marked, others half-hidden

or concealed within a single utterance. Extended passages of compositionally marked dialogue appear at regular intervals in the text, and Wiebe's interest in internally dialogized words continues to develop. In fifteen of the novel's eighteen chapters, the voice of Abe Ross blends and interweaves with the voice of an omniscient third person narrator; Abe's voice alone narrates the three remaining chapters. First and Vital Candle manifests a greater degree of speech diversity than Peace Shall Destroy Many. However that diversity continues to serve rhetorical rather than exploratory purposes.

## II

The story of Abe Ross conforms to the Biblical archetype of the prodigal son. Both sons walk a circular path of exile and return, loss and rediscovery. Abe also travels a circular path with respect to the word of God. At the age of seventeen, he leaves behind his father's voicing of God's words; at forty, Abe rediscovers the word of God reaccentuated<sup>2</sup> in the mouths of Sally Howell and Josh Bishop. In the intervening period, Abe wanders in a wilderness of voices, lonely, spiritually empty and despairing at life's meaninglessness and futility.

Wiebe's text takes up Abe's story in medias res. In the Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5, in which Abe "rests" in Winnipeg, Wiebe uses Abe's field of awareness as a device to register the confusing multitude of speech genres which crowd into, fracture, and finally numb consciousness in mid-twentieth century city environments. The Winnipeg section of First and Vital Candle demonstrates the extent to which Wiebe differs from Bakhtin in his attitude towards all manifestations of polyphony. Through Abe, fresh from the verbal sparseness of the Arctic, Wiebe de-naturalises the city dwellers' "normal adjustment" (57) to their polyphonic environment. He dramatises the debilitating effect of that environment on thought, feeling, and spiritual belief. Wiebe does not employ polyphony in the exuberant celebratory mode of post-modernist contemporaries such as Robert Kroetsch or George Bowering. On the contrary, he suggests that a plurality of fully valid voices threatens coherent thought, paralyses emotion, and undermines spiritual belief.

Wiebe stylizes polyphony most concretely in Chapters 2 and 3 of First and Vital Candle, in the scenes of the Kinconnells' party and the Red Vine Club.<sup>3</sup> By placing Abe in crowded, noisy, claustrophobic rooms, where voices become ensnarled and broken and no single thread of discourse can be followed to its end, Wiebe guides his readers toward an understanding of their own linguistic milieu and its effects

on the psyche. In both of these scenes of cacophony, Abe cannot tolerate the noise. To shield himself from the "incredible clacking racket" (33) in the Kinconnells' basement, he first "deliberately shut[s] out his hearing" (33) and then drinks himself into oblivion. At the Red Vine Club, his behaviour follows a similar pattern:

...as he now sat, beaten by clamour, wails, shouts, barks, foot-stomping, and the low-toned whispers from the adjacent tables all ran together in one grinding cacophony hallelujah amen when my baby smiles at me...o  
 jesus jesus jesus how i love you jesus safe in your arms o darling safe on your gentle breast there by your love i got just what i wanted i got just what i needed

As if dropped into a void, suddenly all was gone. After a moment Abe realized he was slumped down on a red-leather seat, head in his arms as if to shield something vital from annihilation. He sat up then, looked across the room and without a break of movement rose and went to the table where Jim was leaning back, picking up the conversation with the three girls. "Jim, I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's late and I'm going."  
 (62)

Far from feeling enriched or liberated by his experiences of polyphony, Abe's overloaded awareness blacks out. Swamped by relentless waves of present and remembered past verbal din, consciousness does not rise to new pinnacles of freedom and enlightenment; it sinks into oblivion. During his time in Winnipeg, Abe strains to hear some single voice he can follow. Fleetinglly, amidst the cacophony, he hears words which seem to speak to him in a special way. But they are audible only in fragments, in snatches of memory, scraps of graffiti, moments of heightened awareness listening to Bach. Before Abe can even



name his flickering intimations, other languages and voices besiege his field of awareness, clashing violently and breaking against one another.

Abe's experiences dramatise the unanchored mind's futile and exhausting search for meaning in polyphonic space. They also allow Wiebe to dramatise his own problematic position as an evangelical Christian writer in a complex, cacophonous, heteroglot world, where people habitually block out all utterances which do not immediately satisfy their most pressing needs. First and Vital Candle takes into account its own "dialogizing background" (Bakhtin 1981, 76), the manifold existing utterances to which it replies and against which it must define itself in the public domain.

A number of characters in the novel exemplify the way Wiebe does not want to sound. The over-emphatic utterances of Sherris Kinconnell reify speech adapted to that most dense of polyphonic milieux, the crowded party. Wiebe's italics indicate Sherris's exaggerated intonation: "he was so unhappy but he had to catch a plane tonight" (24). An inflated verbal currency, her words carry little sincerity or semantic value. Her over-abundant adjectives strain upwards into the realm of superlatives and empty hyperbole: "absolutely delightful" (23), "completely intrigued" (23),

"so dreadfully narrow" (23), "absolutely years" (23), "so happy you came!" (23), "absolutely prostrate" (24). The speech of the society hostess bears the scars of her constant battle to command attention amidst a crowd of competing voices. Similarly, the "strident voice of the preacher" (61) and the "rock-crusher tones of the girl singing [above] her electric guitar" (61-2) illustrate how the Word of God becomes distorted and unrecognisable as evangelists try more and more desperately to amplify it above the competing din.

The text of First and Vital Candle manifests polyphony only to reify and denounce it. Polyphony becomes a bounded object in the text, an unpleasant but necessary stage in a psychological and socio-linguistic counter-revolution to restore the lost or unrecognised authority of God's voice. For Wiebe, polyphony functions as a means to a monologic end, not as an end in itself. He conducts Abe through or beyond an experience of polyphony towards another goal.

Because Wiebe harnesses his reader's perceptions to those of Abe Ross, the reader, too, must endure a confusing plurality of equally valid voices, before moving beyond that experience to reach a new perception of order and coherent meaning. Like the prodigal son, who had to get lost before he could be found, Wiebe's readers experience cycles of

orientation, disorientation and reorientation as they negotiate a path through a text which moves repeatedly from monologue into polyphony and on towards a new hierarchy of voices. In the opening paragraphs, as Abe wanders the crowded night-time streets of Winnipeg, Wiebe dramatises a mind "looking intensely" (9) but seeing nothing, a mind trying to catch hold of something, yet open to too many impressions to hold fast to any one of them. Abe cannot order or rank his perceptions. His world resembles a meaningless text in which every element carries an equal accent. Wiebe's grammar, punctuation and syntax force readers to participate in Abe's disorientation, by subverting the process of "voicing," or according relative weight to the words and syllables of the text:

He had been walking along Portage Avenue for more than an hour, glance searching out first a store window, then a car gliding by under throttled power, looking intensely though come the evening's end and dropping into bed he would remember not one detail of the mass, couples chatting as they passed oblivious, when looking down into a restaurant below street level Abe Ross saw the girl seated alone at the table.

...He was by, the white image of the girl drifting past his memory like any myriad of shapes passed and forgotten in who could recollect how many towns and tents and cities and farmhouses, and he stopped. (9)

The disorienting effect of this passage arises not because Wiebe problematize the narrative voice of the text,<sup>4</sup> but through Wiebe's momentary pluralization of the accents of the reading voice. Each sentence establishes a particular syntactic direction or narrative line in its initial clause, loses its way in a tangle of right-branching subordinate

phrases and clauses, and then recovers its original path in a second main clause which terminates the sentence. Both sentences become subtly multi-accentual<sup>5</sup> in their middle sections, where the more than one possible syntactic structure can be discerned. How, for example, should readers voice the embedded question in the second sentence? Should "who could recollect how many towns and tents and cities and farmhouses" be spoken with a rising interrogative pitch? Or with the falling pitch of a rhetorical question? Or with the level pitch indicated by the very subordinate grammatical function of this clause in larger context of the sentence? Wiebe's text permits the mind's ear to hear several possible readings or "voicings" of these words.

Inconsistent punctuation also confounds the reading voice. By omitting a comma between "when" and "looking" and between "level" and "Abe" in the first sentence, Wiebe confronts readers with conflicting signals for pausing and stress. On occasions, syntax and punctuation issue contradictory commands. The syntax of the first sentence tells the voice to pause between "passed" and "oblivious," but the absence of a comma implies that "oblivious" is the object of "passed," and that no pause should separate these two words. Unorthodox punctuation, particularly when coupled with convoluted syntax, creates grammatical and semantic ambiguities which further baffle the reading voice. For

example, "a car gliding by under throttled power, looking intensely," and "dropping into bed he would remember" might each be articulated either as instances of ellipsis, or as examples of misplaced modifiers. At the same time, past and present participles such as "throttled," "looking," "dropping," "chatting," "seated," "past," and "forgotten" confuse the reader's sense of temporal linearity, and blur the vocal distinctions between adjectives and verbs. How should the reading voice resolve these ambiguities?

The point to be stressed, however, is that the multi-accentuality of these sentences is temporary and illusory. Wiebe's grammatical ambiguities, his unorthodox punctuation and his syntactic convolutions postpone but do not prevent the reader's discovery of a position from which the meaning of the sentence can be known. Within the space of each of these sentences, readers undergo a process of disorientation as Wiebe creates an array of equally viable options concerning the manner in which the words and phrases should be heard. But this disorientation is followed by a sudden re-orientation, as the several possible patterns of accentuation, pace, pitch and pausing resolve themselves into a single "right" vocalisation.

Wiebe subjects readers to a similar cycle of disorientation followed by reorientation within the space of

certain paragraphs in the text. Like the beautiful female stranger whom Abe follows in Chapter 1, the omniscient narrative voice of the text repeatedly gets lost in a crowd of others' utterances, only to re-emerge further on:

[1] A taxi eased past, the driver trying to catch his eye; [2] she might have taken one. You could walk for a week in Winnipeg and if-- [3] why was I so stupid?-- [4] he paused at the [5]"Don't Walk," [6] the curb balancing his feet. A scatter of people waited across the intersection. [7] Bus-stop. [8] The light flicked and he crossed knowing already she was not among them. He strode through oblivious and just beyond the restaurant at the corner through the double glass of a store the edge of his glance snagged against [the] blue [of her cloak]. (17)

The omniscient narrative voice begins this passage (section 1), breaks through intermittently in the middle sections (4 and 6), and recovers its former dominance in section 8. This voice merges with Abe's inner monologue in sections 2 and 7; it quotes the "Don't Walk" sign in section 5; while in section 3 Abe's voice briefly breaks through by itself. Again, a cyclic movement becomes apparent. In sections 2 to 7 inclusive, Wiebe sometimes blends, sometimes interlaces the omniscient narrative voice with Abe's voice and with what might be called "the voices of the city." Yet in section 8, he restores the omniscient narrative voice to its initial position of dominance in the paragraph.

A congruent cycle of monologue lost and restored can be discerned on a larger scale within the novel as a whole. No sooner have readers oriented themselves and found their way

onto the main narrative freeway than Wiebe diverts them into the obscure, bumpy byways of flashback, allegory, and numerous as yet ill-defined inserted utterances and narrative modes: signs, plaques, graffiti, songs, fragments of remembered speech, price tags, a business card, Abe's brief interjectory first person exclamations and questions, tourist guide patter, a newspaper advertisement, snatches of the Bible, scraps of party-talk, the intimate secular confessions between close friends, the sustained flashback of Chapter 4, and Abe's Arctic adventure story cum parable in Chapter 1. Amongst the diverse utterances and speech genres which penetrate the world created by the conventions of realism, readers lose sight of the landmarks which initially gave them their bearings in the world of the novel. Where, one wonders, is this story going?

From a vantage point at the end of the novel, Wiebe's strategy becomes clear: Wiebe subjects the discourse of the text to centrifugal forces in preparation for organising it around a new centre. Initially, Wiebe establishes a dominant narrative voice in the text, a voice in which Abe and an anonymous omniscient narrator speak in unison. Wiebe then fractures the discourse in Chapters 1 to 5, as a prerequisite to his subsequent reassembly of the broken pieces into a new hierarchy. From Chapter 6 onwards, the disoriented reader gradually acquires a new orientation

within the field of the text.

Across the course of the novel as a whole, the reader's disorientation diminishes for two main reasons. First, the texture of the language changes when the action shifts from one verbal milieu to another. When Abe moves from Winnipeg to Frozen Lake, and begins to define and hierarchize the voices and languages he hears in the world, these voices and languages ossify and fall into ranks within the field of the text. Wiebe begins to group the linguistic scraps together, distributing them consistently between the utterances of different characters. He gradually builds the chopped and vaguely-defined fragments of Part 1 into the solid, substantial, internally consistent blocks of speech which duel against one another in the extended dialogues of Parts 5, 6 and 7. Characters such as John Marsden, Amos Quequeish, Sally Howell and Josh Bishop speak as ideologues,<sup>6</sup> as mouthpieces for distinct verbal-ideological positions. The social struggle implicit in the internal dialogicity of the early chapters emerges more and more into the open, in the compositionally marked dialogues which occur in the later portions of the text. There, the characters engage in debate expressly about the virtues and limitations of different ways of talking about the world.

The second reason disorientation diminishes is that the



reader learns progressively to distinguish certain patterns in the jumble of speech genres embedded in the text. Reorientation takes place in the temporal as well as the spatial dimension. Instead of hearing a cacophony, readers begin to hear ranked choruses or families of voices which eventually converge into a single hierarchy near the end of the text. Wiebe establishes cross-references between the characteristics of certain speech genres. He trains the reader to hear similarity and difference according to new criteria. Re-reading the Winnipeg section of the text, the prodigal reader, ear attuned anew, recognizes the broken shreds of discourse embedded in Chapters 1 to 5 as the tattered outer limits of certain speech genres or particular characters' voice zones.<sup>7</sup>

### III

It is not by chance that Wiebe places Abe in Winnipeg in the early chapters of First and Vital Candle: Winnipeg carries historical associations essential to his theme of spiritual (and linguistic) exile and return. While wandering aimlessly around Winnipeg, Abe comes across the grave of Louis Riel, the grave also of Riel's dream of a religious nation. Only Riel's tomb and the St. Boniface Basilica remain as material traces of that dream. Winnipeg was once a

Christian stronghold, but by the time Abe arrives, the secularisation of Canada is almost complete. Riel's dream has fled (to Josh Bishop's mind at Frozen Lake). God's words hold sovereignty only on tiny islands of space and time in the midst of a non-religious way of life. Worship occurs at set times on set days. A sexton locks the churches after business hours. Grass grows over Riel's seldom-visited grave, and tourists outnumber worshippers in St. Boniface Basilica. In the Winnipeg scenes, the texture of Wiebe's prose renders the famed "decline of Christianity" audible. Like a modern-day Babel, Winnipeg is a place of cacophony in which the voice of God struggles vainly to be heard above the rest.

Profane discourses appear to have overrun the city, monopolizing its present meaning and re-writing the meaning of its past. Tall buildings, monuments to the power of money, dominate the skyline. The church door is "now in shadow under the department store" (46). Brightly lit store window displays reaffirm Jim MacLaren's claim that "Without money in this country you've got nothing. You can't do nothing. You are nothing" (59). Words concerning God reside in the down-and-out part of town. Instead of shining out in up-town neon brilliance, they are scrawled obscurely on walls, or jostled amongst the grimy billboards and placards of the street. In Abe's psyche and the contemporary

westernised world in general, the struggle between secular and religious discourses appears to have finished, and secular discourses seem to hold all the power. The word of God, routed, has almost abandoned the field.

But Wiebe's novel also occupies that field. Because Wiebe has not abandoned faith in the Word of God, the Word has not abandoned the text of the novel. Nor has it entirely deserted the psyche of Wiebe's allegedly "non-Christian" protagonist. In the language of the text, which reflects Abe's awareness, Wiebe brings the struggle back to life again:

[1] "Would you like to tour the Basilica?" [2] and explain the precise cost of the new baptistery at the door and ancient gold-inlaid altarpiece and the pulpit and the replacement value of [3] the whole cavernous mound [4] while as incidentally pointing out the station where Jesus fell for the third time. [5] Facts at least the boy could handle; [6] with hard irony he thought, [7] I have saved the world from one more sum addict. [8] Dreams were for men, not children: like the dream buried between the basilica and the river, under the already brownish grass beside the inevitable bronze plaque:

[9] TOMB OF LOUIS RIEL, PRESIDENT OF THE  
PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF 1869-70.

[10] Governments too preferred facts to dreams, especially if the dreamer was so foolish as to try to realize them.(45)

Although only section 9 is typographically demarcated from the surrounding text, the whole passage is shot through with internal polemic as Wiebe fans the apparently dead embers of Winnipeg's religious historical significance back

into life. In sections 2 and 4, where Abe parodically paraphrases the tourist guide's spiel, two opposed intentions struggle in the single utterance. The language of the text re-enacts Abe's internal struggle. Christian and non-Christian components of the self contend against one another. Section 3 argues that Abe has left his Christian faith entirely behind; however, in sections 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10, Abe interprets the Basilica and Riels' grave from a Christian perspective. By refusing the tourist guide's offer, Abe symbolically resists the fact-mongers who endeavour to seize control of the meaning of the Basilica and Riel's grave. Abe's internal monologue is really an internal dialogue: the word of God has not abandoned the non-Christian psyche after all. In fact, in this passage, Abe's Christian voice has emerged from "some far off unabandoned corner of himself" (38) and assumed a position of dominance over his sceptical voice.

Wiebe's management of the voices in this passage suggests that Abe's (and non-Christian readers') professions of non-belief should not be accepted at face value, and that these professions perhaps hide a deeper, unacknowledged ambivalence towards God within the individual psyche and the community as a whole. Wiebe asks readers to listen to the obscure, minority voices which inhabit the city and the psyche. The heterogeneity of Wiebe's language functions

rhetorically in that it raises the possibility that a remnant of Christian belief remains in "some far off unabandoned corner" of all individuals who consider themselves members of secular society.

Such is certainly the case for Abe Ross. The paradox of Abe's situation is that he has left his faith behind because he honours the authority of words from the Bible. Abe cannot forget his Christian past entirely. Voices from the past continue to inhabit his psyche. Even after twenty three years away from his father, Abe cannot force into oblivion "the thundered 'thou-shalts' and 'thou-shalt-nots' of damnation that forever ruled" (45). Moreover, even as Abe disclaims his Christian belief, his figures of speech perpetuate a Christian construction of the cosmos, and his curses invoke the power of a God in whom he no longer believes:

Once--that devil of a time just after the war--a sag-faced man leaned over his cot there when he could comprehend again and told him he had cried and begged forgiveness--of all the damned religious confidence tricks to try on a hangover!(20) [emphasis added]

In this passage, Abe and Wiebe enter into unequal dialogic competition. Abe intends to proclaim his non-belief, but Wiebe sabotages Abe's intention by putting Christian figures of speech into Abe's mouth. Two authorial wills struggle within a hybridised utterance, situating that utterance in a space of overlap between Christian and secular frames of

reference. But one frame of reference surrounds and subsumes the other. Abe's fictional non-Christian primary utterance exists only as a bounded object within the larger secondary utterance of a devoutly Christian author. Wiebe mediates between the characters and the readers, translating the characters' utterances by having annexed them into the larger context of his text. Wiebe's Christian intention infiltrates all the other voices in the text, pulling them into a different speech genre: the novel as a form of Christian testimony.

The utterances of Wiebe's Christian characters (such as Sally Howell and Josh Bishop) seem inert and rather lifeless because they lack the internal tension between competing wills. By contrast, the speech of his non- and pseudo-Christian characters constitutes an arena in which Wiebe engages in social struggle. Unknowingly, many characters in First and Vital Candle speak in puns. Wiebe hybridizes the non- and pseudo-Christian characters' speech, permitting readers to perceive more meanings in their words than they themselves apprehend. Like Abe Ross who, to the great amusement of the Ojibwa, sometimes knows not what he says in their language, the non-Christian characters unwittingly activate a Christian construction of the real in their speech. Wiebe invites his readers to hear what seems at first to be the subordinate voice in his internally

dialogized prose. For example, when the non-Christian characters casually blaspheme and curse, they do not mean to invoke the power of God. They do not intend to consign their enemy or their dog or their truck to eternal damnation. Yet through the stories of Bjornesen's cursing of Harry Sturgeon and of Adam Ross's cursing of his son, Wiebe reaffirms the forgotten connection between casual cussing and serious ritual cursing. As a result, all cussing in the novel becomes internally dialogized. Wiebe's text perpetuates both the Christian and the profane meaning of the non-Christian characters' words, in a manner which privileges the former over the latter. Unbeknown to his characters, over and above their intentions, Wiebe invokes the Christian meaning of words. He refuses to relinquish control of the world of verbal signs to his socio-linguistic opponents, those who think they now monopolize the right to confer meaning on words and the world. Instead, he captures the speech of those who have captured the key terms in his Christian lexicon, and he subjects their speech to his authorial will in the text.

#### IV

In Chapter 6, Wiebe conducts his readers beyond the cacophony of the city to the relative peace and quiet of

Frozen Lake. In comparison with Winnipeg, Frozen Lake is "virgin territory" to the English language. Wiebe's wilderness settings add a romantic dimension to the action, but more importantly, they provide Wiebe with a bare stage upon which to dramatise the process of initial colonization of Native Peoples' psyches by a growing number of competing White hegemonic discourses. Because only a small number of English-language speech genres has penetrated Frozen Lake, each one can be heard in isolation from the others, can be explored and evaluated as a discrete verbal code both by Abe and by Wiebe's readers. By shifting the action from Winnipeg to Frozen Lake, Wiebe creates a space suitable for exploring the salient features of different varieties of discourse. Only an outer threshold of the English language provides sufficient mental and textual space in which to untangle the knot of speech genres which confounds urban consciousness and convolutes the language of the Winnipeg section of the text.

Frozen Lake, like Wapiti in Peace Shall Destroy Many, typifies a polyglossic space.<sup>8</sup> Government policies, instituted mainly through the school system, systematically promote the English language over the Ojibwa language of the Native Indian inhabitants. Wiebe mentions but does not elaborate upon the difference between "polysynthetic" Ojibwa language and "analytic" English language.<sup>9</sup> He refers to the



polysynthetic nature of Objíwa on two occasions in Part 3 of the novel (95, 104), but passes up an opportunity to dramatise disruption of the polysynthetic Ojibwa psyche by the analytic English language. The English language as such does not disrupt the Ojibwa psyche. Wiebe locates the Ojibwa's verbal-ideological problem more precisely.

The Ojibwa do not encounter the English language as a single system,<sup>10</sup> but as a composite made up of several distinct speech genres. In First and Vital Candle, Abe expresses his concern that the state school system has the potential to promote the least worthwhile speech genres and ignore those which codify spiritual and moral values. In Chapter 12, Abe reflects upon the fact that the Ojibwa children are

becoming the most distinctly, most forcedly non-Indian...Sally couldn't let them speak a word of English not only because it was government regulation but because otherwise they would never learn to speak proper English--so wash your face and read about Dick and Jane whoever they are and open doors for silly girls and no wonder Peter Pan is left behind when even for a child it's impossible--. (220)

Through Abe, Wiebe points to the cultural imperialism systematically practiced through the government school system. As the Ojibwa children acquire the English language, the learning process itself works like a long initiation ceremony, educating the children into partial membership in the broader Anglo-Canadian community. Potentially, such education cuts the Ojibwa children off from their own

cultural and religious heritage, and leads to their assimilation into mainstream Anglo-Canadian culture.

Sally Howell and Josh Bishop attempt an alternative, benign form of imperialism, one which builds on the existing remnants of the Ojibwa cultural and religious heritage. Instead of stamping out the Ojibwa children's traditional knowledge, Sally attempts to hybridize it with her Christian construction of the real. For example, she teaches her pupils "Canada's first Christmas carol written by the Catholic Brebeuf for his Huron converts" (229). This carol integrates the nativity story into a North American Indian physical and cultural context, with hunters replacing shepherds, a "lodge of broken bark" (229) instead of a stable, "a ragged robe of rabbit-skin" (229) rather than swaddling bands, and "chiefs...with gifts of fox and beaver-pelt" (229) in place of the three wise men bearing gold, frankincense and myrrh. Sally's non-violent evangelism does not impose the word of God dictatorially and monologically, but allows it to enter into dialogue with the traditional Ojibwa construction of reality. Sally and Josh permit the Ojibwa voice to sound in the nativity song, albeit in a subordinate position.<sup>11</sup>

Josh Bishop also ventures out from his own cultural and linguistic starting point in order to introduce his God to

the people of another culture. Dissatisfied with the usual missionary practice of using the Cree syllabic Bible, and impatient at the slow progress of the Wycliffe translation into Ojibwa, Josh undertakes to translate the Bible himself. Josh believes that the Ojibwa will not listen to God unless he speaks to them, and can be spoken to, in their own language. Unlike more orthodox missionaries, Josh does not destroy, but instead builds on, the discourses already in place. In reply to Abe's question, "What do you do, you just take their word for God...and talk about him, or what?", Josh says

"They believe there are many spirits, and the Great Spirit, the kische manido, is so great and sovereign he would never have anything to do with ordinary people. He's above that.... What I've been trying to do is show them that the kische manido is not so careless about them, that the idea of greatness they have is right but that he has come to man through Jesus Christ and that we can know a great deal about him."

"You leave as much of their idea in and just give it a Christian twist?"

"You start where they believe, yes. Saint Paul did, when he talked to the Greek senators in Athens."  
(169-70)

Josh proceeds on the assumption that a greater epistemological gap exists between a religious and a non-religious outlook than between the outlooks of people who hold to different religions. Certain values transcend the boundary between Christianity and other religions. Morally speaking, it makes little difference whether one invokes the power of God or kische manido. A more important distinction is whether one invokes this power to curse or to bless.

Curses and blessings can both be bestowed in either English or Ojibwa. Certain speech genres transcend boundaries between national languages. From their respective sides of the border separating Heathen from Christian, Kekekose and Bishop together oppose the discourses of force and violence, the secular and pseudo-religious speech genres which dominate Anglo-Canadian cultural life, and which to an increasing extent shape action, thought and belief in the Ojibwa community at Frozen Lake. The English language and the Ojibwa language do not confront each other like two monoliths; Wiebe's text uncovers intra-linguistic axes which cut across the threshold between the two national languages.

On the threshold between English and Ojibwa, different speech genres within the English language struggle to exert their hegemony over the minds of the native people. Amos Quequeish has returned from prison sporting a large vocabulary of English obscenities and curses. Traders bring the language of commerce to the region. John Marsden introduces a discourse of professionalism, and an abstract, scientific, state-endorsed version of historical discourse. The school curriculum exposes the children to English as a verbal code bringing new and alien orders of knowledge, in particular the scientific view of the world officially endorsed by the state. But Sally Howell and the Bishops introduce English to the Ojibwa also as a religious

discourse. Believing that the Ojibwa "can't avoid [the white world] even if they try" (313), Sally and Josh give voice to speech genres which oppose the impoverished, sterile and profane Englishes invading the minds of the Frozen Lake community. At Frozen Lake, Wiebe's main linguistic battle-front emerges clearly into view.

V

The dialogues in Chapter 13 involving John Marsden provide a suitable starting point for exploring Wiebe's fundamental moral distinction between discourses. In an exchange between Sally Howell and John Marsden, Wiebe juxtaposes two radically different ways of talking about international relations. Marsden opens with

"Do you think the theory of Canadian military defence would make sense to them [the Ojibwa children]?" "No," she said. "They have trouble enough learning about the countries of the world right now leave alone learning which they should hate."

"Now just a--minute," Marsden stumbled over a word.

She stood motionless. "Yes?"

"I was talking about defence, not hate--"

"But," she interrupted and Abe too stared at her in amazement, "those children are very straightforward. It would make no sense to them at all preparing to shoot down someone who might come over to kill you, and not hate them. Anyone you plan to kill before he kills you you just naturally hate. Right?"

"You don't talk about it like that. If the possibility of aggression exists a government has to make plans to deter it, that's all." (233-4)

Wiebe uses the Ojibwa children's minds as an arena in which Marsden's language stands trial. Through Sally's articulation of the Ojibwa children's understanding of Marsden's talk, Wiebe denaturalizes a language which enjoys wide acceptance in North American and other Westernized societies. Marsden's manner of speaking impresses listeners as highly authoritative because it issues from the mouth of a professional, an "expert." But if readers participate imaginatively in the Ojibwa childrens' mode of understanding, they occupy a space outside the jurisdiction of "experts'" discourse. Alienated from the verbal milieu which ordinarily shapes their own norms and values, readers can assess its effects on ideology and behaviour.

Like the creators of "Newspeak" in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four,<sup>12</sup> Marsden employs language as an ideological apparatus: if "you don't talk about it like that," the logic runs, you'll soon learn not to think of killing as killing, nor see "the theory of Canadian military defence" as "planned racial and religious and political savagery" (Wiebe 1989, 96).<sup>13</sup> Abstract euphemisms such as "aggression," "deter," and "defence" push the blood and guts of killing into the background and out of sight. In Marsden's speech, language becomes a tool for facilitating killing. It works in precisely the same way as modern weapons technology which enables one person to kill another

from a distance by pressing a button and watching a blip on a monitor screen. By rooting out the words "kill" and "hate" from his vocabulary, Marsden strips war of its personal and moral dimensions. As a result, kind, polite, church-going, novel-reading citizens consent to murdering others like themselves, quite willingly and efficiently, in a mood of cool detachment, aloof from any passionate personal hatred or personal guilt.

Marsden's speech employs de-humanising labels and euphemisms to deaden conscience and render killing natural and abstract. By contrast, Anton Schwafe insists in Chapter 2 that he strangled "a human being" (36) not "a communist" (36) or one of "the Reds" (34). Josh Bishop speaks of the Germans not as enemies, but as "mothers" (241), "sons" (241), "fathers and husbands" (239), and "people" (241). Through Sally, Josh, and Schwafe, Wiebe introduces a counter-discourse, a manner of speaking which restores the personal and moral dimension of war and of the "planned savagery" of cold war. Through the language of these characters, Wiebe effectively deconstructs state-endorsed verbal-ideological barriers separating "us" from "them," and affirms instead the sacredness of all God's creation.

Wiebe first introduces John Marsden in Chapter 2 at the Kinconnells' party. In this early scene, Marsden's language

might seem less offensive and barbaric than Harold Granger's crass diatribes against heathens, communists, and pacifists. But Wiebe shows that Marsden's language is no less hostile to human life. Marsden at first dissociates himself (and Canada) from Granger's (the U.S.A.'s) aggressive stance towards to "the Reds" (34). When someone at the party puts Marsden forward as an example of Canada's contribution to the fight against communism, Marsden quickly demurs:

"No, no. I'm with Norad and we're strictly defensive. We'll never--we couldn't--touch anything overseas. That's SAC's business." (33)

Ironically, even as he attempts to dissociate himself from Granger's aggressive position, Marsden speaks the same language as Granger. Nobody else at the party uses the terms "Norad" or "SAC". These words form part of the vocabulary only of the two defence experts.<sup>14</sup>

In Chapter 2, Marsden uses tame, euphemistic words such as "touch," "attack," "hit back," and "anything overseas." In Chapter 13, however, in his dialogues with Josh Bishop and Sally Howell, the verbal mask concealing Marsden's hatred gradually falls away, exposing his personal moral complicity in the act of killing. Josh forces Marsden to translate his job description into a language which cannot skirt around God's commandment not to kill. He forces Marsden to own the word "kill," and to face the fact that his targets are fellow human beings:



... "You spend the biggest part of your life, all your employed waking hours, working how to kill people more efficiently. Why?"

Marsden said heavily, "... I don't exactly see my job as a study in efficient killing--"

"No, I'm sure you don't. But in the last analysis, when the bomber comes over and you see it on your screen and order the interceptor rocket fired, your only interest is the 'kill' right?"

"That's my job: stop the plane from getting through to people like you--"

Josh went on imperviously, "And you gun for the kill whether it's a rocket or ten men in a bomber-- makes no difference."

"I don't think about men at all. I'd probably go crazy if I did--families, all that stuff. I don't think at all; all my job is, right now, stop that bomber getting through to you." (239)

It is crucial to notice that as Josh Bishop goads Marsden into anger, Marsden's language converges more and more with that of Harold Granger. When Josh expresses his lack of faith in guns, Marsden retaliates with "Okay preacher! And what else will the goddam Commies listen to?" (245). Marsden's belligerence and use of profanity are precisely what one would expect from Harold Granger.

Harold Granger's speech encodes values diametrically opposite to Wiebe's Mennonite ideals. Although Granger appears only briefly in the novel, his utterances provide an essential orientation point in the text, a linguistic centre around which Wiebe assembles the speech styles of other characters. Marsden is not alone in joining Granger's linguistic community. Amos Quequeish belongs by virtue of his constant swearing and cursing. John Kinconnell also belongs with Harold Granger, because his language implicitly

celebrates the predatory dog-eat-dog ethos behind the capitalist ideal of competition:

He once explained every major transportation problem Frobisher has had up north in the last twenty years! And also how his proposed network would kill every one of them, forever. You know the way he talks--not 'dispose of' or 'solve'--kill! never to be resurrected.  
(88)

Adam Ross and Sigurd Bjornesen, too, unleash violence and hatred in their language. In the same way as Bjornesen "used all the Ojibwa curse formulas" (141) against Harry Sturgeon, Adam Ross uses God's word as a weapon to punish his son:

...he snatched the Bible down from the shelf above the table and holding it before him like a high and mighty weapon, intoning his voice so hard I could not batter mine against it, beyond myself though I was, "If ye will not hear, and it ye will not lay it to heart, saith Jehovah the God of hosts, then will I send the curse upon you, yea, I have cursed you already: Cursed be he that dishonoureth his father. Cursed. Cursed."  
(303)

Granger, Marsden, Quequeish, Kinconnell, Sigurd Bjornesen and Adam Ross--six men of different nationalities and vastly different walks of life. Yet Wiebe gathers them all into the same morally-defined linguistic community. Wiebe's text alerts readers to the moral affinities between these characters' different speech styles, and to the violence implicit in, or legitimized by, their ordinary, apparently innocuous figures of speech. Wiebe re-defines the boundaries between socio-linguistic groups. He divides all discourse into two moral categories: that which encodes his Mennonite ideal of love for all human beings, and that which valorizes anger, violence, and hatred.

## VI

As in Peace Shall Destroy Many, the characters in First and Vital Candle speak less as unique individuals than as representatives of socio-linguistic groups. Within the space of the text of First and Vital Candle Wiebe works out his own map of the social and verbal-ideological world. He projects that world from the moral position articulated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, to expose the morally-defined linguistic boundaries which transect traditionally accepted axes between national languages and between certain speech genres. Wiebe invites his audience to take a second reading of their positions using previously overlooked linguistic co-ordinates. When readers (speakers) come to locate themselves on the map Wiebe provides, they may find themselves situated in unexpected places, on the "wrong side" of some socio-linguistic, moral or religious line. Mainstream Christian readers might find themselves in the same language community as "the enemy." Enlightened eclectics, who respect the authority of all discourses equally, see their liberal tolerance dissolving into nihilism. Non-Christian readers realise, like Abe, that they are neither beyond the range of, nor indifferent to, the voice of God.

Wiebe demonstrates the way in which each speech genre automatically enshrines or institutionalizes a particular moral stance, as if so-called "free" linguistic practices were very little removed from "reciting a damned script" (24). It is customary, for example, for a "defence specialist" (and indeed for most scientists and scholars) to encode the values of pragmatism and scientific detachment by expunging personal and moral terms from the utterances they make in a professional capacity. The conventions of each

speech genre create in advance a moral position for the speaker and the listener to occupy.

Historical plaques afford one of the clearest examples of this principle. The historical plaque is terse. The physical constraints of this speech genre legitimise censorship. Space limitations necessitate countless sins of omission of information, conveniently veiling the ugly, brutal side of the dominant parties' glorious tales of victory. In Chapter 3, Wiebe lifts the veil customarily held in place by the conventions of the genre:

NEAR THIS SITE STOOD THE FOLLOWING FORTS: FORT ROUGE UNDER LA VERENDRYE, 1738, FORT GIBRALTAR UNDER THE NORTHWEST COMPANY, 1810, THEN CAME FORT GARRY IN 1822, REPLACED BY UPPER FORT GARRY 1835 AND EXTENDED INTO THE 1850'S WHEN THIS GATEWAY WAS ERECTED. DEMOLISHED IN 1882.

Five generations, four forts glossed in fifty words on a plaque of greenish bronze. And of all the poor fools that had mixed the mud or pulled it apart, nothing....

RIEL: 16 NOVEMBRE: 1885

Staring at the stone he [Abe] had almost seen H-A-N-G-E-D. But there are some facts tombstones do not face--nor fortyish men... (43-4, 46)

Historical plaques illustrate extremely clearly the unspoken censorship laws that inform all speech genres, as they each construct their particular "realm of the true," and push foreign facts beyond their particular horizon. By having Abe consider the carnage not mentioned on the plaques, Wiebe pulls the moral facts back into the picture. In First and Vital Candle, Wiebe accents the silences, the hidden moral, ideological, and political biases and blind-spots in a number of hegemonic speech genres which structure

consciousness in mid-twentieth century western societies. Within the perimeters of the text, Wiebe reifies the languages of commerce, anthropology, foreign relations, "psych jargon" (210), history, and certain kinds of Christianity he considers spurious.

Only by breaking decorum or tradition, or by translating an utterance from one speech genre into another, might one or both interlocutors break out of the moral enclosure which the conventions of any speech genre erect around them. Wiebe invites readers to undertake precisely such a translation. He reformulates many of the kinds of utterances heard frequently in day-to-day life, translating them into a manner of speech which encodes the moral values articulated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

At times, Wiebe's translations involve substituting certain words for other words, such as when Josh Bishop translates "deter" into "kill," or "target" into "men." A more subtle variety of translation occurs when the words themselves remain unchanged, but are transported into a new context or captured by a rival socio-linguistic group. Annexed into an alternative system of signification, the word (or utterance) may take on an entirely different meaning. Reflecting light-heartedly on this phenomenon, Abe and his old school friend, Jim MacLaren recall the way Olga,

the girl who played Lady Macbeth in the school theatricals, made "Out, out, damned spot sound...like bellowing at some flea-bitten black and white bitch to get out from under the table!" (50).

On a more serious note, Wiebe explores the forgotten "multi-accentuality"<sup>15</sup> of certain key words. He reopens allegedly closed questions concerning the meaning of a number of verbal signs, signs whose meaning a majority of readers would probably consider fixed, certain and immune from further change. Wiebe's text demonstrates that the social struggle to confer meaning on signs is by no means over yet, despite the arguments of rival factions to the contrary. For Wiebe, words such as "Jesus," "God," and "damn" are not meaningless anachronisms, mere fossilised vestiges of obsolete modes of belief. As far as he is concerned, these so-called "fossilised" terms have never died; they live and breathe and in fact dominate the psyche of Christians like himself. For such Christians, the problem is not so much that the key terms in their vocabulary ("God," "Christ," "damned," and "hell," for example) have disappeared or passed out of circulation; worse, these terms appear to have been captured and enslaved by non- and pseudo-Christian groups in society, who put the most sacred words in the Christian lexicon to work in profane speech genres where they function as curses and meaningless

expletives. In First and Vital Candle, Wiebe transforms these apparently dead and meaningless signs into battle zones once more, sites where competing views of the world contend. The Biblical speech genres in the text constitute an alternative gravitational field. Prayers, Bible readings, Josh's sermons, and Sally's Christian testimonies in conversation pull terms such as "Christ," "God," and "Jesus" into a signifying system which encodes Wiebe's Mennonite Christian construction of the real.

The Christian characters say "Jesus" or "God" under different circumstances and in different tones of voice from those adopted by non- and pseudo-Christian characters. Josh's and Sally's "Christ," "God," and "Jesus" look identical on the page to "the same" words spoken by Marsden or Amos Quequeish, but they in fact carry entirely different semantic values. The manner and circumstances under which Wiebe's characters speak of God provides readers with an infallible guide to their religious and moral attitudes. Wiebe exposes the spurious nature of Harold Granger's professed Christianity, by having him say "Christ almighty you're a Communist!" (34). Marsden, too, uses the name of God in vain. In the company of practising Christians such as Josh and Sally, Marsden politely tries to suppress his habitual swearing, but Wiebe meticulously registers in the text each verbal trip-up, each pause or quick substitution:

"'Now just a--minute,' Marsden stumbled over a word" (233). Why mention that a character stumbles over a word? Because his silences carry as heavy a burden of meaning as his audible speech. By mentioning Marsden's stumble, Wiebe accentuates the pause, so that a brief silence (an absence) becomes audible (a presence). Wiebe's dash indicates the deleted expletive "goddam." As Marsden becomes more heated, he slips into his habitual mode of speaking, forgetting to make his usual tactful deletions: "God help us when they get the H-bomb!" (242); "What else will the goddam Commies listen to?" (245); "God man, you control the allowances!" (246). Cornered and angry, Marsden begins to swear and curse, "as if Josh's passion had released him from restraint" (245).

Throughout most of the novel, Abe considers his Christian belief totally dead, and his unstinting use of curses and profanities would seem to bear his opinion out: "his mind could only curse" (17); "god almighty six weeks out" (18); "damn that boy damn that girl...damn it all" (227); "you God damn stingy slave driver! Working us all to death to buy your God damn stinking soul into heaven!" (305). Yet through Abe's language, Wiebe hints that the question of Abe's religious belief remains open. Certain key terms in the Christian lexicon, words such as "Christ," "God," "Jesus," "damn," "grace," and "love," are pulled in



two different directions within Abe's psyche, dramatising his unacknowledged spiritual vacillation.

For example, Abe recalls "an old verse... 'Christ, that my love were in my arms/And I in my bed again'" (332). When he sang this "old verse" with his war-time buddies, the word "Christ" functioned as a meaningless expletive. In such a reading of the verse, "Christ" conveniently fills an empty metric space, leaving the main accent of the sentence to fall on the erotic image of lying in bed in the arms of one's love. But as Abe approaches the threshold of Christian faith, the word "Christ" begins to take on a different meaning. Under Sally's influence, Abe reconsiders the possibility that the word "Christ" might also address a living entity. As soon as Abe grants this possibility, the entire utterance crosses the border into another speech genre: "he would more nearly have called it a prayer" (332).

The word "grace" undergoes a similar re-accentuation, a similar straddling and subsequent crossing of the threshold from secular to Christian speech genres. In Chapter 1, Abe employs "grace" to refer to the beauty and elegance of the woman he follows through Winnipeg: "A transparent scarf added a grace note to her coiffure" (17); "she graces the couch" (17). But Sally Howell introduces Abe to another meaning of the word, a Christian meaning which surrounds and

subsumes the secular meaning:

"In the Christian's vocabulary God's 'grace' is the verb 'to be.'...Peripherally it means God's favour to man, who's done everything not to deserve that; and included in it is the power to make a man pleasing in God's sight..." (316)

When Abe begins to pray at the end of the novel, he employs the word "grace" in its Christian sense: "By your grace have mercy" (353). The word "grace" has crossed into a Christian speech genre: the prayer.

Prayer has a vital place in Wiebe's radical protestant vision of the political relationship between God and humankind. Together, prayer and Bible-reading constitute a dialogue. Unlike the Ojibwa's kische manido and Adam Ross's "absolute-law-giving" God, Wiebe's God of grace enters directly into dialogue with each of his followers. Although the divine word of God remains sovereign, all human voices have permission to address God at will. All enjoy the same political privilege to enter into dialogue with this divine other.

Dialogue is precisely what Abe's father forbids, as Wiebe's handling of the cursing scene makes clear. Adam Ross consigns his son to eternal exile from the society of God and family as punishment for the interlocutory sins of refusing to listen and insisting on answering back:

the face hunched together now in mild surprise at my speaking after he had spoken and there was, according

to all that had ever happened in our family, nothing further to be mentioned.... So he did not bother to answer; just turned to go out and as he did something went over me like a spasm and in a moment we were shouting both...and he bellowing at last would I take back what I said and receive the beating I deserved and I long past caring, having hurled all to the wind the instant I ventured the first words.... And then he had snatched the Bible down from the shelf above the table and holding it before him like a high and mighty weapon, intoning, his voice so hard I could not batter mine against it, beyond myself though I was, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, saith Jehovah the God of hosts, then will I send the curse upon you, yea, I have cursed you already: cursed be he that dishonoureth his father. Cursed. Cursed."  
(303)

In First and Vital Candle, Wiebe opposes not only non-Christian constructions of the world, but also the dominant Christian factions which have appropriated the voice of God and used it for their own political purposes. A wall of "other, alien words about the same object, the same theme," (Bakhtin 1981, 276) obscures the non-Christian reader's understanding of Wiebe's God. Jesus' exhortation to "love thy neighbour" for example, must contend against the words and actions of all the Christians in history who have started wars in the name of the one true God. Wiebe's most dangerous opponents are "Christians" like Harold Granger, who relish the prospect of "pounding the holy h" (33) out of the communists, or the Ontario Orangemen who quelled the Riel rebellion by "shooting as sincerely as they said their prayers every night" (44). Wiebe's text affirms that all Christians do not share the same values. They hear God differently and speak radically different languages. A vast

gulf separates the gentle, soft-spoken sermons of Josh Bishop from Adam Ross's fire-and-brimstone versions of "the same" speech genre. As well as making audible the covert alliances or subtle harmonies between speech genres which normally sound radically opposed to one another, Wiebe also alerts readers to the deep but seldom acknowledged rifts in what might usually be thought of as "THE Christian voice."

Abe cannot hear the voice of God in the complex, cacophonous urban verbal milieu not only because other voices drown it out but also because God's voice dissolves into a multiplicity of human voices which attempt to mediate between individual believers and God. Abe tries "Lutheran, Anglican, Mennonite, Baptist, United, [and] Roman Catholic" churches, but he can never discern God's unmediated voice

in all the gibberish from precisely acted ritual to shapeless hallelujah-amen-ism, from idiotic appeals to emotion to as idiotic appeals of philosophy, from time-marking silence to banshee screams, with all the innumerable gradients of emotional and mental atrophy and massage between, far from not finding need satisfied, he had not even been able to unearth that, his very need, to recognize it. He simply knew emptiness, a vacancy with him so long now it had acquired a kind of painful fullness, like swallowing air after a seven-day hunger. Only this was no seven days. (93-4)

Wiebe's complex plotting (which emerges into clear focus only at the end of the novel) has the effect of dividing these many Christian voices into two camps: those who worship the God of thunder, and those who worship Wiebe's God of grace. In chronological order, Abe's circular

journey away from and back towards the voice of God appears in Parts 6, 4, 2, 1, 3, 5 and 7. However, Wiebe begins Abe's story in medias res, folding the circle in half as it were, and plotting two paths, leading towards two alternative images of the God's voice. While the main story-line moves forward in time through Parts 1, 3, 5 and 7 towards the beginning of Abe's dialogue with Jesus, a second narrative moves chronologically backwards through Parts 2, 4 and 6 to the moment when Abe attempts to move out of earshot from Adam Ross's monologic, "absolute-law-giving kind" (291) of God. In Parts 6 and 7, Wiebe juxtaposes two radically different voices of God. Against the tyrannical, unanswerable, thundering voice of God from which Abe runs in his youth, Wiebe sets the gentle voice of the God of grace, who forces no one to listen and who hears the prayers of believers.

Through Josh Bishop and Sally Howell, the voice of Wiebe's God of grace dominates the final two chapters of the novel. At the end of the story, as Abe grieves at Sally's graveside, Wiebe dramatizes the beginning of his dialogue with God:

And in that long dry crying, did he hear a voice like an echo of all the passed roads and rivers of his life: "You have run and hidden far, and you are tired. Turn to me now, come now"? In his nothingness he could not know; only later: But he found within himself that he could voice at last: "I am a miserable sinner. By your grace have mercy, have mercy." (353)

Interestingly, Wiebe presents the image of God's utterance in an interrogative sentence, a syntactic construction which makes sense only in the context of a dialogue. By this strategy, Wiebe attempts to engage his readers in dialogue with the text. However, the final effect of Wiebe's question remains rhetorical; the dialogic sentence-form does not change the monologic function of the passage because Wiebe answers his own question for the reader. At this point in his writing career, Wiebe's rhetorical purpose precludes the possibility of entering into equal dialogue with his readers.

As an evangelical Mennonite, Wiebe endeavours to place Jesus' message of love and peace in a position of sovereignty in human consciousness. This single intention covertly hybridises the many voices and languages contained in First and Vital Candle, harnessing them all into the service of his authorial will. The voices which speak in the novel do not enjoy equal status or equal power. Wiebe has "decided in advance" (Bakhtin 1984, 204) which single voice will prevail.

The text not only resembles, but also strives towards realizing in historical actuality, a Mennonite utopia in which Jesus' voice has sovereignty over all human voices. Wiebe proceeds on the assumption that speech constitutes a form of action, and that First and Vital Candle participates in history by bringing the voice of Jesus into the struggle

to constitute facts and confer meaning on them. While holding his readers' attention with a story of love and violence in the northern-wilderness, Wiebe challenges the hegemony of secular scientific, nationalistic, and mainstream (state-endorsing) Christian discourse, and exposes the nihilistic results of according all signifying systems equal validity. If First and Vital Candle achieves its desired rhetorical effect, readers should acquire a new understanding of their own active "speaking part" in history.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3: FIRST AND VITAL CANDLE

1. Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical references appearing in Chapter 3 refer to First and Vital Candle (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966).
2. See Holquist 1981, 423, and Vološinov 23, for definitions of "reaccentuation" and "reaccenting." According to Holquist, "Every language or discourse system accents-- highlights and evaluates--its material in its own way, and this changes through time. The parallel with a language's stress system is not accidental" (423). Although they do not affiliate themselves with any church, Sally Howell and Josh Bishop "accent" the Bible in a distinctly Mennonite way. They privilege the utterances of Jesus above other sections of the Bible, and set Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-7:27) above all else.
3. See especially pp. 32-3, and p. 62.
4. In that Wiebe employs third person omniscient narration which reflects Abe's point of view, the text manifest the presence of two narrative voices at this point. Without question, the omniscient narrator's voice almost monopolises this passage, giving the narrative a pronounced monologic quality.
5. It is necessary to reiterate that in the present context, the multiple accents do not derive from multiple narrative voices, and do not indicate that the text is internally dialogized. At this point, the term "multi-accentuality" describes the plurality of possible ways a single reader might choose to "voice" the words on the page.
6. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin maintains that "The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance" (333).
7. According to Michael Holquist,
 

a zone is a locus for hearing a voice: it is brought about by the voice.... Zones are both a territory and a sphere of influence.... A character's zone need not begin with his directly quoted speech but can begin far back in the text; the author can prepare the way for an autonomous voice by manipulating words ostensibly belonging to "neutral" authorial speech. (1981, 434).



8. In a polyglossic space, two or more national languages co-exist.
9. In an analytic language, "auxiliary words are the chief or sole means of expressing grammatical relationships of words, to the total or partial elimination of inflection" (Pei and Gaynor, 13). A polysynthetic language is one "in which various words are combined (usually merged into the equivalent of a verb), with the resulting composite word representing an entire sentence, statement or idea" (Pei and Gaynor, 172).
10. According to Bakhtin, linguists who take as their object of study the single language system (an abstract system of normatively identical forms) cannot come to grips with the concrete processes involved in language use in real situations. Bakhtin argues that Saussure's "langue" has never existed in historical actuality and that Saussure's model of language denies the historicity (diachronic dimension) of linguistic practice. See Bakhtin 1986, 60-102, and Vološinov 1973, 58-61 for Bakhtin's arguments against Saussure's binary opposition between "langue" and "parole," and against his privileging of the synchronic dimension of language over the diachronic. Bakhtin and Vološinov agree with Saussure, however, on one fundamental point: that the link between the signifier and its signified(s) is arbitrary and socially negotiated. Bakhtin's and Vološinov's vision of the sign as an arena of social struggle depends on this assumption.
11. See Bakhtin 1981, 342-45. Bakhtin's distinction between "externally authoritative" and "internally persuasive" discourse offers a theoretical basis for explaining the political significance of Sally Howell's and Josh Bishop's methods.
12. See in particular George Orwell's Appendix to Nineteen Eighty-Four.
13. Wiebe expresses his continuing concern with the issue of "planned savagery" in contemporary international relations in Playing Dead, 96-7.
14. Researching First and Vital Candle, Wiebe gathered a considerable body of documents on the subject of American and Canadian defence policy. Wiebe notes that Norad stands for "North American Air Defence," and SAC for "Strategic Air Command." While the former is an early warning "defence only" system, the latter is a nuclear striking force with a global range. Through Norad, which is organised jointly between Canada and the U.S.A, Canada implicates itself in the aggressive foreign policies of the U.S.A., helping "to

enable the United States to use its maximum power to destroy the enemy should he decide to attack the North American continent." Wiebe's handwritten notes mention that the term "the enemy" is used, indeed taken for granted, by the experts. See The Rudy Wiebe Papers, File 26.8.5.

15. "Multi-accentuality" refers to "the clash of live social accents" (Vološinov 23) within the verbal sign, the potential voicings of the word.

## CHAPTER 4: THE BLUE MOUNTAINS OF CHINA

### History as Inadvertent Confession

#### I

In The Blue Mountains of China (1970), Rudy Wiebe recounts the history not of an individual but of a group, "a particular people from various nationalities bound together by a faith."<sup>1</sup> Four families--the Friesens, the Epps, the Reimers and the Driedigers--represent a community of Russian Mennonites who, in the course of a hundred years, split into several distinct societies, divided by distance, language, culture, and historical circumstances. Their disparate voices collaborate within the space of Wiebe's text to articulate Mennonite "knowledge of our origins."<sup>2</sup>

The Blue Mountains of China continues Wiebe's movement away from direct, unmediated authorial discourse. Compositionally marked dialogue continues to perform the vital role it played in Peace Shall Destroy Many and First and Vital Candle, but internal dialogization becomes more complex and pervasive than ever before. Moreover, Wiebe

shifts into a dialogic form in The Blue Mountains of China, leaving behind the biographical design of his first two novels. Aside from Frieda Friesen's sections (Chapters 1, 3, 6, and 10), Wiebe no longer organises his exposition of thematic material as a chronological series of stages in the life of an individual. Instead, he moves toward formal "syncretism"--the juxtaposition of various voices reflecting diverse points of view.<sup>3</sup> Each chapter of the text is dominated by the voice of a separate character, who articulates a distinct position within Mennonite society and records events from his or her particular perspective. Together they form a fragmented, multi-voiced, historical narrative which encodes the plurality of the Mennonites' experience of the past.

However, a text may assume a dialogic form without necessarily relinquishing monologic linguistic functions and conceptions of truth; these depend on the author's political relationship with the voices which speak in the novel.<sup>4</sup> The difficulty posed initially by the text of The Blue Mountains of China is that Wiebe's position in relation to those voices is deceptive. For the most part, he obscures his own dominance over the various narrating voices in the text, so that they seem at first to enjoy the status of autonomous centres of authorial control, co-subjects in the "'great dialogue' in which characters and author might participate

with equal rights" (Bakhtin 1984, 71).

Wiebe's self-effacement forces readers to grapple with the concept of dialogic truth and with the historicity of human understanding, problems articulated most explicitly in the novel by Franz Epp and Jakob Friesen IV.<sup>5</sup> As each new speaker enters the arena of the text, he or she casts a new light, a new system of accents, on the utterances of the others, with the result that semantic possibilities continuously multiply and unfold.<sup>6</sup> Each speaker seems "honed in on himself" (124), oriented exclusively to his or her own pressing concerns, leaving readers to interpret the text without the aid of any consistent criterion of relevance, without a predetermined basis for sifting, weighing and interpreting what is said, and thus with no sure idea of the official site on which the voices dialogically intersect.<sup>7</sup> Wiebe initially disorients readers by placing them in a similar predicament to Jakob Friesen IV who hears a stranger speak but cannot arrive at a stable understanding of the words, because he "was never sure to what question the man gave his answer" (114).

Only in retrospect, from a point near the end of the novel, does Wiebe unveil the question to which all the speakers in the text have given an answer. In the final chapter, John Reimer gives voice to "the terrible question

of...social injustice" (215), the moral charge to which all the voices have already unwittingly confessed or acquitted themselves. John Reimer's announcement of the question pushes the novel across a border between speech genres: it translates a polyphonic history into a monologic trial. By unveiling "the terrible question," Wiebe reaccents the entire text retroactively. Casual incidents and remarks, interstitial phrases, trivial circumstantial details caught only in the speaker's peripheral vision suddenly display their true thematic relevance; conversely, words and events which at first seemed crucial fade into insignificance.

In the final chapter of The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe effects a sudden revelation rather than a sudden "reversal of method and perception" (Ferris 94). He unmask his own voice--or his "voicing" of the words of Jesus--and reveals its relation to all the other voices in the text. The voices of the characters work ultimately as objects rather than subjects of cognition, the accents imparted by their own volition overridden by Wiebe's sovereign authorial voice. Wiebe's concealed purpose throughout is to refract his own voice through--rather than speak to--his seemingly autonomous narrators. Close analysis of the text reveals that although Wiebe shifts into a dialogic form in The Blue Mountains of China, the novel remains functionally monologic, an elaborate system of "dialogue[s] rhetorically

performed" (Bakhtin 1984, 73).

## II

The first voice which speaks in The Blue Mountains of China is that of Frieda Friesen, Wiebe's first attempt at a polyglossic speech:

I have lived long. So long, it takes me days to remember even parts of it, and some I can't remember at all until I've been thinking over it a little now and then for weeks, and little Johann or Friedl ask, "Urgrossmuttchi, what is that, so cold in Canada the ground is stiff?" Then 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. (7)

Frieda's unusual rhythms, diction, and syntax give her English a distinctly foreign accent, an accent identified as German with the appearance of the names "Urgrossmuttchi," "Johann," and "Friedl" (7). In an illuminating article on the nature and social significance of Frieda's language, Magdalene Falk Redekop describes its effect as

something like that of a double exposure or stereoscopic vision.... Her syntax and vocabulary evoke the sound of Low German which can be heard, simultaneously, as one reads the English. (Redekop, 98)

Redekop calls Wiebe's technique "direct oversetting" (98) and she likens it to a very literal translation designed to accentuate rather than negate the disparity between two social/ideological worlds.<sup>8</sup> Frieda's voice occupies a threshold between the closed, traditional world of the

Kanadier Mennonites of Paraguay, and the more open, present-centred English-speaking world inhabited by Wiebe's readers.

Despite its hybridity, Frieda's language remains stylistically consistent and monologically compact over the entire duration of her story. The quality of addressivity--the awareness of an interlocutor to whom the discourse is directed--emerges only subtly, but is vitally important, in Frieda's monologue. She twice mentions that her grandchildren, Johann and Friedl, want to know about Canada (7, 42), and that "older ones not from Paraguay" (142) wonder about life on the Chaco, but in no sense does Frieda's narrative get its main impetus from these vaguely sketched listeners. The young ones' questions might set her memory in motion, but once activated, it runs "only through God's grace" (7). No human audience determines the shape of Frieda's narrative. She speaks consciously as one who stands on the threshold of the end of her life, and she tells her story after returning to Paraguay, the place she refers to as "the end of the world" (141). If Frieda does not address her story directly and openly to God, she at least senses that "his ear hears each word fall" (137). Unlike most of the other major characters, Frieda never forgets her moral accountability to God; her speech manifests her constant awareness of God's judging presence.



Within Frieda's monologue, a strictly limited number of human voices gain a hearing. Frieda remains deliberately deaf to all but a few authoritative Mennonite voices, and these she thoroughly assimilates into her own. In fact, Frieda explicitly acknowledges the process of making "others'" words her own.<sup>9</sup> As a woman in a traditional Mennonite society, Frieda has no voice in formal decision-making processes. Before marriage, she lives under the authority of her father's voice; after marriage, subject to her husbands's. But Frieda makes a voice for herself by taking over their utterances. For example, in the first of several renditions of her father's motto, she clearly accepts the wisdom of what he says but leaves no doubt that the words belong to him:

Everything seemed to come so bunchy in our family and it was enough to make you think sometimes, my father said.

"But think always like this," he said, "it does come all from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty." (10)

Later, during a phase of doubt and temptation without father or husband nearby to provide support, Frieda adopts her father's words as her own:

Then I knew what my father said each one of us has to take and know for himself: it all comes from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty. (46)

No quotation marks separate Frieda's words from her father's. From this point onwards, Frieda takes possession of her father's motto.

Frieda remains firmly committed to her own version of the saying. Like her father, she accents "want" and "sickness," causing the motto to work as a source of solace in times of severe trouble.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Dennis Williams (Willms) places the accent on the words "strength" and "plenty," to justify his rapacity in business and to explain the accidents of birth that gave him his starting capital:

Esther's man, Dennis Willms sold Chevrolets, and all kinds of other things now too. He wrote his name "Williams," but even had some farms. He had taken over to run them while they had the war and now they were his; hired people ran the farms...

"Na Muttchi," he said, "you always said like Grandpa, 'it all comes from God.' So okay, but it's not always just sickness and want, eh?"

"Not always," I said. "No." (149)

The utterance "It all comes from God, strength and sickness, want and plenty" becomes a site of social struggle in the text. Frieda agrees politely with her son-in-law, as her strict sense of social decorum dictates she must. But her actions, speaking louder than her words, decisively repudiate Dennis' reaccentuation of her father's motto. She rejects the Willms' offer to join them in their life of "strength" and "plenty," and returns instead to the hardships of life in Paraguay.

It is essential to notice that Frieda mentions as if in passing how Dennis Williams multiplied his wealth. Her subordinate clause, "while they had the war," alludes to a larger story which Wiebe assumes his readers already

know:<sup>11</sup> as a Kanadier, Dennis would have gained automatic exemption from military service on religious grounds and been able to take advantage of a war situation which brought death, grief and financial ruin to others. Despite their minor syntactic importance, the words "while they had the war" carry enormous thematic significance within the text as a whole, for they allude obliquely to the fact that Dennis has attained his wealth by feeding parasitically on the suffering of others. Within the clause "while they had the war," Wiebe counterposes two systems of accentuation: Frieda's (her choice to place the clause in a subordinate syntactic position within the unity of her utterance) and his own (which weights her allusion according to its thematic significance within the larger utterance of his text as a whole).

Despite this disparity between the stress patterns created by the character and the author, Frieda's speech sounds as "unidirectional double-voiced discourse...stylised Ich-Erzählung" (Bakhtin 1984, 199). In Bakhtin's terms, Frieda's monologue functions as "a compositional substitute for the author's word....as a position indispensable to him for carrying on the story" (Bakhtin 1984, 190). Frieda's story, with its careful notation of dates, and its numerous cross-references to other strands of family history, provides readers with a relatively synoptic view. Wiebe's positioning

of the four parts of Frieda's narrative in the novel means that readers return to it repeatedly as to "a constant point of reference" (Keith 1981a, 47). Moreover, her frankness and simplicity define a normative moral position "against which others may be measured" (Keith 1981a, 47).

### III

How do other voices in The Blue Mountains of China compare with Frieda Friesen's? While Frieda remains closed to all but a few Mennonite voices, whose words she either decisively rejects or assimilates thoroughly into her own speech, Liesel Driediger is far more open to the voices and languages of others, and can never quite subdue certain troublesome alien accents that pervade "her own" speech.

While Frieda's consciousness remains firmly rooted in the Low German language,<sup>12</sup> Liesel abandons this tongue at the very first opportunity. At the age of nine, during the sea passage from Germany to Paraguay, Liesel flees from the very sound of the Mennonites' suffering, the endless din of crying children, "scolding voices, murmurs, complaints, shushes" (76) that, together with the throb of the engines, fill the stagnant air in the Mennonites' overcrowded quarters in steerage. To escape, Liesel sneaks, with as much

dignity as she can muster, up the stairs past C Deck and B Deck, the areas reserved for cabin and tourist class, to the heavenly realm of A Deck, where the First Class passengers laugh and dance under sparkling chandeliers. In this exalted realm Liesel hears many unintelligible, but to her, brilliant languages, "Spanish or English or even French" (81) and refined High German. Compared to these, her own people's Low German sounds like "heavy feltboots some men still wore, so stinking when they schluffed by" (81).

Liesel suffers from linguistic as well as social claustrophobia. She feels trapped in a language she considers intrinsically inferior, with people she believes are culturally beneath her. While Liesel's father is highly educated, and teaches at the Leningrad University, most of the other men on the ship are "such farmers" (77). Yet circumstances compel Liesel to speak the same national language as these (to her) detestably ignorant people. Liesel therefore devises linguistic strategies to mark her social difference--and without knowing it, her immaturity and her willed insensitivity to the suffering of others. She refuses to comply with the Mennonites' prevailing accentual system. During funeral services, for example, instead of bowing her head and immersing her mind in the words of the "heavy songs" (75), and blending her voice into the "voices groaning in harmony" (73), Liesel adopts a detached, playful

aesthetic attitude to events. For her, funerals are festivals of music and theatre:

Not that Liesel minded funerals. She had found there could be enjoyment there; and, sometimes, in church services...

On this sad earth I am a pilgrim,  
And my journey, o my journey  
Is not long.

then she would feel just impossibly, almost too beautifully, sad and even before the end of the first verse she would remember that there were only three more and that they were not long and she would be even sadder. But then often Brother Hoppity preached. He was the only preacher who danced about behind the table or whatever makeshift pulpit they had managed. His hands and the changes on his face--and when she was close enough to see his feet it was best by far.... His announcements about funerals were also unsurpassed. She always watched him then, entranced: will he manage just choking a little; will he be forced to look down and everyone waiting, waiting; or will he suddenly burst right out into tears? Brother Hoppity...had actually cried only once, at the very beginning of the epidemics when six children had died in one night.... She had had no anticipation of anything and so missed savouring altogether what would happen until it was past. (73-4)

Conspicuous in this passage is the marked disparity between Liesel's chirpy tone and the serious nature of the topic at hand--death. Wiebe offsets two competing patterns of accents: one imparted by the syntactic choices of Liesel-the-drama-critic, and the other arising from the tremendous pathos inherent in the very idea of children suffering and dying. Liesel mentions the deaths of six children only in a subordinate clause. For her, the incident has significance only in so far as it makes possible the main event, Brother Hoppity's tears. But Wiebe allows his audience to read against Liesel's accent: Liesel's language exemplifies

varidirectional double-voiced discourse. The difference between that and Frieda's unidirectional double-voiced discourse measures the distance between parody and stylization.

Liesel herself tries unsuccessfully to parody the speech of others. She mimics the voice of "some old grackle like Stiffer Kliever" (72) who, in a manner "precisely in keeping with the spoil-sport ways of old people" (73) urges that "a silly old funeral" (72) should postpone the party:

"It is of course now clear," he would say and say, "that it was not to be. That it should not be. Even if we forget--and who can?--what has just happened, let us remember what we have been through, and what is still before us. Yes, some could be happy, some, but as I said before, when this matter first was laid before us, for how many would the happiness--oh, some would be happy!--not mean only a greater sorrow because of those, especially all those beloved little ones, who are not here, whom their loved ones will not see, or hold, again?" And now there'd easily be enough water to carry the day. Of course. (72)

Liesel caricatures the speech of the "old grackle,"<sup>13</sup> the italicised words exaggerating his accents, and the breaks and rhetorical questions lampooning his attempts to engage the sympathies of his listeners. Yet Liesel cannot entirely subordinate the "old grackle's" system of accents; his words counter-attack her attempts to neutralise their meaning and their power. The "old grackle's" speech successfully defends its own accentual system because, as Bakhtin writes of novelistic pathos, it "continually senses the resistance offered by alien discourses, alien points of view" (1981,

394). Wiebe fills the "old grackle's" speech with "sideward glances"<sup>14</sup> which pre-empt and defuse in advance all possible objections to his argument: "Even if we forget--and who can?--what has just happened.... Yes, some could be happy, some, but..." (72). His sideward glances capture Liesel's voice and subject it to his own intentions.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to sideward glances, the "old grackle" harnesses the power of pathos--"all those beloved little ones, who are not here, whom their loved ones will not see, or hold, again" (72). Even though the "old grackle's" words appear compositionally bound within Liesel's utterance, their pathos generates "a counterforce" (Bakhtin 1984, 198) against Liesel's intentions. They break out of Liesel's control and speak to the reader directly by disclosing certain facts which further the story, (like Frieda's words). Through a voice captured by another voice, Wiebe tells his readers that children are ill and dying and that their families are suffering intense grief and profound feelings of loss. This story reflects upon Liesel's callous response to the suffering of the other Mennonites: it implicitly transforms Liesel's contemptuous remark, "And now there'd be easily enough water to carry the day" (72-3) into a bounded object. Wiebe thus intensifies his parody of Liesel the parodist. He liberates voices captured within her voice, and allows them to imprison their capturer. And as



the "old grackle's" voice seizes control, the focus shifts away from Liesel's hopes and disappointments and centres on the moral fact that she would purchase enjoyment knowing it must intensify the suffering of others. Although Liesel calls her opponent "old grackle," her behaviour resembles that of the numerous predatory black birds in the novel.<sup>16</sup>

By filtering his story of suffering and death through the voices of Hoppity Hiebert and the "old grackle," which must in turn pass through the filter of Liesel's de-patheticising mind and words, Wiebe holds the pathos of his subject matter at arm's length, two steps removed from his own direct, unmediated discourse. The voices of Hiebert and the "grackle" are compositionally subordinate in that they are doubly-bounded in the text. Yet they function as surrogates for Wiebe's authorial voice.

Bakhtin's distinction between poetic and novelised pathos explains why Wiebe resorts to this strategy of compounded indirection. In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin describes poetic pathos as

fully sufficient to itself and to its object. Indeed, the speaker completely immerses himself in such a discourse, there is no distance, there are no reservations. A discourse of pathos has the appearance of directly intentional discourse. (394)

After the excesses of nineteenth century fiction and melodrama, this direct, monologic, poetic pathos is no

longer available as a literary strategy for "serious" writers in the twentieth century. Wiebe knows that "discerning" audiences would be likely to recoil from any too-overt tugging at their heart-strings. Yet his moral case against Liesel depends precisely on the success with which he can call forth his readers' sadness and compassion. Without such a response, where would one find a moral or emotional norm against which to assess Liesel's glib dismissal of others' pain?

Because "lucidity today is strictly for morons" (183) according to Liesel-the-literary-critic, Wiebe must resort to dialogic or "novelised" (Bakhtin 1981, 394) pathos, which, in Bakhtin's words,

does not have discourses that belong to it alone--it must borrow the discourses of others.... [It] always works in the novel to restore some other genre, genres that, in their own unmediated pure form, have lost their own base in reality. In the novel a discourse of pathos is almost always a surrogate for some other genre that is no longer available to a given time or a given social force--such pathos is the discourse of a preacher who has lost his pulpit.... Everywhere, the discourse of pathos is connected with orientations and positions that are unavailable to the author as authentic expression for the seriousness and determination of his purpose, but which he must, all the same, conditionally reproduce by using his own discourse. (1981, 394-95)

To see the difference between novelised and poetic pathos, one has only to compare Wiebe's complex system of refractions against the kind of naive pathos articulated in Charles Dickens' rendition of the death of Little Nell. When

displaced from its original emotional and textual context, Dickens' passage becomes laughably maudlin.<sup>17</sup> Wiebe guards against the possibility that his own text may be parodied by similar acts of appropriation and displacement by wrapping his authorial voice in layers of other voices to create an impenetrable protective cocoon around his own words. Anyone attempting to appropriate Wiebe's words and "re-voice" them parodically finds their own voice already objectified and judged. Wiebe creates a linguistic context which shields his own voice from the kinds of decrowning recontextualizations to which Dickens' famous tear-jerker has been subjected.

Wiebe's use of sideward glances and pathos in Chapter 5 warrants close examination, for it supplies an infallible guide to his position, not only in relation to Liesel's voice but also in relation to the voice of a powerful faction within his own readership. Within the context of the novel as a whole, Liesel's discourse functions as one long sideward glance at a particular type of reader. In Liesel's voice, Wiebe pre-empts and denounces in advance the voices of those who would argue that moralistic literature is intrinsically bad. Liesel functions as a surrogate for the "wrong reader," the reader who judges the text entirely in aesthetic terms, in a state a "suspended sensitivity" (80) toward moral and spiritual matters.<sup>18</sup> Wiebe does not exclude readers and writers from the necessity to make moral

choices. Through Liesel's aesthetic delight in funerals, and Irene Friesen's enjoyment of Bob Dylan, Wiebe presents images of audiences who take a voyeuristic delight in others' pain--"sad can be fun" (210) provided one is "curled in a chair with a full belly" (210).

Like Abe Ross in First and Vital Candle, Liesel believes she believes nothing, and imagines she has made a clean escape from anything to do with her early religious upbringing.<sup>19</sup> Yet she retains in some hidden corner of her psyche the memory of a lost faith and a lost language, and a sensitivity to the sufferings of others. Hearing Jakob Friesen speak, Liesel learns to interpret the gaps, silences and omissions in his speech: "It sounded so heroic, so pathetically heroic in what he did not mention that Elizabeth felt something move in her beyond tears" (193). Momentarily, Liesel becomes Wiebe's "right reader," reading against the accent supplied by a speaker. Her ear becomes attuned to dimensions of experience that Jakob Friesen, like Wiebe, cannot directly articulate to his audience:

She wanted to groan in pain for what she understood of him, of herself, and at the same time rage flared in her at the guilt and agony and regret covering, soaked through and through people while the "great" poets and novelists of the western world mucked around wading and parading their own mighty organs and viscera, posturing like puppets, shooting themselves off at the moon and inflating themselves the magnificent modern crusaders of humanity, seers and prophets of the sixties, because they "discovered" Dachau, "discovered" Vietnam. Dachaus are everywhere; who could number the Vietnams. In people who believe they believe nothing. (196-7)

Wiebe differentiates himself from those "'great' poets and novelists" (196-7) who exploit the suffering of others for their own gain by using that suffering as grist for their aesthetic mill. Unlike Charles Dickens, Wiebe wants to move his audience "beyond tears" (193). And unlike the Leonard Cohens of the literary world,<sup>20</sup> Wiebe has no interest in romanticising the black sides of human nature. Rather than evoking transitory aesthetic epiphanies, Wiebe endeavours to provoke a permanent change in moral thinking-- "thinking different" (216)--which would lead to his readers' active participation in "a revolution for social justice" (215).

#### IV

For Wiebe, moral questions are always inseparably bound up with linguistic questions, in particular the question of how Jesus' teachings have the potential to mutate semantically when they cross the border between one context and another. Sam Reimer desires to live by Jesus' words, "Do good to them that hate you that you may be children of your father which is in heaven" (169), but wonders "What did that mean when you weren't hated, rather someone across an ocean and you knew about it? (169)." How might Jesus' words "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," translate

into concrete action in contexts where the plurality of social identity renders the terms "self" and "other" ambiguous? Who precisely is this "other" to whom one is morally obliged? In The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe positions each major character in a crisis where he or she must make a moral choice: to act in the interests of the self or in the interests of other people? To heighten the dramatic intensity of this age-old moral dilemma, Wiebe situates his characters in contexts where the border between "self" and "other" is problematic.

Chapter 2, "Sons and Heirs" explores the menippean theme of the dialogization of the self, to suggest that oppression of an other involves a suppression of part of the self. "Sons and Heirs," encodes the perception of Jakob Friesen V (Jascha). In contrast to Frieda's language, which draws the words of others into itself to assimilate them completely into her own language, Jakob's language breaks apart and explodes outwards, leaving no core language-of-the-self behind at all.

Under the impact of radical changes in Russia's national history, Jakob's psyche splits open, just as his grandfather's body was split open by the sword of a Russian bandit. The Russian secret police seize nineteen-year-old Jakob in lieu of his temporarily absent father. They throw

him into prison, and subject him to interrogation under torture, interspersed with periods of total solitude during which he must contend with severe cold, hunger and cramp. After six weeks, the authorities release Jakob as unexpectedly as they jailed him. Weak and mentally unbalanced, he makes his way home to his father's farm in Karatow Colony, to find that his family has fled to Moscow and his familiar, changeless world has turned upside down. Free of his father's authority for the first time, released from the severe constraint of the countless "thou shalt nots" dictating his behaviour and holding his personality in its single fixed shape, Jakob discovers what Bakhtin has referred to as

the possibilities of another person and another life... He loses his finalized quality and ceases to mean only one thing; he ceases to co-incide with himself. (1984, 116-7)

During Jakob's absence from Karatow, the GPU has implemented the Communist policy of social and economic equality. Russia has crossed the threshold into "the new age" (29) and Jakob's world has been permanently transformed into a nightmarish quasi-holiday world of "looseness" and "un-necessity" (35). This world conforms closely to Bakhtin's model of the carnival world, where

the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of the ordinary...are suspended.... What is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it--that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical

inequality or any other form of inequality among people... All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people.... All things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. (1984, 122-23)

Jakob returns from prison to find that Escha, the Russian farmhand, now sleeps in Jakob's bedroom in the main hof, a place hitherto reserved for the "son and heir." Under the new regime, everybody is equal. Escha no longer confines himself to his "proper place" in the barn with the "other animals," but has the free run of the entire Friesen establishment. Escha's entry into all the spaces from which he was formerly barred abolishes the distance separating him from Jakob.

The idea of social equality destroys the boundaries of Jakob's identity. His privileged position as "son and heir" ("this is my hof this is mine I am the eldest son this is mine" [15]) is usurped by a farmhand strutting around like a carnival king. Jakob and his family have always dehumanised Escha, treating him as another work animal to be used for their benefit. Jakob refers to Escha as an ox (21), a horse (15), a pig (21). Under ordinary circumstances, Jakob thinks of himself as profoundly different from Escha. His religious training has taught him that "man is not a carefree brute; he is a thinking creation made in the image...[of] God" (39). Jakob's family has placed tremendous value on



genealogy, without accepting its concomitant--sexuality. Such acceptance of the body would threaten their sense of moral superiority over others. But torture and extreme physical deprivation in prison have given Jakob an "overwhelming awareness" (17) of his own body, an awareness which, without his family to help him suppress it, remains acute after his return home. And when Escha crosses the physical threshold into Jakob's own house, his presence abolishes the distance between two aspects of Jakob's identity. Escha personifies Jakob's physicality, repressed by years of rigorous religious conditioning. With mounting horror Jacob sees his own animality mirrored in Escha.

Jakob perceives Escha as his parodic, decrowning double. Looking groggily into the mirror, Jakob sees his own face "double in grotesque extended repetition...and he wheeled to Escha" (19). He stares at Escha, "eyes green in each other's eyes. Nose to nose, exactly the same height" (30). Jakob knocks Escha down, and sees him lying "like a mirror image" (38) flat on the ground. Wiebe depicts the two as "one animal" (38) wrestling with itself. Jakob hears his own name as Escha voices it in Russian--"Jascha." Jascha and Escha mirror one another in name as well as in body.

The language of Wiebe's text reflects the disintegration of Jakob's identity in other ways. Like Jakob

himself, the text of "Sons and Heirs" does not "co-incide with itself"; it looks chopped up in comparison with Frieda's monologue. Wiebe breaks up the printed text on the page by leaving empty spaces, and by alternating between italic and roman type-faces. Jakob's inner speech (the italicised passages which are themselves internally fragmented) repeatedly interrupts the main body of the narrative in which Jakob's voice blends with that of a narrator.<sup>21</sup>

Wiebe signals the progressive release of Jakob's "other self" not only through his rash, violent actions, but also by the emergence of his second voice--the voice of bodily instincts and passions. Initially, Jakob's second voice remains mixed with the voice of the narrator, to signify perhaps that Jakob has not yet given utterance, even internally, to his own "otherness." At first, Jakob sanctions only his Christian inner voice (the italicised words). Yet Wiebe situates these words in the text in such a way that readers perceive them as a reply, a reaction to feelings Jakob has not yet confessed, even to himself:

The GPU fiend at the desk whose face of question question question had chiselled itself into him until he would have to know it even contorted, spitted and frying forever in hell

blessed saviour make me pure that in heaven I may

did not bother to raise his head...(12)

Not until the second instance of Jakob's inner speech does he give his second voice any kind of a hearing. Thinking that the world has come to an end and that his family has gone to heaven, he confesses his sexual curiosity for the first time:

questions and questions six and six and where were you born who is your father where is your father where were you october 6...do you go to church how many sisters do you believe the bible...jesus has come again and taken them and I am left for hell...I never confessed when I saw...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-- (13-14)

Wiebe embeds Jakob's sexual confession in a broken, heteroglot inner utterance. It is vital to notice that Jakob has "lost grip on duration, on sequence" (12). Temporal as well as spatial distance has disappeared. Voices from different times riot together in his memory, turning his psyche into a carnivalized space. In this, his second, inner speech, memories of the GPU interrogation mingle with questions put by the catechist, and with his own confessions and formulaic ritual answers. The voice of the self has lost any semblance of monologic integrity. Jakob's inner speech now consists of many broken, incomplete utterances. Remembered words spoken by voices separated in time, space and social rank now quarrel chaotically with each other in his psyche.

Wiebe even suggests that Jakob's first voice has never truly been his own. When Jakob tries to recover himself by praying, he can only make feeble verbal gestures towards the things he had always automatically prayed for

o god help be with bless take care of  
help bless take care (34)

Jakob's first voice consists of nothing more than utterances learned by rote from his parents, utterances now decaying into incoherent fragments in Jakob's overwrought mind.

In the final stage of the dialogization of the self, Jakob's second voice emerges completely into the open, fully embodied in the figure of Escha. As Escha speaks, Jakob hears "his own" words in the mouth of an "other" whose accents release the repressed heteroglossia of his speech. Escha gives voice to the shadow-side of Jakob's words by repeating them reaccented:

[Jakob:] "In our house--where"...

[Escha:] "Yeah, our house, now" (14)

Here Escha translates Jakob's words into the language of the "new age." In post-Revolutionary Russia, "our" no longer means "the Friesens'"; it means "belonging to everybody."

Escha also gives voice to Jakob's secret doubts about the sacredness of Jesus' name:

[Jakob:] "All left... what... Jesus...."

[Escha:] "No jesus, they just run to Moscow." (16)

Escha converts the name "Jesus" into a parodic double of

itself, decrowned by the shift from an upper-case to a lower-case "J." Significantly, this is not the first time the lower-case "jesus" has appeared in the text. Escha merely repeats out loud what Jakob has already secretly uttered twice during his second inner speech ("jesus has come again...jesus has come again" [14]). Escha's voice relays Jakob's inner speech to the outside world. By trumpeting aloud Jakob's most shameful, inner longings and doubts, Escha turns Jakob's psyche inside out. In killing Escha, Jakob kills part of himself.

Wiebe expresses a complex moral attitude to the Communist revolution and to those involved in it. He depicts post-revolutionary Russia as a travesty of social justice, an instance where a great ideal is dragged down by the brutality with which individuals and institutions which carry it into effect.<sup>22</sup> By using religious terms and images to describe the Communist regime, Wiebe highlights the error of placing faith in a human political institution rather than in God. "The church [is] now converted to soviet offices" (41), and Commissar Serebro, like a "shining happy angel" (41), helps implement the Communist dream of a heaven on earth.

Wiebe employs the voice of Jakob Friesen V to articulate many of the negative aspects of the revolution;

he views this radical change from the perspective of one who only stands to lose by it. Yet Wiebe also counterpoints Jakob's experience with a rival version of events. While Jakob places the emphasis on his own loss of rank and wealth, and on Escha's undeserved usurpation of his position, Wiebe covertly highlights Jakob's moral culpability and Escha's generosity and willingness to forgive.

Wiebe situates the central moral facts in Jakob's peripheral vision. Jakob confesses his culpability unconsciously, inadvertently, indirectly:

[1] We were unbelievable fools. [2] To think Stalin would go on letting them take advantage of those terrified by reports and the stupid local communists into selling and running off to Canada.... [3] What anarchy, drought, fear left could be had for the spitting; in two years they had controlled the mill, owned four farms, equipped, and managed the village studfarm where eight Cossacks worked, the biggest operation in Karatow Colony.... After harvest in 1928 the whole family even took a holiday in Odessa, travelling first class on train and ship. [4] That must have been the first thing Serebro heard when he came to take over.... (20)

In Section 1, Jakob confesses to the error of his ways, admitting fault not for doing wrong but for getting caught. Ironically, as Wiebe indicates in Sections 2 and 4, the Godless Communists' reading the Friesen's family history coincides precisely with a Christian reading: both regard the Friesens' wealth as a monument "built with the blood of the poor" (32). In Section 3, Jakob's words occupy a space

of overlap between two opposed speech genres: celebratory family history and confession. At the same time as he boasts about the spectacular rise of his family, Jakob inadvertently confesses to his family's ruthless perpetrations of social injustice. Not only do the Friesens exploit economically-disadvantaged Russians such as Escha, they also profit from the fears, misfortunes and religious convictions of their fellow Mennonites.

Wiebe translates Jakob's family history into a confession by invoking moral criteria that lie outside Jakob's consciousness, criteria which enter the text through a variety of means. First, Wiebe employs the voices of minor characters who engage in dialogue with Jakob. For example, one reads Jakob's boast in the light of Serebro's explanation of his conversion from Mennonitism to Communism-- "[I was] the younger son of a younger son living in the worker shacks while cousins lived fat" (32). Through Serebro, Wiebe indicates that Jakob's fortune depends on other family members' misfortune. Jakob's wealth has been gained not only by hard work and entrepreneurial skill, but by taking advantage of the old, grossly unfair, Russian laws which decreed that a family's wealth and property must pass entirely to the eldest son.

Second, readers understand Jakob's utterances in the

light of information supplied by other voices speaking in other chapters, such as Franz Epp's observation in Chapter 4 that "Friesen had taken everything that the revolution and anarchy and hunger could bring" (65). These voices which speak within the arena of Wiebe's text invite Wiebe's audience to read against Jakob's accents, or to hear beyond such accents a repressed, condemnatory voicing of Jakob's words.

A third way Wiebe contradicts Jakob's version of events is through a system or "language" of animal imagery. This imagery provides an authoritative key to the moral identity of every character in the novel. When Muttachi calls Frieda's father, Isaak, a mouse for accepting his disinheritance so meekly (27), she unwittingly uses a system of signs which Wiebe entirely controls. Images of mice, deer, prairie dogs and other timid, defenceless animals surround characters who suffer for the benefit of others (whether voluntarily or otherwise).<sup>23</sup> Their moral opposite, those who deliberately take advantage of the grief and misfortune of others, Wiebe surrounds with images of bloodsucking, parasitical, scavenging animals: wolves (47); the black vulture of Chapter 4; Balzer "the big leech" (60); Liesel and/as the grackle; lice (110, 117); the bloodsucking Chinese and Mennonites (123); mosquitoes sucking blood from a dead antelope (156); Emily Reimer in her new Thunderbird



bought with her husband's life insurance money (180); Hawk the bikie (202); and the many varieties of sinister black birds--the crows and magpies of Canada, the griffons of central Asia, and the vultures sailing in circles above the Paraguayan Chaco--which eat the bodies of the dead.

In reply to Muttachi's contemptuous accusation that Isaak Friesen is a mouse (which, unbeknown to her, functions as a compliment within Wiebe's signifying system), Wiebe uses Jakob's peripheral, apparently incidental impressions of his grandmother to depict Muttachi as "hunched," (16), clad in black, "fingers crooked" (16) like talons, her "nose almost infolded to a beak" (25). Muttachi resembles a black scavenging bird squawking "mine...mine" (31).

A fourth authorial counter-language enters the text in the form of allusions and images from the Bible. Muttachi sits at her spinning wheel, engaged in ceaseless, obsessive toil, making and unravelling, making and unravelling her yarn again and again: nobody else is going to enjoy the benefits of her work. When the communists arrive to distribute the Friesens' possessions amongst the populace, she hoards all the household linen on her own lap. Wiebe does not reveal the significance of Muttachi's spinning and holding onto cloth until Chapter 8, "The Cloister of the Lilies," where Jakob Friesen, coming unexpectedly upon a

refuge in the midst of severe blizzard, and thinking of his own past avarice, recalls part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "Think of the lilies...of the field. They toil not neither do they spin, yet your heavenly Father car..." (108).<sup>24</sup>

As Muttachi merges into the sinister blackness which reappears in every chapter of the text, "brutish" Escha comes into focus as "fairer than expected" (30). The names Jakob and Escha allude to the Biblical story of Jacob and Esau. This allusion dialogizes the text in that it tests and activates the reader's Biblical knowledge which in turn offers an alternative perspective of events in the Friesen's hof. In the Biblical story, Esau and Jacob are brothers. Esau, being the oldest, is the heir. But Jacob bribes Esau out of his birthright at a moment when Esau is weak with extreme hunger,<sup>25</sup> and he subsequently tricks their father into bestowing his blessing on him and making him lord over Esau.<sup>26</sup> Although angry at first, Esau forgives Jacob and embraces him as a brother.<sup>27</sup>

In The Blue Mountains of China, Escha is older than Jakob, and Wiebe hints more than once that they are brothers, Escha being Jakob Friesen IV's illegitimate son.<sup>28</sup> Without consciously making the connection between Escha's colouring and the distinctive Friesen red-blond

looks, Jakob V describes Escha as "just a bastard...his reddish-blond hair giving some fly-by-night father away" (19). Serebro all but suggests the two are brothers: "You are very alike, big, your faces--you could almost--strange" (33). Jakob Friesen IV supposedly has only one son and heir, yet the title of the chapter, "Sons and Heirs," refers to more than one.

Like his Biblical namesake, Escha harbours no rancour towards Jakob, although he clearly remembers being tricked and exploited by the Friesens. He asks for only half of the money Jakob Friesen IV left behind for his "son and heir," and he offers Jakob the only gift he has to give--the Russian girl. When Jakob rebuffs this offer by screaming insults, obscenities and curses at Escha, Wiebe indicates the mildness of the latter's reply: "Shut up," Escha said, suddenly quiet. "It's easy. Just do what you want. What are you yelling for?" (31).

For a single brief moment, Jakob glimpses the possibility that Escha "ceases to mean only one thing" (Bakhtin 1984, 117). In the hayloft, Jakob sees another Escha, an Escha whose masculine potency renders him not brutish but almost god-like: "immense naked man of varied gigantic columns half-gilded, erect in the sun" (24). The possibility that Escha, too, has been created in the image

of God implicitly complicates the morality of traditional Christian attitudes toward the human body. "Sons and Heirs" may be read as an allegory of Christian dis-integration of the self, a parable illustrating the dangers implicit in alienating body from mind. Jakob Friesen V, aspiring to the Christian ideal of pure spirituality, constructs his own body as "other," a hostile enemy to be feared, despised and if necessary, destroyed in "self"-defence.

The complexity of Wiebe's relationship with the voices of his characters makes "Sons and Heirs" one of the most complicated chapters in an extremely complicated novel. Close analysis of the text bears out Bakhtin's point that "a concrete discourse may belong simultaneously to different varieties and even types...[and that] the interrelationship of voices in discourse may change drastically..." (1984, 199). In so far as Wiebe employs Jakob's voice to further the story, the language of "Sons and Heirs" functions as "unidirectional double-voiced discourse...unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intentions" (Bakhtin 1984, 199).<sup>29</sup> In so far as Wiebe uses animal images and the voices of other characters to carry his own voice into dialogue with Jakob's voice, the text exemplifies "varidirectional double-voiced discourse...transmission of someone else's words with a shift in accent" (Bakhtin 1984, 199).<sup>30</sup> Wiebe's Biblical

allusions constitute yet a third dialogizing mode, in which "the other discourse exerts influence from without" (Bakhtin 1984, 199).<sup>31</sup>

## V

In The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe's characters distinguish between the communal self and other by drawing lines of social difference on the basis of numerous criteria: occupation, age, gender, nationality, church, colony, genealogy, historical background, and language. Wiebe allows disparate principles of kinship to relativise one another, to show that, like the marvellous "Red Line" separating the northern from the southern hemisphere, the entire network of intersecting social borderlines are all just "man-made" (85) lines, products of human fear, self-interest, unexamined values and assumptions. For his vision of the social world, Wiebe turns back to early Anabaptist fathers whose teachings stressed "a literal application of Jesus' concept of the brotherhood of man" (Tiessen 71). This vision of universal human kinship plays a vital role in Wiebe's moral rhetoric: Wiebe starts with the moral axiom that family members care for and help each other; he then stretches the idea of family until it includes the entire human race.

A number of characters guide Wiebe's readers toward this vision of universal human kinship. Frieda, for example, lives her early life confined within an extremely narrow social circle, limited almost entirely to her parents and her siblings. But as she enters school, matures, marries, and bears children, who in turn grow up and marry, her family expands so greatly as to raise the question, who is not kin to Frieda? Frieda discovers relations almost everywhere she goes. Illness forces her to cross man-made lines of social difference, and to place her trust in people she thinks of as "other." In Fernland Zentrale--Russlander territory--she finds that "Russlanders...were nice, some just like Kanadier" (145). Further afield, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Frieda finds people there willing to befriend her, and doctors willing to try to cure her, even though she is "foreign" to them. These Good Samaritan figures--Frieda's Spanish doctor, Listov the courageous Russian landlord who hides the Mennonites from the GPU, and Wong Gordon the Chinese guide who helps David Epp back to Russia--play a vital role in the novel by illustrating that those on the "other" side are not ogres but only human beings, some willing to risk their personal safety to help others.

In Chapter 12, Samuel Reimer discovers his oneness with people from an "other" race and an "other" land. But the transformation of his social perception occurs far more

suddenly and violently than does Frieda's. After a life devoted "selflessly" to his own family's welfare and comfort, a life deliberately cut off from news of the outside world and its millions of suffering "foreigners," Samuel hears God's call to "proclaim peace in Vietnam" (158). From that moment, his own family become foreigners, and, as he learns more and more about the horrors of the war, the distance between Samuel and the Vietnamese "other" steadily diminishes and eventually disappears. The suffering of the Vietnamese becomes Samuel's own suffering, as though the very skin that defines the physical boundaries of his body, like that of the napalmed children, had been burnt away:

He felt flayed: skinned to the agony of the world before the words [of the documents describing the war], 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?" (169)

The struggle between competing perceptions of the social world and the final lifting of the barrier between self and other is most compellingly dramatised in the language of the text in Chapter 9, "Drink Ye All Of It." Initially, Wiebe establishes a contrast between the narrow vision of Erna Epp, concerned solely for the welfare of her baby, and David Epp, the "selfless" husband masterminding the escape of an entire Mennonite village across the frozen Amur River to China. However, David's dialogue with Greta

Suderman brings him face to face with the moral implications of drawing arbitrary lines between the villages which make up the colony: Greta's brother and sister, and their families, live in village Number Four, a neighbouring village left behind to bear the brunt of the GPU retribution for the escape. Greta forces David to confess that they have betrayed those left behind, that it is not enough to say "We cannot think of Number Four; can we get out? How can we think of what happens to them; can we get out?" (130). For Greta, "we" includes those left behind to pay the price for the escapees' freedom. Through the dialogue between Greta and David, Wiebe indicates that no social group co-incides only and entirely with itself. No position on the social map lacks ambiguity:

"Greta, we all have pain. Who is without?"....

"Greta, we all--" but she tugged aside at his tone.

"All right," he said, "all right. I'll say it. To you. Say that all those left in the villages beyond the river, our brothers and sisters there, those we all sang with 'Now Thank We All Our God' in church festivals, once, we.... We left them in the lurch, back there, on the other side."...

"And in the village you," she said, "we all agreed..."

"I know that: we all agreed. Others fled before in families, but we did as a village. That's why we're all together; we are here only as we all are, here. We aren't Sudermans and Epps and Rogalskis and Martens anymore, we are all one family, and what we do is for all. Otherwise what possible way can we live with our--" he stopped right there. Say things he had never yet worked to the end in thought, dear God. (124-25)  
[emphasis added]

As the broader implications of his own words begin to dawn in David Epp's mind, Wiebe's juxtaposition of pronouns in



the text warrants close attention. "Others," "those," "them," "you," and particularly "we" and "all" collide and burst open in the mind of David Epp. And as their meanings begin to flow into one another, David discovers the logical end-point of his argument: that "we are all one family, and what we do is for all."

In "Drink Ye All Of It," Wiebe dramatises the oneness of humanity and the universality of guilt. He paints a world red in tooth and claw, where every living thing preys on every other, from the minute louse which drinks the blood of David's baby, through the animal and the human worlds, up to the huge "mountains [that] stood like fangs along the horizon" (138), "black and jagged...in the heartless cold" (126). To escape from Russia, the Mennonites must run the gauntlet between bloodsuckers of all varieties, who strip them of their few remaining possessions, and in one case even demand a young Mennonite girl as payment. Nor does Wiebe exempt the Mennonites themselves from the charge of preying on each other. Some hide morsels of food for their own personal use instead of pooling it. Greta Suderman inadvertently smothers her own baby out of terror that its "cry will poke through any snow-piled wall" (118) and betray the entire party as it sneaks past the border guards. And Erna Epp, quick to spy a way to take advantage of Greta's misfortune, covets Greta's breastmilk for her own ailing

baby. In reply to David's hint that Greta consider acting as a wet-nurse, she reduces Mennonites and Chinese alike to bloodsuckers and scavenging wolves:

"Your little David, your precious little living David.... And my Jonka in that shallow hole being clawed right now out of that shallow hole by Manchurian wolves, wolves like these bloodsuckers here of Chinese, of Mennonites that just want the last bit of whatever it is you--" (123)

Lest readers feel tempted to dismiss Greta's words as an outburst of hysterical grief, Wiebe endorses her judgement by an insistent use of metaphor. Four times within the space of one page he employs the distinctive image of the Mennonites scrambling across "the elbow of the giant Amur" (129-30), an image which stresses the resemblance between the Mennonites and the lice which infest human bodies: both have no option but to sustain their own life by sapping other living things. No-one, no matter how scrupulous, is guiltless.<sup>32</sup>

Biological law translates to theological proposition through Wiebe's Biblical allusions. The title of the chapter, "Drink Ye All Of It," taken from Matthew's narrative of the Last Supper, introduces the idea of human redemption through Jesus' voluntary self-sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> Wiebe also inserts sections of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. David Epp's mind, slightly delirious due to fever and lack of food, wanders back and forth in time, from the impending sacrament of the Lord's Supper (the Holy

Communion service), to a boyhood memory of his father saying "Supper is waiting, Mama will have supper waiting" (126), to the passage from Paul's Epistle recalling Jesus' actions and words at the Last Supper, to a number of his own dialogues concerning the planning and execution of the villagers' escape across the Amur River. Although David remembers past dialogues in an endeavour to assuage his own guilt, his inner speech keeps bumping up against the words of Paul's Epistle:

for I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took

...But it had to be done...so...in the forty below when no guard from Number Four could stand outside or believe anything could happen that same night they took

bread and when he had given thanks he brake it and said take eat this is my body which is broken for you this do in remembrance

"But we'll have to eat..." "The Bergen sleigh broke, we have to--".... "You want to break up and drag that junk under the guns of the GPU and all over the world, dear God. (126-29)

Wiebe's alternation of italicised and Roman type-faces signifies the simultaneous occurrence of the Communion service and David's inner speech, between which David's attention jumps back and forth.<sup>34</sup> At certain points, the two streams of words momentarily blend--in "same night," "took," "eat," and "break," for example. At these sites, where everyday words intersect with the Word, David's inner speech jumps the rails, as it were. He not only recalls

snatches of his own dialogues with many different people, some his fellow conspirators, some the victims betrayed by his conspiracy; he also hears Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians as if it were addressed directly to him. And it is Paul's voice, relaying Jesus' words and actions, which finally determines David's understanding of his present situation and persuades him to follow Jesus' example of "the way to live for others" (173).

It is not by chance that Wiebe quotes Paul's account of the Last Supper rather than one of the versions appearing in the Gospels.<sup>35</sup> Unlike the historical narratives of the Last Supper recounted in Matthew (26:26-30), Mark (14:22-25) and Luke (22:19-20), Paul's account functions as metahistory: it places the emphasis less on what happened than on how the Last Supper should be interpreted and commemorated. Paul relays Jesus' actions and words within the context of a warning against abusing the sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

whosoever shall eat and drink unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord but let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup for he eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks damnation unto himself (130).

By employing Paul's metahistorical voice, Wiebe creates a bridge between the disparate historical contexts in which Jesus' voice is audible. Wiebe allows readers to compare the "first" Last Supper, the Corinthians' abuses of the sacrament, the particular context in which David Epp and his

fellow villagers commemorate Jesus' sacrifice, and the diverse contexts in which his readers engage with Jesus' words in Wiebe's text. Paul's voice warns against exploiting Jesus' self-sacrifice for one's own earthly gain. He reminds the Corinthians (as well as David Epp and readers of The Blue Mountains of China) that the rite of Holy Communion ritually re-enacts Jesus' sacrifice for the sins of all of humanity--"this is my body which is broken for you" (128)--and that abuse of the sacrament constitutes a heinous betrayal. Just as greed and selfishness make bloodsuckers of Ernst Balzer, Dennis Willms, and the Jakob Friesens, abuse of the Lord's Supper makes a person "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (130).

Interestingly, Wiebe invokes more of Paul's Epistle than he quotes in the novel. The Mennonites' circumstances--they are close to starvation and have just betrayed and abandoned a section of their own congregation--allude to verses which lie just outside I Corinthians 11:23-29, the passage which comes to the surface of David Epp's inner speech. In I Corinthians 11:21-22 and 11:34, Paul warns against consuming the bread and wine of the Eucharist to satisfy bodily hunger and thirst; and in I Corinthians 11:18 and 11:33, against employing the rite as a mechanism of division and exclusion within the congregation. Despite their obvious relevance to David Epp's situation, Wiebe

refrains from quoting these verses in the novel, his omission testing and activating the Biblical knowledge of his audience. As elsewhere, Wiebe employs allusion as a dialogizing strategy. By creating an opening which allows readers to supplement the Biblical quotation he supplies, Wiebe encourages his readers to engage in dialogic interaction with his text.

Within Wiebe's larger moral argument, David Epp's action has particular significance in that it helps make concrete a fundamental distinction between two kinds of Christians: those who value Jesus' self-sacrifice as a kind of "fire escape" (201) useful for evading punishment in hell for their sins, and those who view Jesus as a model of how to live concern for others, a way of saving other people from "the hell of their being born, living and dying" (155). Not only does David turn back in a physical sense to Russia; he also turns back to the moral paradigms offered by Jesus' actions. Furthermore, those who come after David Epp, such as his son, David III, Samuel Reimer and John Reimer, turn back to David Epp's "futile" action as a concrete example of how to live one's Christian concern for other people. Irrespective of its immediate result, David's action has lasting inspirational value. It translates the paradigm of Jesus' actions into twentieth-century contexts.

## VI

The narrative in The Blue Mountains of China repeatedly turns back on itself, despite the forward-moving chronological progress of the historical narrative. As in all Wiebe's novels, readers can integrate the narrative fragments according to two contradictory structural principles--one linear, the other cyclic. Sherrill E. Grace identifies the same structural tension in The Temptations of Big Bear, which she analyses in terms of Tzvetan Todorov's distinction between "horizontal...narrative of contiguity" and "vertical...narrative of substitutions" (Grace 9).<sup>36</sup> Todorov's model also proves highly applicable to The Blue Mountains of China because it facilitates understanding of the inextricable connection between Wiebe's narrative structure, his dramatic re-accenting of the text and his radical Christian vision of all history.

Todorov maintains that although both horizontal and vertical narrative types usually occur in combination, certain genres are characterised by a predominance of one structural principle over the other; for example, adventure stories come nearest to an entirely horizontal structure, while detective or mystery stories offer the purest manifestations of vertically integrated narrative (Grace 9). Traditional historical narrative, with its profound concern

with chronological sequence and linear causality, constitutes another very pure form of horizontal structuring. Wiebe subverts the traditional horizontal structure of historical narrative in The Blue Mountains of China because such a structure issues logically from a theory of history profoundly inimical to his most fundamental moral postulate: that Jesus' teachings have a trans-historical applicability.<sup>37</sup> If history equals unremitting change, if it unfolds as a sequence of unprecedented, irreversible, unrepeatable events, then the passage of time pushes Jesus further and further "away," as it were, making his words and actions increasingly tenuous and limited in their relevance to subsequent ages. Wiebe's subversion of horizontal narrative dramatises that in time as well as in space, moving "'away' is not so simple" (61). Everywhere, and at all times, the Mennonites are dogged by universal human problems such as death and social injustice, and the "beautiful mocking blue" (126) of utopian dreams.<sup>38</sup>

Although The Blue Mountains of China deals ostensibly with historical subject matter, the narrative works according to a formula characteristic of the detective or mystery story. The salient feature of the detective story is that the precise relevance of each incident, each word, each group of words, does not become entirely clear until the denouement, at which time the brilliant sleuth marshals all



the evidence and reveals The Truth to the cast of characters assembled in or out of court. The Blue Mountains of China resembles a mystery story in that readers hear the testimonies of the witnesses before they know the nature of the crime. Wiebe offers the facts openly but not the universal key to their significance; readers hear the voices of witnesses, without knowing the extent of their implication in the crime.

John Reimer performs the same function as the brilliant detective in the mystery story: he defines the correct reading position, the only perspective from which The Truth can be known, the "right way" to accord weight and meaning to the words of the text. Although John Reimer articulates The Truth in compositionally marked dialogue with people gathered around him at the roadside, the authority of his voice so far exceeds that of his interlocutors that The Truth does not emerge at the point of genuine dialogic contact between voices. Instead, John Reimer engages only in "pedagogical dialogues" (Bakhtin 1984, 81).<sup>39</sup> His announcement of "the terrible question of...social injustice" (215) demarcates the site upon which all the pieces of the horizontal narrative "stack up along a vertical line" (Todorov, qtd. in Grace 9). Suddenly, like a revelation, it becomes clear that the narrative fits together vertically rather than horizontally.<sup>40</sup> Every

character faces the same moral dilemma, every incident reproduces the same set of paradigmatic elements, and every voice answers the same moral question: "the terrible question of his [Jesus'] day as it is in ours was and is social injustice" (215).<sup>41</sup>

The vertical structure of The Blue Mountains of China is a logical artistic corollary of Wiebe's belief that the Bible offers a set of universal paradigms for all history, and that Jesus, because he had to contend with the "permanent factors in history"<sup>42</sup>, offers a permanently valid model of the right way to live. To discover "where we are in truth," and what "is and is to be," Wiebe turns back in The Blue Mountains of China to "our origins," not merely to the Mennonites' history over the last hundred years but to the origins of Christianity when Jesus showed "the way," the direction, the path, to his followers.

The title of the final chapter, "On The Way," not only refers in a literal manner to the highway along which John Reimer walks, it also alludes to Jesus' words in the Gospel of Saint John: "I am the way" (John 14:6). Wiebe, John Reimer and Saint John function as links in a chain of voices relaying the words of Jesus down through history to Wiebe's readers in their respective historical presents. Like John Reimer, Wiebe takes the Word of God out of the physical and

social confinement of church buildings and closed Christian communities into an open space where it is freely accessible to whoever decides to stop and engage with the text. And Reimer's decision to walk north towards the Indian reserves, not west toward the serene isolation of the blue Rocky Mountains, hints at "the way" Wiebe will live his concern for Canada's oppressed indigenous "others" in his next novel.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4: THE BLUE MOUNTAINS OF CHINA

1. Peace Shall Destroy Many, 8.
2. John Newlove, "Black Night Window," Epigraph to The Blue Mountains of China, (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1970). Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers appearing in parentheses in Chapter 4 refer to this edition.
3. See Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 110.
4. Bakhtin points out that "the mere presence of specific language styles, social dialects and so forth" (1984, 182) does not guarantee that a text functions dialogically. "What matters," he argues, "is the dialogic angle at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work" (1984, 182).
5. See Franz Epp's attempt to describe the black vulture on p. 56, and Jakob Friesen IV's consideration of the stranger's utterance on p. 114-5.
6. Cf. Ina Ferris' description of Wiebe's strategies for subjecting the reader to "a process of relentless disorientation" in "Religious Vision and Fictional Form: Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China," in W.J. Keith, A Voice in the Land (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981) 89.
7. This quality of non-intersection derives in part from the fact that several chapters of The Blue Mountains of China were written for separate publication. See "Black Vulture," The Mennonite, 82, (20 June 1967), 410-15. Reprinted in Christian Living, 14 (July 1967), 20-5, and Mennonite Brethren Herald 6 (21 July 1867), 2-6. "Over the Red Line," The Mennonite, 82, (18 July 1967), 464-67. Reprinted in Christian Living, 14 (August 1967), 20-3, and Mennonite Brethren Herald, 6 (September 1967), 4-6. "The Well," The Mennonite, 82, (15 August 1967), 502-5. Reprinted in Christian Living, 14 (September 1967) 20-3, Mennonite Brethren Herald 6 (6 October 1967), 4-6, and Pluck 1 (Spring 1968). "The Blue Mountains of China: My Life: That's As It Was," Mosaic, III/3 (Spring 1970), 154-61.
8. "If translation constitutes an effort to correlate two worlds, then literal translations deliberately defeat this purpose by drawing the reader's attention to the absence of synchrony" (Redekop 100).

9. The word "others'" appears in inverted commas because Wiebe has problematized the boundary between the utterances of self and other.
10. See pp. 50, 92, 145.
11. He has already told this story in Peace Shall Destroy Many.
12. See Frieda's reaction to the cowboys: "He was laughing and swearing at the other two. I think it was swearing but maybe it was French, or Russian" (43); and her confession that even after thirty years in Paraguay she knows very little Spanish (148).
13. The term "old grackle" is enclosed in inverted commas to signify that it is Liesel's, not Wiebe's, epithet.
14. Bakhtin defines "the word with a sideward glance" in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 196.
15. The "old grackle" speaks "discourse with a sideward glance at someone else's word," Type III.3.c in Bakhtin's typology (1984, 199). However this discourse is transmitted within Liesel's discourse, which fits into Type III.2.a, parodic discourse. Through the grackle's sideways glances, Wiebe parodies Liesel the parodist.
16. Wiebe reinforces the impression that Liesel resembles a black bird by having her tie a black shawl around her hips to create what she thinks is an elegant trailing effect behind, like the tail of a bird (74, 76). See the discussion of Wiebe's use of animal imagery in section IV of this chapter.
17. See The Temptations of Big Bear, p. 273 for Wiebe's dramatisation of the extreme vulnerability of Dickens' narration of the death of Little Nell to parodic treatment.
18. Wiebe hints that Liesel adopts an aesthetic perspective to escape from her own suffering, refracted in the text through the utterances of the wealthy First Class passengers who watch her being fished out of the ship's indoor swimming pool: " 'immigrants in steerage...skin and bone...without...poor...dreadful condition' " (84).
19. "Are you still a Mennonite?"  
"No. I--not any more." (191)

20. Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers, discussed by Elizabeth Cereno and her friend, Rachel, is Wiebe's prime example of art that exploits suffering. See pp. 183-84.

21. This method of blending the voices of narrator and protagonist, and allowing the protagonist's inner speech to break through at strategic moments, develops out of Wiebe's narrative practice in First and Vital Candle. Cf. Pierre Spriet's discussion of first person and third person narrative in "Rudy Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China: the Polyphony of a People or the Lonely Voice of the Fringe?," Multiple Voices: Recent Canadian Fiction, Proceedings of the IVth International Symposium of the Brussels Centre for Canadian Studies, 29 November-1 December, 1989, Ed. Jeanne Delbaere (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1990) 59-68.

22. Wiebe voices this judgement most explicitly through David Epp's inner speech in Chapter 9:

It will be good with no rich or poor. No hungry. No one fighting any more, everyone living for everyone else, working in peace and harmony on the common land, together to the fields in the morning, together eating our bread and living in quiet and singing of our land, with always enough to eat and work, everyone our friends, everyone workers. (127)

23. In a passage of dialogue which sounds at first like an interlude between sections of "serious" dialogue, Wiebe provides an explicit key to the animal imagery pervading the novel. Having trodden on something in the dark beside the road, John Reimer remarks to Jakob Friesen IV that "they" (presumably prairie dogs--Wiebe creates allegorical possibilities by not supplying the antecedent of the pronoun) die in large numbers "on the way" (218), because when one of a pair is accidentally killed by a car, the other refuses to abandon it, and carries on the road trying to guard the other or decoy further dangers; when a car comes "the live one feels the shadow over it and sits up" (218). John Reimer and Jakob Friesen IV pass on to the topic of the scavenging black birds who eat the bodies of the dead animals. This conversation draws a clear dividing line between two categories of animals.

24. Matthew 6:28. The verse begins with the words "Why take ye thought for raiment?"

25. Genesis 25:22-34.

26. Genesis 27.

27. Genesis 33:1-16.

28. Zailig Pollock comes to the same conclusion, "The Blue Mountains of China: A Selective Genealogy," Essays in Canadian Writing 26 (Summer 83): 72, n.5.
29. Type III.1.c in Bakhtin's typology (1984, 199).
30. Type III.2.e in Bakhtin's typology (1984, 199).
31. Type III.3 in Bakhtin's typology (1984, 199).
32. Of all the characters in the novel, Frieda perhaps comes closest to a blameless life. Yet Frieda's earliest memory, the first event she recounts after the story of her own birth, is of a newly-employed field-worker struck dead by a bolt of lightning that would otherwise have killed her mother working nearby. Frieda remarks that the man had "three little ones, smaller than me" (8), to convey her vague childhood inkling that her mother lives because the others' father died. This is not to say that Wiebe equates Frieda with "Ernst Balzer," the black vulture. On the contrary, the parallel fortunes of Frieda and Balzer serve only to mark the difference in their responses. Frieda feels for the children who have lost their father; Balzer only rejoices not to have lost his own skin. Until David Epp senior reminds him that "Mrs Friesen was praying too" (66), Balzer spares no thought for the unfortunate scapegoat to whom he owes his safety, nor for the family whom he has heard through the door "crying and pleading, begging like children" (65).
33. Matthew 26:27-28: "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."
34. According to Magdalene Redekop, Paul's words are not liturgical (107). However, Paul's words carry the words of Jesus, which are repeated as part of the rite of Holy Communion.
35. While the italicised quotations come from Paul's Epistle, the title of the chapter, "Drink Ye All Of It," comes from Matthew 26:27.
36. See "Structuring Violence: 'The Ethics of Linguistics' in The Temptations of Big Bear," Canadian Literature 104 (Spring 85): 7-23. Grace draws on Tzvetan Todorov, "The Quest of Narrative," The Poetics of Prose, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

37. As George Hildebrand demonstrates, Wiebe also drawn on the theory and methodology of Biblical typology, which reads the New Testament as a turning back to the Old Testament, and views the events of the Old Testament as a series of prefigurations of events recounted in the New Testament. See "The Anabaptist Vision of Rudy Wiebe: A Study in Theological Allegoresis," diss., McGill University, 1982.

38. Frieda sees "the Cypress Hills [which] lay on the prairie like blue dust, far away" (45); Dennis Williams sees the Canadian "Rockies, their snow burning blue against the evening sky" (200); David Epp looks back across the Amur to the Russian valley from which he has just escaped to see the "faint clumps of smoke like blue mounds on the rigid air" (130).

39. Bakhtin defines "pedagogical dialogues" as follows: "Someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error, that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and pupil" (1984, 81).

40. In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe defines "mystery" as "that which is hidden to some and revealed to others" (159). It is quite possible that readers who share Wiebe's thorough knowledge and interpretation of the Bible would discern quite early the vertical structure of the narrative and the moral dilemma common to every episode.

41. My italics.

42. Quoted by John H. Yoder, epigraph to The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972).



## CHAPTER 5: THE TEMPTATIONS OF BIG BEAR

### Redeeming Canada's Past

#### I

In The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe turns his attention to Western Canadian history during the period when the Dominion government was "opening the great West"<sup>1</sup> to white settlers and enclosing the Native population on reserves. Wiebe's story centres on the Cree Chief Big Bear, branded a troublemaker by official historical accounts because he refused for the longest time to sign any treaty or settle on a reserve, and later convicted of treason-felony for his association with Indians who killed nine Whites at Frog Lake.<sup>2</sup> In The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe offers an alternative interpretation of Big Bear's life. During the twelve years covered in the novel's main narrative, from Big Bear's refusal to sign Treaty Number Six in 1876, to his death in 1888,<sup>3</sup> Big Bear resists the temptations of physical violence and fulsome surrender, the only options recognised by the other great chiefs. Big Bear alone understands that the most crucial battles take place on the verbal-ideological plane rather than the physical,

and that his people's political survival depends on the strength of their religious faith. Big Bear urges the various tribes to forget their superficial differences and band together as a religious community. Only if they speak with a single mighty voice empowered by the "Only One" can they enter into equal dialogue with "that one Whiteskin than whom there is none higher" (TBB 197).<sup>4</sup>

Five varieties of dialogue warrant close attention in The Temptations of Big Bear: compositionally marked dialogue, formal syncrisis, the "great dialogue" between author and narrating characters through which Wiebe engages in dialogue in the wider cultural arena, and the dialogue between the text and its readers. These several manifestations of dialogue in and around Wiebe's fourth novel suggest that he more and more concedes that meaning comes into being dialogically, through negotiation between voices speaking with one another in the evolving context of human history.

This dialogic principle offers Wiebe a chance to subvert dominant monologic systems of scientific, historical, sociological and religious truth. In The Temptations of Big Bear, he contradicts official history and the Anglo-protestant political ethos which supports it. Yet Wiebe challenges these monologic systems not to overthrow

monologism as such, but as a preliminary step to promoting an alternative monologic vision of the universe. Wiebe "unearths" Big Bear's life from the "the giant slag-heap left by the heroic white history"<sup>5</sup> in order to integrate it into his own Mennonite system of values and beliefs. A whole-hearted embrace of the dialogic principle would weaken the logical foundation of Wiebe's Christian convictions. How can one remain committed to the belief that one's own religious truths remain absolute, permanent and universally valid, while at the same admitting the cultural and historical relativity of all truth? What happens to Wiebe's Christian vision once he confronts the possibility that his absolutes are vulnerable to past and future misappropriation? For Wiebe, the dialogic universe holds the prospect of existential terror as well as that of ideological freedom.

Wiebe's ambivalence manifests itself in the text of The Temptations of Big Bear in a tension between dialogizing and monologizing mechanisms. On all five intersecting planes on which dialogue occurs, centrifugal forces contend against centripetal, as if Wiebe's writing were subject to a law demanding that every dialogizing action has an equal and opposite monologizing re-action.

## II

Compositionally Marked Dialogues

"Ceremony was all" (10), reflects Governor Morris in the opening scene of the novel. Much of the dramatic interest in The Temptations of Big Bear centres on a series of compositionally marked dialogues that take place during ceremonial and ritual occasions--the farewell ceremony at Fort Pitt, Big Bear's treaty-signing ceremony at Fort Walsh, Big Bear's Thirst Dance, the buffalo hunt, the church service at Frog Lake, the formal councils of the Indians, and finally Big Bear's trial. In the Dominion Government's "non-violent" take-over of the Canadian West, ceremonies and rituals have as much historical importance as major military offensives and counter-attacks. They are highly theatrical public occasions when the rival social factions try to inaugurate or defend the power of their respective sovereign discourses, to gain or resist the hegemonic control of others. Wiebe expresses a profound concern with voice in these scenes of formal dialogue. He dramatises the distinct kinds of power activated by various manifestations of the voice--the mysterious charisma of an individual voice, the political efficacy of a communal voice, the hegemony of a group of White cultural institutions termed "the Queen's voice." Wiebe's compositionally marked ceremonial and ritual

dialogues warrant detailed consideration because they encode manoeuvres in an undeclared verbal-ideological war.

During ceremonies and rituals,<sup>6</sup> rigid rules, taboos, and etiquette come into effect, prohibiting dialogue altogether or keeping it within pre-determined limits. These restrictions against free dialogue, most clearly illustrated in the elaborate protocols of the courtroom, create a protective "framing context" (Bakhtin 1981, 344) for a sacred word, a buffer zone separating an authoritative language from the zone of familiar contact with rival speech genres. Thus, special occasions create safe habitats for special words.

At least, such is the case if the ceremony or ritual proceeds according to plan--which it almost never does in The Temptations of Big Bear. Big Bear hijacks Governor Morris's farewell ceremony at Fort Pitt; he laughs out loud and speaks in sign language over the voice of the judge during his trial; Leif Crozier penetrates Big Bear's field of vision during the Thirst Dance, and Wandering Spirit breaks into the Maundy Thursday mass at Frog Lake. Wiebe makes concrete the verbal-ideological war fought in the West by showing Whites and Indians carnivalizing one another's ceremonies and rituals in an attempt to decrown the other's authoritative word.

In scenes of compositionally marked ritual and ceremonial dialogue, Wiebe displays an acute sensitivity to the political significance of interlocutory conduct. He pays meticulous attention to the concrete particulars surrounding and pervading each verbal exchange. Wiebe's stage directions--the timing and tone of a speech, the posture and dress of the speaker, the participants' adherence to or flouting of decorum, and their choice of an addressee--these concrete details do not serve a merely corroborative or decorative function. They are the very substance of the action itself.<sup>7</sup>

In the opening scene at Fort Pitt, for example, Big Bear's mere presence bumps the closing ceremony off its anticipated course. His attendance, after years of refusing to talk at all with the government's commissioners, causes Governor Morris to break decorum during the crucial opening moments of the ceremony. Morris's first words address Big Bear, when ceremonial propriety dictates that he should at that point make his formal reply to Sweetgrass's warm and flattering words of welcome. Big Bear seizes control of the dialogue by not responding to Governor Morris. At the moment when Morris very obviously expects him to reply, Big Bear creates "a silence so deliberate" (19) that Morris's dignity and composure begin to crumble: "every stretching second drained him standing at attention farther into

insignificance" (19). In a literal realization of James McKay's earlier remark, "Wait till you hear his voice" (15), Governor Morris waits. Big Bear forces him to wait. And, as Morris knows, to wait upon someone signifies one's deference to their will and one's acknowledgement of their power.

When Big Bear speaks for the first time, his words emerge out of a disconcerting silence of his own making, not in obedience to Governor Morris's cue. Unlike Sweetgrass and the other chiefs, who collaborate with Morris's efforts to steer the dialogue into "safe" areas, Big Bear follows no-one else's predetermined script.

Bakhtin's distinction between "passive" and "active understanding" proves useful for explaining the political significance of Big Bear's interlocutory strategies, and for describing Big Bear's function as a dialogizing device in the text. Bakhtin describes passive understanding as

purely receptive, contribut[ing] nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word. (1981, 281)

An active understanding, by contrast,

assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex inter-relationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. (1981, 282)

Some of Sweetgrass's remarks at Fort Pitt exemplify passive

understanding. Sweetgrass parrots the recommendations of the government commissioners--"I want to dig up a small piece of land and grow food. We should all do that" (35). The extreme baldness of Sweetgrass's expression warns that he has no appreciation of the practical difficulties of agricultural life, let alone of the immense social and spiritual adjustments it will involve. He merely repeats the words of an "other," in the language of the "other," without attempting to translate the words into his own traditional framework of values and beliefs. Instead of testing the authority and veracity of the words, he trustingly accepts them at face value, seeming almost to imagine that the digging of a hole will prompt food to spring instantaneously out of the ground. Sweetgrass follows a kind of unwritten script devised largely by the Governor, not a script generated by any process of equal collaboration between the two interlocutory parties. He thus engages only in a formalized pseudo-dialogue, where he understands the commissioners' words and the terms of the treaty only in a passive manner, a manner which, according to Bakhtin, "is no understanding at all" (1981, 281).

Like Sweetgrass, Big Bear repeats words spoken by the commissioners, but his revoicing strives towards an active understanding of the other's utterances. Big Bear annexes the commissioners' utterances into (what passes for)



traditional Indian discourses, quoting verbatim the words and phrases of the cultural "other," but testing their meaning according to whether they fit--or do not fit--into his own culture's religious construction of the world.

Governor Morris foresees the reserve Indians "living as they have always lived, but with the Queen's gift in addition"

(28). Big Bear responds with:

"The Governor says we will live as we have always lived. I have always lived on the Earth with my people, I have always moved as far as I wished to see. We take what the earth gives us when we need anything, and we leave the rest for those who follow us. What can it mean, that I and my family will have a 'reserve of one square mile'? What is that?" (29)

James McKay tells Big Bear that he must "Choose the places where you wish to live. They will be reserved for you forever" (28). Big Bear's reply renders McKay's statement absurd: "No one can choose for only himself a piece of the Mother Earth. She is. And she is for all that live, alike" (28).

By recontextualizing and reaccenting the utterances of McKay and Morris, Big Bear penetrates to the heart of the Indians' political problem. Through Big Bear, Wiebe shows that all questions of land rights depend on a prior question: which society controls the social processes whereby truth comes into being? To quibble, as have the other chiefs, over the size of the reserve or the amount of money to be paid, is to signal acceptance of the ideological

postulates underlying the treaty and thus to surrender to White hegemonic control. Big Bear argues not against the number of acres, but against the concept of land as acreage, a privately ownable, commercially exploitable, material commodity. He attacks not the number of dollars to be paid in compensation for the land, but the monstrous idea of reducing the Great Spirit's sacred gift to a dollar value. Staunchly rejecting the premises on which the terms of the treaty are based, Big Bear surrenders neither physical territory nor ideological ground.

As well as being a historic figure, Big Bear functions as a rhetorical device whereby Wiebe exposes the artificiality of certain axioms which dominate thinking about the land and the social order in twentieth century Canada. Like the Ojibwa children in First and Vital Candle, Big Bear offers Wiebe a means of articulating a perspective which lies outside the view conventionally adopted by a majority of Wiebe's fellow Canadians. Big Bear resembles the rogues, clowns and fools described by Bakhtin,<sup>8</sup> who estrange audiences from their habitual assumptions about the natural and the social worlds. Big Bear's questions, "misunderstandings" and jokes persistently de-naturalize the standards of order and common-sense which Morris inaugurates at Fort Pitt, and which a majority of Wiebe's readers, a century later, would probably consider axiomatic. By

dramatising the historicity and the cultural relativity of the materialist ideology that prevails in his own time, Wiebe opens the way for future ideological change.

But Wiebe attempts to restore Big Bear's authentic voice only in so far as Big Bear agrees with Wiebe's Mennonite values and beliefs. In the above speeches, Big Bear clearly articulates a Mennonite vision of the relationship between the land, humanity and the deity. Such a reading of Big Bear's major speeches gains support from Wiebe's own observations on the similarities between the traditional Indian and Mennonite Christian outlooks:

The concept of receiving the land boggled the Indian mind. This is also a basic Christian belief--that the land and what it produces you don't make--the seed, the rain, the sun. You are thankful for what it does. You don't push it around. You work with it. (VL 207)

The Biblical prophets and Big Bear had a great deal in common, the sense of a heritage that has been sold out, that through ignorance or neglect has simply been left: and the voice very clearly says that you cannot neglect your inheritance like this, the gifts of--the Cree call it "the Main One," the Jews "Jehovah"; you cannot do that and expect to get away with it" (VL 152).<sup>9</sup>

As well as articulating a Mennonite vision that passes for an authentically "other" Indian one, Big Bear's "active understanding" releases two kinds of "othervoicedness" in White talk. First, Wiebe uses Big Bear to unmask the racism and deceit hidden beneath the dignified tones of the Governor's ceremonial voice. When Big Bear's laughter breaks ceremonial decorum, Morris forgets that all Indians must be

referred to politely as "brothers" and calls Big Bear a "big-mouth savage" (22). Second, Wiebe uses Big Bear as a hybridizing device, a means of releasing the internal dialogicity of Morris's utterances:

Governor Morris: ... "When you hear my voice you are listening to your Great Mother the Queen"....

Big Bear: "The Queen speaks to us?"

Governor Morris: Yes. You have heard her voice, whom God bless and preserve long to reign over us." There was a momentary silence.

Big Bear: "The Queen is--a woman."

[The Indians erupt into]...immense laughter.... But the Governor, the commissioners, the police stood rigid with darkened faces. The Governor swung around to Erasmus, his voice shivering,

"Tell that--that--I didn't come here to have my Sovereign Queen insulted by some big-mouth savage."  
(21-22)

As in the previous examples of recontextualization, Big Bear asserts his right to govern the meaning of the "Governor's" words. He annexes the signifier "Queen-as-woman" into an Indian semiotic system in which "woman" connotes physical weakness, intellectual and social inferiority, and voicelessness in formal council sessions. From the Indians' point of view, Governor Morris inadvertently subverts the authority of his voice in the very act of proclaiming that authority. As Big Bear's intentions (expressing Wiebe's evangelical Christian intentions) invade Morris's words, those words become contested territory, like the land.

Big Bear faces a formidable opponent in Alexander Morris, veteran of many a diplomatic coup, and heroic master of treaty signing ceremonies. Morris certainly understands

the crucial role of ceremony in the process of securing economic, legal, and hegemonic control over the Indians. In reply to the kind of wild west historical romances which would view Morris's diplomatic skills as a travesty of heroism, Wiebe stresses that Morris has played a less glamorous but no less vital role in the history of his country than have the gunslinging heroes of America's Indian wars: in just four years, he has "personally negotiated three treaties that gave his country more lands than any one negotiator in history, anywhere on earth, bloodlessly" (26).

Wiebe characterises Morris as an accomplished parodist. His ceremonial voice rewards close analysis. "We have agreed on everything," insists Morris,

The Cree are the principal tribe of plains Indians; this has been the fourth time that I have met my Cree brothers with a treaty in my hand. And standing here on this--uh, sitting--on this ground I cast my eyes to where the sun rises, down to the great lakes and I see a broad road leading from there to the Red River, I see it stretching on to Fort Ellice, I see it branching there.... A broad road, and all along it I see the Governor and the commissioners of the Queen taking the Indian by the hand, saying, we are brothers, we will lift you up, we will teach you the cunning of the white man. All along the road I see Indians gathering, I see gardens growing and houses building. I see them receiving money from the Queen's commissioners, I see them enjoying their hunting and fishing as before...." (27-8)

Morris's language deflects attention away from discrepancies between Indian and White religion, a tactic

which allows him to valorize his own words by pretending they come from the Indians' supreme deity. Morris places emphasis on the number four, for example, to imply that he shares the Cree people's sense of the special religious significance of that number. In the oft-repeated "I see" construction, he dons the verbal guise of the shamanic visionary in an attempt to insert himself into the role of sole official mediator between the Cree people and their Great Spirit. Morris couches his narrative of past historical events, and his account of the Government's wishes concerning future history, in the form of a divinely inspired prophecy. Morris exploits the intensely religious outlook of his audience. By mimicking prophetic utterance, he enhances the rhetorical potency of his words and thus invests them with the power not just to predict but to control the course of history. Ironically, Morris's pseudo-divine prophecies become self-fulfilling in that they help bring about White domination in the West.<sup>10</sup>

Morris adopts a number of mimicking strategies designed to blind the Indians to the vast gulf which separates their traditional perception of the world from that dominant in White society. The obvious differences between English and Cree remind everyone present at the ceremony that the two negotiating parties are culturally alien to one another. To disguise his foreignness, and more easily win the Indians'

trust, Governor Morris uses "picture language": Red and White hands clasped in friendship, historical progress in the form of a road, the White man lifting the Indian up into civilisation.

Wiebe's source for Alexander Morris's speech is Morris's own published record of the treaty negotiations, entitled The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories. Comparison of Morris's original with Wiebe's adaptation of the speech reveals some twenty changes of various lengths and levels of significance.<sup>11</sup> One set of changes confirms that Wiebe characterises Morris as a parodist. Wiebe "Indianises" Morris's speech further than in the original by removing abstract and Latinate diction and substituting more concrete expressions deriving from the Indians' daily experience. For example, Wiebe replaces the word "East" (Morris 231) with "where the sun rises" (27); and he alters "retaining their old mode of living" (Morris 231), to "living as they have always lived" (28). In these instances, by departing from a verbatim quotation of his source, Wiebe heightens the quality of mimicry in the Governor's language.

In the dialogue between Big Bear and "Govenor" Morris, two parodists face each other in a duel. They both succeed in dethroning one another's sacred discourses by capturing

the language of the other as a bounded object in their own utterances, and subjecting the other's language to a new authorial will. However, because Wiebe leaves no doubt as to which speaker he supports, the text continues to function as monologic discourse.

Gary Saul Morson's discussion of parody and meta-parody offers a useful criterion for distinguishing between polyphonic and monologic parody. Morson reserves the term "parody" for texts that function monologically,

those double-voiced texts or utterances that clearly indicate which of their conflicting voices is to be regarded as authoritative. The audience of parody--that is, the readers who identify the text as a parody--know for sure with which voice they are expected to agree. (Morson 81)

In "meta-parody," by contrast, the text functions polyphonically:

each voice may be taken to be parodic of the other; readers are invited to entertain each of the resulting contradictory interpretations in potentially endless succession. In this sense, such texts remain fundamentally open, and if readers should choose either interpretation as definitive, they are likely to discover that this choice has been anticipated and is itself the target of parody. (Morson 81)

If Big Bear and Morris each parody the other, why is it that readers are not caught in an endless oscillation between two "contradictory hermeneutic directives" (Morson, 81) as would be the case if the text functioned polyphonically as meta-parody? The answer is that Wiebe introduces an external adjudicator: the Bible. He apports authority to the



voices in the text by measuring them against the voices of Jesus and the Apostles. The Epigraph from Acts 17, together with various sections of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, function as the deus ex machina which determines the outcome of the struggle between voices and languages in the text.

Wiebe consistently invokes the Bible to valorize Big Bear's speech and to decrown Morris's parodic language. For example, Morris appropriates the family kinship terms used by tribal societies to define social identity and social relationships: terms such as "brothers," "the Grandmother," "the Great Mother," and her "Red children" feature prominently in his speech. Within Morris's utterance, these terms function parodically: Morris uses the language of another to accomplish his own purposes. But when Wiebe, in turn, appropriates Morris's utterance, he constitutes Morris's parody as a bounded object, a travesty of the social and religious ideals offered in Acts 17. The Indian terms of kinship enter an alliance with a patron text, Wiebe's epilogue from Acts 17. Wiebe thus causes the discourse parodied by Morris to exert "a counterforce against the author's [Morris's] intentions" (1984, 198).

Wiebe further subverts Morris's speech by adding one crucial Biblical allusion to the pseudo-prophetic "I see" speech (quoted earlier). Whereas The Treaties of Canada

records Morris as saying "I see a broad road leading from there to the Red River...it is wide and plain trail" (Morris 231), Wiebe substitutes "I see a broad road leading from there to the Red River...a broad road" (28). Wiebe's alteration brings to bear a section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which warns specifically about moral pragmatism and false prophets:

Enter ye at the straight gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Matthew 7:13-15)

In the act of commending himself and the immense benefits of his civilization to the Indians, Morris unwittingly quotes the words of Jesus. Morris accidentally doubles the meaning of his own utterance, turning it into an inadvertent confession of moral culpability.

Big Bear, too, unwittingly echoes, paraphrases, and alludes to sections of the Bible, particularly in contexts infused with great pathos. Reading Big Bear's speeches, Eli Mandel hears "not so much Indian speech...but Biblical speech. I hear the cadences of the Bible, and a prophetic voice" (151-2). Each time Big Bear calls for peace, universal human kinship, and political equality between all individuals under the unmediated authority of the supreme deity,<sup>12</sup> his voice is valorized by Wiebe's epilogue from

Acts 17. Big Bear's moving address to the court after his trial, when it can make no legal difference, carries the voice of Jesus into the field of the text. Big Bear's "Forgive them, they are hungry and terrified, forgive them! Have you no children? (397) echoes Jesus' "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). While the Bible only undercuts Morris's moral authority, it consistently reinforces Big Bear's.<sup>13</sup>

### III

#### Syncretism

Wiebe's concern with voice manifests itself formally as well as thematically in the novel: the war in the West takes the form of a war between voices in the text. As in The Blue Mountains of China, the text serves as a field where utterances made at different times and in different places can enter into dialogue with each other. More important, the records of those utterances come together in the space of the text. Wiebe gathers documentary materials from archival institutions scattered across Canada and as far afield as New York, and puts them together between the covers of a single text in order to propagate new meanings.

The number and variety of voices and languages exceeds

that in any other of Wiebe's novels, as Wiebe explores further the artistic and rhetorical potential of the formal syncretism first used in The Blue Mountains of China. Whereas The Blue Mountains of China consists of thirteen sections, The Temptations of Big Bear consists of thirty. Each of its six chapters divides into four, five, or six parts, some of which contain a number of subsections, each dominated by a particular voice speaking a distinct social dialect. The whole resembles a mosaic of "voice-zones" (Bakhtin 1981, 434), "a conglomeration of heterogeneous linguistic and stylistic forms" (1981, 48) in which Western Canada speaks "in all its voices, in all the languages and styles of the era" (1981, 49).<sup>14</sup>

But at the same time as Wiebe adopts this dialogic form, he countervails its possible effect and consolidates power at the centre of authorial control. Despite the spectacular disintegration of the authorial voice, Wiebe devises measures to guard against any possible loss of semantic authority over the novel.

Although more voices speak in The Temptations of Big Bear than in any other of Wiebe's novels, Wiebe ranks these voices more clearly and less awkwardly than previously, guarding against the possibility that his readers may become morally disoriented amidst the welter of voices and

languages audible in the text. Like all Wiebe's novels, The Temptations of Big Bear contains two paradigmatic characters: a prophetic teacher-figure who conducts the Word of God into the text, and a protagonist who struggles to actualize the Word in his own concrete actions and utterances. Critics find fault with Wiebe's first three novels for his failure to flesh out his teacher-figures and his reluctance to subject their spiritual and moral doctrines to any rigorous testing. In The Temptations of Big Bear, however, Wiebe finally appeases the critics on this matter: teacher and protagonist combine in the figure of Big Bear, who, as the title of the novel suggests, must endure a series of gruelling spiritual, moral, and physical tests. And the sovereign Word, instead of entering the text only via the speech of a character, stands sentinel at the portal of the text in the form of an epigraph. As Coral Ann Howells points out, "the epigraph from Acts at the beginning offers us the key to the whole system of signification in the novel" (1982, 161).

Wiebe keeps the excerpt from Acts 17 outside the main body of the novel. He takes full responsibility for its presence. Moreover, he protects his sovereign discourse from any dangerous dialogizing forces which might lurk in the shadowy recesses of his text. Like all authoritative discourse, Wiebe's epigraph "remains sharply demarcated,

compact and inert" (Bakhtin 1981, 343). Wiebe "permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions, no spontaneously creative stylizing variants of it" (Bakhtin 1981, 343). By positioning the sovereign word outside the main body of the text, Wiebe holds carnivalizing forces firmly at bay.

In Canadian cultural life in the last third of the twentieth century, The Temptations of Big Bear ceremonially re-opens a debate ceremonially closed a century earlier. From the Government's point of view, the ceremony at Fort Pitt marks the closure of negotiations, the termination of equal dialogue between the Ottawa Government and the Indians. The treaty contains the Queen's "last words" (33). Wiebe, however, contradicts the official meaning of the "closing" ceremony at Fort Pitt by using it to "open" the action of an alternative voicing of history. Like Big Bear, who repeatedly stymies Governor Morris' attempts to close the ceremonial proceedings, Wiebe flouts the authorities' measures to repress dialogue. History does not fall naturally into separate epochs, although certain sections of society have a vested interest in promoting the myth that it does. It is a political strategy to proclaim that any struggle--whether physical or verbal--is over, or, by the same token, to insist that it continues. Wiebe's publication of The Temptations of Big Bear in 1973 testifies that the

contest between rival authoritative voices and hegemonic languages continues a hundred years after the date of their official closure.

#### IV

#### Great Dialogue

A highly mutable and at times contradictory political relationship exists between the author and the narrators in The Temptations of Big Bear, because Wiebe speaks in a dual voice as "half-brother and half-captor" (300) of the other voices which speak in the text. Bakhtin's description of Pushkin's Onegin offers a starting point for explaining the doubled "dialogic angle" of the authorial voice:

The author not only represents this language but is also in fact speaking in it.... All these languages, with all their direct expressive means at their disposal, themselves become the object of representation.... But at the same time these represented languages themselves do the work of representing to a significant degree. (Bakhtin 1981, 46-7)

Two degrees of linguistic objectification may co-exist within a single text. Like Pushkin, Wiebe directs his readers' attention to two distinct planes of referentiality: the world of non-verbal facts and the world of linguistic facts. On the one hand, The Temptations of Big Bear functions as a polyphonic historical narrative whose linguistic heterogeneity reflects the diversity of

experience on a threshold between cultures during a time of radical historical transition. On the other hand, the text functions as a monologic empire in which semantic authority resides with a single speaker.

Wiebe tells Big Bear's story assuming that few of his readers know much about the history of Western Canada.<sup>15</sup> He describes Big Bear as "almost totally unknown" (VL 154). Therefore, as Wiebe states in an outline of the novel, one of his authorial objectives must be to "make certain that the necessary historic facts are clear" (RWP 26.15.3). One of two main means by which Wiebe accomplishes this end is by transcribing (and pretending to transcribe) words spoken or written by "a representative white [who] helps us to see from his or her angle" (RWP 26.15.3).<sup>16</sup> In such instances, Wiebe must allow readers to look through the language of the narrating characters, as through a pane of transparent glass, at a world of historical facts hitherto unknown. Thus, in so far as Wiebe harnesses the voices of others as an expository device, he speaks rather than objectifies their language. The character's narration functions as "transparent" stylization, or in Bakhtin's terms, a "unidirectional double-voiced discourse, unobjectified discourse of a character who carries out (in part) the author's intentions" (Bakhtin 1984, 199).<sup>17</sup>



When Wiebe quotes (or pretends to quote) pre-existing utterances for purposes of exposition, he adopts an attitude of political passivity. He eschews the role of active creator of the text in order merely to transcribe other people's stories. Wiebe allows his narrating characters so great a degree of autonomy that if The Temptations of Big Bear purported to be a scholarly historical text, reviewers would say that the author had not assimilated his source materials sufficiently. "Why should I rewrite those documents, those diary entries?," he asks, "I don't need to reinvent them.... He [the previous speaker] has, once and for all, said it" (Neuman 237).

But as Robert Kroetsch observes in "Unearthing Language," Wiebe does rewrite the documents (Neuman 237). The primary utterances Wiebe employs play more than a single role in the text. On the non-verbal plane of reference, others' utterances function as a medium of exposition (a signifier); on the verbal plane of reference they function as the object of representation (a signified).<sup>18</sup> Wiebe gives voice to two authorial objectives throughout The Temptations of Big Bear: one voice delegates others to tell a story, a second voice makes a judgement on the speakers. Wiebe's dual orientation doubles the "dialogic angle" which defines the political relationship between his and the others' utterances. He subjects others' utterances to an

ambiguous or rapidly altering degree of objectification. Portions of the text straddle or oscillate rapidly back and forth across the borderline between parody and stylization as Wiebe realizes two distinct authorial objectives, one pulling with the original author's intention, another pulling against it.

From the foregoing analysis of Alexander Morris's "I see" speech, it is clear that Wiebe intends readers to view his language as a bounded object. However, a comparison of Wiebe's version of the speech with the version recorded in The Treaties of Canada confirms that on another level, Wiebe uses Morris to transmit a body of basic historical data to his readers. Wiebe literally speaks Morris's language, by adding details which make Morris's summary of historical events clearer, more concise and more comprehensive. For example, Wiebe changes "I met the Crees at Carlton" (Morris 232), to "I met the Salteaux at the North-west Angle, the Cree at Qu'Appelle, at Ellice, at Carlton" (28). Morris's "road" goes simply "by Pelly to Carlton" (Morris 231); Wiebe changes his source by adding "and on to here, Fort Pitt, and to Whitefish Lake and on into the far land of the Chipewyans" (28). These details argue that Wiebe not only objectifies Morris's primary utterance but also harnesses it as an expository device.

The Canadian Volunteer serves as a second example of the way Wiebe both objectifies and speaks the language of a narrating character. In this instance, a complication arises because the Volunteer, although at times parodied by Wiebe, does much of Wiebe's work as a parodist of other speech genres. The Volunteer lampoons newspaper reports, General Middleton's military text book, Fenimore Cooper's frontier romances, and the official historical record of events:

As the Indian held the position while the general retired, the creek and valley were promptly named "Stand Up Coulee." I have seen the official report as I have seen the place and I daresay General Strange defeated Big Bear--the enemy is always licked--but why then did the general retire eighteen miles to Fort Pitt? (315)

Near the end of the Volunteer's section, however, Wiebe "pulls rank," as it were, on the Volunteer and constitutes this narrator's speech as a concrete bounded object, a signified of authorial discourse. The Volunteer relates with relish the hunting and torturing of the Metis, Pierre Blondin. This anecdote finished, he sums up the entire campaign in language which shocks readers into understanding that (in contrast to Wiebe), the Volunteer finds the falsity of the records less lamentable than life's refusal to live up to them:

As a matter of fact, in three months of war I don't think the military all told actually finished more than thirty maybe thirty-five of the bastards, breeds and Indians put together. The official report says eighty-four, but you know what you can do with that. (328)

A third example of the speakers' dual roles points to

the importance of repetition in The Temptations of Big Bear. Edgar Dewdney's analysis of Big Bear and the overall historical situation guides readers towards an understanding of the story as a whole. In fact, critics have relied heavily on Dewdney's unofficial letter,<sup>19</sup> because he brings the ideological conflict into focus. He offers many valuable insights into the issues at stake, the strategies and interests of the various parties involved, Big Bear's character, and his historical and political significance. Dewdney's letter affords a clear, synoptic view, which comes as rather a relief after several chapters where one feels one cannot see the forest for the trees. However, Dewdney unwittingly repeats some facts which readers already know, for example, that the Indians are starving because the buffalo are dying out. At this point, Dewdney's language, hitherto a near-transparent medium, suddenly arrests attention and becomes Wiebe's main referential object. No longer oriented exclusively towards facts which lie outside the world of language, Dewdney's discourse enters into combative dialogue both with Big Bear and with Wiebe. Their voices struggle against one another to confer meaning on the Indians' starvation. Wiebe registers that Big Bear "began to hear children crying...he heard many children in the North crying" (92) with hunger. When Dewdney speaks on the same topic, what claims the reader's first attention is not the fact of starvation itself, but the manner in which Dewdney

describes it:

Our police and agents have worked very hard on the starvation and developed a workable system whereby they give out rations for one day only on alternate days, but you will note that the total cost is still very high especially when you buy from local suppliers. Indians are accustomed to an almost pure fresh meat diet and it is hard to imagine how debilitating flour and salt bacon are until you observe life in a begging camp. Debilitation is not of course all bad; for it checks their desire for fighting, but you might note the scrofula and death statistics.(111)

This quotation from Dewdney's unofficial report illustrates how vital a role repetition plays in the dynamic of Wiebe's text.<sup>20</sup> Whenever the narrative circles back on itself to repeat a fact offered previously, that fact becomes a site of dialogic struggle between the individuals who give it voice. Repetition, alternating with exposition of "new" facts causes the text (at first reading) to oscillate between a monologic and a polyphonic mode, as it shifts the reader's attention constantly back and forth between two planes of referentiality, one in the world of non-verbal facts, the other in the world of language.

The same principle comes into play whenever a narrating voice re-articulates some portion of the knowledge the reader brings to the text from outside. Therefore, on the second and subsequent readings of The Temptations of Big Bear, when the reader already knows all the basic historical data, the entire narrative works in the manner of Dewdney's repetition. Wiebe exploits the historicity of the reader's

process of understanding. He recognizes that people "live into" (115) an understanding of words and the world. Repeated readings of The Temptations of Big Bear shift attention more and more towards that plane of reference where language itself is the object of representation. Living into an understanding of The Temptations of Big Bear involves hearing Wiebe's judging voice growing progressively more dominant until it all but drowns out the story-teller's voice. The non-verbal plane of reference fades into the background. It comes to serve as a stage upon which the verbal-ideological struggle takes place. Wiebe views history as a battlefield where voices clash and vie to confer meaning on the past.

Repetition also transforms certain utterances into sites of dialogic struggle. One of Wiebe's favourite strategies in The Temptations of Big Bear is to repeat a word or a phrase in several different contexts to ring a number of changes on its meaning. For example, he repeats the term "the good Indian" several times, passing it from mouth to mouth. "The good Indian" first appears in Governor Morris's reply to Big Bear's foreboding of hanging: "The good Indian needed to fear no Indian law: the good Indian now needs to fear no Queen's law" (26). In case readers have not already heard the common saying "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," the Canadian volunteer brings that saying to

their attention. Coming across the corpse of an Indian warrior, the Canadian volunteer sardonically remarks "he is a good Indian now" (321). The Volunteer's utterance retroactively dialogizes Morris's: if "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," Morris agrees with the argument he intends to refute, for if only dead Indians are good, it follows that only dead Indians need not fear the Queen's law: Big Bear is therefore correct in thinking that all live Indians do need to fear the Queen's law. A third voice imparts another change to the meaning of "the good Indian." William McLean testifies at Big Bear's trial: "Well, some say that the dead Indians are the only good ones, but in his life I considered him [Big Bear] a good Indian" (370). McLean confers a moral meaning on the term "good," and in the process he captures the volunteer's utterance as a bounded object. Whereas Morris equated "good" with "tractable" and "law abiding," and the Canadian volunteer equated "good" with "dead," McLean employs the word "good" to refer to Big Bear's intelligence, his fair-mindedness, and his attempts to avert violence at Fort Pitt and Frog Lake. After McLean's statement in court, the text permits no further changes to the meaning of the term. As with the word "peace" in Peace Shall Destroy Many, and with "grace," "God," and "Christ" in First and Vital Candle, Wiebe redeems words which have fallen into profane colloquial speech genres. After letting "the good Indian" live a contingent

and semantically protean life in the text, Wiebe finally shepherds the term into an authentically Christian speech genre, and places "the good Indian" under semantic arrest.

The fate of "the good Indian" accurately reflects Wiebe's authorial priorities. Unlike his post-modernist contemporaries, who use repeated recontextualization to celebrate the infinite semantic openness and dialogicity of words,<sup>21</sup> Wiebe's repetitions work consistently in one particular direction, towards recovering or redeeming a suppressed Christian voice and meaning. That task accomplished, Wiebe closes off possibilities for future change. In The Temptations of Big Bear, as in The Blue Mountains of China, Wiebe exploits the historicity of words only to arrest their semantic evolution at another point; he activates polyphony with an ultimate aim of realizing a monologic rhetorical intent.

As an evangelical Christian, Wiebe attempts to establish an empire of God's word. Bakhtin's essay, "The Problem of Speech Genres," offers a starting point for examining Wiebe's imperialistic endeavour. Bakhtin's theory of primary and secondary speech genres creates an implicit analogy between novels and political empires: as imperialistic nations seize control of hitherto independent political states, novelists take possession of others'



utterances, and incorporate them into their texts.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, the appropriated primary utterances

lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others... They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole. (Bakhtin 1986, 62).

Wiebe embeds existing primary utterances of real people in his text, quoting newspaper reports, letters, Francis Dickens' diary, and Big Bear's Treaty document in the secondary utterance of his novel. As well as openly quoting, Wiebe silently incorporates the utterances of others into the text of The Temptations of Big Bear. He quotes source materials not acknowledged in the text as "other," for example, anthropological data from David Mendelbaum's The Plains Cree. In addition, Wiebe attributes certain utterances to others which he has actually written himself for example, Kitty MacLean's "journal." Whether quoted overtly, or tacitly, or fictitiously, these primary utterances become subject to Wiebe's authorial will as soon as he annexes them into the empire of his novel.

Wiebe describes the aims of his appropriations in his interview with Shirley Neuman and Robert Kroetsch:

INTERVIEWER: So this distrust [of official history] was part of the decision to drop literal, unaltered documents into The Temptations of Big Bear and Scorched-Wood People?

WIEBE: Yeah, I think once you have taken this angle, this attitude of telling the minority story, then you drop in the majority documents and see how stupid they

sound or what kinds of ironic changes you can ring on them. It's amazing how ironic it sometimes becomes. Especially when you know why Inspector Dickens was so laconic, for example. I mean, if he said three words more, he'd give himself away. His total incompetence, right? He has to be laconic. "Bad weather, travelled." It was like he was going on a trip to London.... I have a sense of trying to get at the truth of things--I think the truths of things can be gotten at still--by setting the diamond of the document in the artificial set of the fictive situation. The diamond shines so much more clearly, it shows its true nature. (Neuman 230, 237)<sup>23</sup>

Viewed in these terms, the "found" portions of Wiebe's novel fall into an overtly imperialistic category of discourse--parody. Wiebe's authorial will colonizes the real or fictional primary utterance, annexing it into the empire of his novel. This recontextualization releases meanings repressed by the original author and by the former context in which the utterance was heard. Others' utterances function as refracting media for Wiebe's moral judgements. As the narrating characters tell their respective stories, the reader (having been offered a moral touchstone in the epigraph) can see that the speakers unwittingly condemn or redeem themselves, precisely as they do on a second reading of The Blue Mountains of China. Wiebe objectifies the primary utterance of others, constitutes them as bounded objects within the field of his secondary utterance, the novel.

Wiebe's parodic strategies effectively subvert the hierarchy of voices whose genesis he recounts. The

Temptations of Big Bear depicts the rise to dominance of "white talk" in the Canadian West. Metonymically, Big Bear's demise makes concrete the insidious process whereby a proverbially "silent" people are deliberately silenced by the alien White race, who silence aspects of themselves in the process.<sup>24</sup> In 1876, Big Bear's prophetic voice is

a tremendous cry echoing over the valley, and again with the interpreter; as if again and again in any language the words of themselves would refuse to stop sounding. (23)

Nine years later, in 1885, Big Bear sits silent in a small room packed tight with the words of Protestant (Orange)

Anglo-Canada:

there was nothing but the inevitability of this frightful orangeness tightening, down on them, squeezing him with them into one indistinguishable, tiny squashed cube. (384)

Like the Mennonites in Peace Shall Destroy Many, the Cree, the Blackfeet, the Sioux, and other tribes all find themselves suddenly swept into the arena of British Imperial and United States history. In this new context, they feel trapped and marginalized in that larger story of the White Grandmother and the White Father, "those two who have divided everything that is between them" (102). Time-hallowed actions such as horse-stealing and scalping one's enemies, actions which formerly signified heroism and manhood, become crimes punishable by death. Without themselves changing, the Indians' actions and utterances become first semantically ambiguous and then entirely

translated, as the alien society progressively enforces its interpretations. "The Queen's voice" translates "good" Indians into "bad." "What has become of the First People?" (205) Big Bear asks his fellow chiefs at Carlton. The dramatic lapse into statistics immediately following Big Bear's great cry answers the question: the First People and their great words have been captured and transformed into mute objects of White knowledge. If they survive at all, they survive as political prisoners in the empire of "the Queen's voice" and of other forms of powerful "White talk."

Despite their charismatic power, Big Bear's words remain politically impotent because Whites control the rules of official dialogue. Whites decide on "the proper manner" (13) of presenting "just claims" (13); Whites decide whether evidence qualifies as admissible or inadmissible in court; Whites decide that Big Bear cannot speak in his own defence until after the jury has reached its verdict and the judge pronounced the sentence. Without the aid of communications technology and a relatively stable, highly institutionalized socio-political hierarchy, the Indians find themselves "under organized attack and individualistic defence" (308) in a war of words.

But a century later, Wiebe enlists the technology of print to practise the same appropriative strategies as the

agents of White imperialism he depicts, annexing others' words into the domain of his authorial control. "The Queen's voice" finds itself suddenly absorbed into a microcosmic imperial domain ruled by the Word of God, which releases Big Bear's words and actions from their imprisonment in various non-Christian and pseudo-Christian forms of "White talk." Although Wiebe subverts the hierarchy inaugurated by Anglo-Canada, he does not restore the usurped Native hierarchy of discourses. In The Temptations of Big Bear the authority and meaning of Big Bear's words depends no longer on the discourses of White law, anthropology, linguistics, history or commerce, and probably even less on "authentic" Indian religious discourse. De-colonizing only so that he may re-colonize, Wiebe interprets the meaning of Big Bear's life and words in relation to the values articulated in those portions of the Bible which are central to his own Mennonite belief.

In three short semi-fictional frame stories, "Where is the Voice Coming From?,"<sup>25</sup> "Bear Spirit in a Strange Land,"<sup>26</sup> and "On the Trail of Big Bear,"<sup>27</sup> Wiebe reveals that the enemy within the text stands for the enemy outside the text. Wiebe stresses that historians, and indeed all who speak and perform interpretive acts of any kind, occupy what Bakhtin would call the "chronotope" of history.<sup>28</sup> Big Bear and Wiebe live in the same story in which "unearthing"

follows in historical sequence after "burial." In all three stories, Wiebe emphasises that no interpreter is a merely passive spectator of history; all live in a world shaped by history, and must accept responsibility for their active participation in history. If Big Bear and his people seem voiceless in Canada's national political arena, their silence does not result from some single, finished, irreversible act of suppression confined to a past time, but from sustained, institutionalised silencing mechanisms operating in Wiebe's own historical present. To liberate the "larger meaning" of Big Bear's life from "beneath the giant slag left by the heroic white history" (VL 134), Wiebe must do battle with the same institutional and ideological forces as Big Bear fought against a century earlier.

"Where is the Voice Coming From?," "Bear Spirit in a Strange Land," and "On the Trail of Big Bear," document in semi-fictional form Wiebe's duels with the official twentieth century custodians of the past. As well as searching for the "larger meaning" of Big Bear's life in the suppressed other-voicedness of historical documents, Wiebe also seeks that meaning in other disciplines. For example, in "On the Trail of Big Bear", Wiebe lists Leonard Bloomfield, the linguist, as one of his sources (VL 138). Bloomfield's two major publications on the Cree language, Sacred Stories of the Sweetgrass Cree (1930) and Plains Cree

Texts (1934), preserve Cree stories not as sacred theological truths nor as authoritative historical information, but as a body of anthropological and linguistic data. Bloomfield preserves the Cree words themselves very carefully, but in doing so, he annuls their hegemonic power, changes radically their social functions, and subjects their meanings to an alien cultural context. From the Indians' point of view, the stories die on their journey across the border into White culture. Bloomfield kills them in the very act of rescuing them from extinction. When Wiebe reappropriates Bloomfield's desacralised "sacred stories," however, he does not try to recover their old "authentic" significance. Rather, he translates the "truth" about Big Bear out of one Eurocentric verbal-ideological system into another.<sup>29</sup> Wiebe scrapes the stories bare of Bloomfield's influence only in order to incorporate them into the another imperialistic form of "White talk." In The Temptations of Big Bear, no less than in Bloomfield's publications, the Cree sacred stories remain imprisoned. Wiebe accords them significance only in so far as he can harness their power to accomplish his own distinctively Mennonite authorial objectives.<sup>30</sup>

A similar principle applies in the case of Big Bear's sacred bundle, Chief's Son's Hand, the tanned bear's paw wrapped in many layers of cloth which Big Bear consults

whenever he needs divine guidance. In "Bear Spirit in a Strange Land," Wiebe recounts his arduous journey in search of this particular sacred object, which he finds housed, "naturally," in New York city, in the American Museum of Natural History. Wiebe describes the museum as a prison, replete with uniformed guards, barrier points, windowless rooms, artificial lighting and bad ventilation. Security is tight. Visiting hours are limited. Like inmates of a jail, the objects are identified by serial numbers instead of names. The objects are called whatever the museum says they are called. They now mean whatever the museum says they mean. The museum has translated "Chief's Son's Hand" into "50.2-3739 A-M"; Big Bear's "spirit gift" into "the Mendelbaum smaller stuff" (VL 146). And the museum naturalises the meanings it imposes by ritualising the visitor's approach to the objects, controlling perception and enforcing "proper" protocols of interpretation. The museum constructs a subject-position for the visitor to occupy. It declares journeys into otherness strictly taboo.

White and Cree rituals collide for a moment in Wiebe's mind, splitting his voice and dramatising the ambiguity of his relation to both Big Bear and Mendelbaum (the anthropologist who "ransacked [these] riches of prairie People" (VL 148)).<sup>31</sup> Wiebe speaks self-consciously as Big Bear's "half-brother and half-captor" (TBB 300). His voice



splits in two: one voice sharing Big Bear's belief in a Great Spirit--("the Great Spirit who big Bear, and I also, believe shaped the universe" (VL 148))--while another voice admits, "well, I'm no primitive; I can't defy classification" (VL 146). Polyphony resolves into hierarchy, however, as the story nears its end. Wiebe interprets Big Bear's life, and can empathise imaginatively with him, only from within a Mennonite belief system which places supreme value on each individual's direct personal contact with God. Wiebe dwells on the image of Chief's Son's Hand pressing on the back of Big Bear's neck because it makes concrete the idea that God "is not far from any of us" (Acts 17).

Unlike more traditional historical fiction which merely adds a human interest element to dominant contemporary historical mythology (or, as Muecke would put it, "celebrates the achievements of the powerful in the language of the powerful" [Benterrak et. al. 125]), Wiebe's historical fiction contradicts a number of historical and other "truths" which underpin social injustice in his own historical present. Through parody and "hidden polemic,"<sup>32</sup> The Temptations of Big Bear replies to twentieth century historians, linguists, anthropologists, and education authorities responsible for preserving and disseminating--or as the case may be, repressing--the past of what Wiebe can call "my place" (VL 134).

## V

Heteroglossia

By publishing sections of the documented past in The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe liberates the primary evidence from the dungeon of a single context. He removes the records from the confines of research libraries, museums, and archives where they have been cloistered for many years, safe from the ravages of time and too much public handling. In its thousands of copies, Wiebe's novel disseminates the documented past into a wider public domain, into bookstores, lending libraries and classrooms, where it may reach a more culturally diverse audience than the small band of scholars who usually act as official custodians of the past. The Temptations of Big Bear dialogizes history in that it abolishes "epic distance" (Bakhtin 1981, 14) by bringing the past into the zone of contact with the unfinished, open-ended present, where its meaning remains open to negotiation.

In "The Artist as a Critic and a Witness," Wiebe recognises that meaning comes into being through the interaction between a text and its readers, particularly in cases where an author stimulates "active" understanding.<sup>33</sup> Potentially, meaning can multiply in direct proportion to

the diversity of contexts in which a text is interpreted:

There is probably no such thing as one absolute, correct meaning to a work of art.... Its meaning depends on the interaction between the work of art and the beholder. This interaction may be very alive or almost nil, depending on such widely varying factors as the beholder's knowledge of the conventions used in that art.... Art's effect on you depends a good deal on your knowledge--or even on your digestion.... Among people of reasonably similar background and emotional outlook it will affect them the same way. (VL 40)

The furore which erupted in the Mennonite community over Peace Shall Destroy Many taught Wiebe how little an author can control his readers' responses, even when those readers belong to his own relatively homogeneous minority community. Wiebe tells Donald Cameron how very quickly he came to understand that texts take on a life of their own once they leave the presses and go out into the wider social world:

This book has nothing to do with you any more, man. A guy sitting and reading it in his own private living room, that book and him--that operates by itself. (Cameron 155)

Potentially, there could be as many interpretations of The Temptations of Big Bear as there are readers of the text, because, as Michael Holquist puts it, "all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup" (Bakhtin 1981, 428). Meaning comes into being partly through a process of "anacrisis,"<sup>34</sup> the dialogic engagement between voices inside with voices outside the text, both of which meet in the psyche of the reader.

Wiebe therefore faces a conflict of authorial interests. He wants to liberate the meaning of Big Bear's life from the monologic Anglo-Canadian historical tradition, that is, from the meaning imposed on it by official history. Yet because this dialogization serves only as a stage in a process whereby Wiebe re-integrates Big Bear's life into an alternative monologic order, Wiebe must deal with the question of misappropriation or wrong-reading of his own text. Wiebe puts new evidence about Big Bear's life before a jury made up of all who read the novel. He does not want the meaning of that evidence to splinter into a plurality of equally valid contextually determined readings.

The internal hybridization of the text exacerbates the danger of misinterpretation. When Wiebe appropriates others' utterances, he neither extinguishes the intentions of the original author nor surrenders entirely to them. (In fact, Wiebe's purpose is precisely to expose the intentions of those others.) So it is only by maintaining a plurality of in-tensions, a hybridization or double-voicedness in words, that Wiebe can "compel them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master" (Bakhtin 1981, 300). But if the intentions of other speakers remain active in the languages of the text, these languages retain the potential to resist Wiebe's authorial domination. Wiebe's appropriated voices

and languages do not submit passively to his control, for they are already "populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 300). In the cultural contexts in which they might normally sound, these primary utterances and speech genres may enjoy tremendous hegemonic potency; they may embody an enormous investment of political energy on the part of a powerful faction in society which encodes its ideology in that language. This power is precisely what makes these languages so useful to Wiebe, and precisely what makes them so recalcitrant, so capable of resisting his parodistic intent. If Wiebe's parodied languages already occupy a dominant position within the reader's psyche, they may strive to bypass Wiebe and speak directly to the reader, earning approval irrespective of Wiebe's intentions. Primary genres want to revert to their primary functions, and resist the mediations that result from their having been captured by the imperialistic secondary genre of the novel.<sup>35</sup>

To the extent that these primary utterances do break free from the centre of authorial control, to the extent that they address the reader directly, and cast off their secondary roles, unitary semantic order breaks down in the text, and meaning scatters chaotically in all directions. The breaking point, the point at which Wiebe's authorial "empire" disintegrates, depends in part on the pre-existing linguistic orientation of his readers. Meaning "in" texts

does not lie entirely within Wiebe's control, but is determined by the way in which readers "hear" and accord weight to the various languages of the text.

To curtail the potential heteroglossia of his text, Wiebe attempts to neutralise contextual diversity by constructing a fictional subject position for all readers to occupy. Wiebe writes into the novel a script for his readers to follow in their dialogic interaction with the text. To the extent that Wiebe dictates his readers' dialogue with the text, he transforms that dialogue effectively into a monologue, a product of a single authorial will.

Wiebe "grooms" his audience, teaches them how to play their proper part, by offering role-models in the form of Kitty McLean, Governor Morris, and Edgar Dewdney. These characters perform a vital function as reader- and listener-surrogates. Only "the right listener" (355) hears the soft laughter of Big Bear's ancestors at Old wives Lake. Only those fluent in sign language understand Big Bear's "fingers whirling under the jury's nose" (382). Only the right reader will return the desired verdict of "innocent" at Big Bear's posthumous twentieth century re-trial.

Kitty McLean alerts Wiebe's audience to the multiple layers of voices, accents and meanings in the text. Sitting

in the Regina Courtroom at Big Bear's trial, hearing the distant cranes as if through a curtain of closer sounds, and trying to see Big Bear through several layers of superimposed obstacles, Kitty's confusion raises the issues of visual focus and auditory attunement:

Kitty could hear cranes flying south, though she could not actually see them.... She could hear them perfectly; their squawky boom crossing between the gaps of words.... She found herself trying again and again to focus Big Bear through the outside edge of the judge's egg-shaped glasses.... Again and again she pondered the problem: what could anyone, even a judge, see looking through that.... She heard absolutely everything anyone said and the cranes too, for after his thundering laugh he talked to her. Silently, his hands moving... (381-2)

Like Sam Reimer in The Blue Mountains of China,<sup>36</sup> Kitty hears beyond the dominant foreground sounds in her immediate milieu. Kitty's attention jumps from one layer of sound to another, showing Wiebe's audience how to hear the "othervoicedness" of the text and read against the dominant pattern of accents in the language.

As well as acting as a device for standardising audience response, Kitty McLean, together with Alexander Morris and Edgar Dewdney, alerts readers to a particular signifying process common to all languages at all times in all cultures. Sherrill E. Grace has analysed Wiebe's prose in terms of Julia Kristeva's distinction between "symbolic" and "semiotic" linguistic functions, the former a systematic code ("language as nomination, sign and syntax" [qtd. in

Grace 10]), the latter a mode of communication intrinsic to the phenomenon of language, operating through "instinctual and pre-verbal drives manifest in rhythm and intonation, and 'anterior to naming'" (qtd. in Grace 10). If it is reasonable to deduce from these definitions that the symbolic function is culture-specific while the semiotic function approaches universality, then Wiebe's main reader-surrogates, mesmerized by the phenomenon of Big Bear's voice, function as devices directing attention to a universal "semiotic" signifying process, which unites Cree- and English-speakers, and runs as a common thread through all the diverse varieties of English in the novel.

In scenes where translation takes place, Wiebe invites readers to think of language as two separate modes of communication, one culture-specific, the other common to all. The translation process bifurcates language, doubles its voice as it were, allocating "sense" (the information conveyed by the symbolic function) to one speaker, and "sound" (the semiotic function) to another. Alexander Morris customarily listens to Indians by filtering out the Cree-speaking voice altogether, so as to hear the "sense" coded in English, (which is perhaps why "every Cree had sounded the same to the Governor" (19): they all sound like Peter Erasmus speaking English!) But when Big Bear speaks, Morris's orientation shifts. He finds himself mysteriously



compelled to listen to the sound of Big Bear's "unintelligible" Cree-speaking voice. The voice-phenomenon suddenly assumes more importance than the coded information the translator's voice transmits: Morris "found his head turning into blackness, slowly down the enormous strange depths of that incomprehensible voice" (19). Grace demonstrates that Wiebe subverts the symbolic process and enhances the semiotic in the thirst dance and buffalo hunt passages.<sup>37</sup> In passages such as these, the right reader, like Alexander Morris, encounters a language at once foreign and intelligible.<sup>38</sup>

Kitty, too, finds herself attuned exclusively to the semiotic level:

Where did those Cree sounds come from, I had never heard...were they words, they were, sounds...as if the high oration had melted into chant, or dirge...the old man stood with a wide black hole in the middle of his face and the sound coming out of there.

"What's he saying?" Papa's elbow prodded my knee. "What's that? Kitty!"

But there was only that sound turning in my head. Translate what? (287-88)

Kitty cannot translate Big Bear's words because they cease to function as words. Big Bear's voice activates a signifying process whose universality renders translation entirely redundant. Although Big Bear speaks a foreign language in one sense, he also speaks a language Wiebe implies is common to all humanity. Big Bear's language seems at once alien and comprehensible. Whenever translation

becomes unnecessary, impossible or irrelevant, Wiebe subtly directs the "right listener" to an area of common linguistic ground shared by all humanity. Wiebe stresses repeatedly that under certain conditions, there is no need for translation. Everybody already speaks the same language:

What he demanded was clear enough from his gestures" (249); "Papa understood quite enough without translation" (283); "It wasn't necessary to try and say words, his tone told me everything" (290); "They were each speaking in their own language...though each knew the other could recognise only an isolated word, and face to face...they understood each other's meanings very clearly indeed" (242).

Although the most conspicuous feature of the text of The Temptations of Big Bear is its spectacular diversity of languages, Wiebe uses reader-surrogates such as Kitty, Dewdney and Morris to point to a level of communication where all voices speak the same language. Against diversity, Wiebe weighs the idea that all humanity shares at least one common language, which transcends traditional us/them linguistic boundaries and therefore needs no translation. Wiebe's epilogue from Acts 17 emphasises the kinship of all humanity, and the sound-quality of Big Bear's voice, breaking through racial and linguistic and boundaries, confirms that vision of a united social world. The "right reader" hears in Big Bear's voice the sign of Big Bear's humanity. The urgency of that voice "would leap the entire man out at them stripped" (25). The semiotic function, furnishing proof of universal human kinship, compels readers

to attend to their common bond with--and thus their moral responsibility towards--the speaking "other."<sup>39</sup>

Wiebe's reader-surrogates work as a powerful monologizing tool which works both inside and outside the boundaries of the text. By drawing attention to the semiotic process common to all the languages constituting the text, they countervail its internal stylistic heterogeneity; and by helping to standardize audience response, they limit the external heteroglossia of the text in the social world.

## VI

Although The Temptations of Big Bear focuses ostensibly on a people far removed from the Mennonites, the issues Wiebe raises, the concepts he applies, and the moral criteria he brings to bear all derive directly from his Mennonite world-view. When Wiebe goes back to the primary records he finds Big Bear dialogized, and his actions interpreted by many conflicting voices.<sup>40</sup> But instead of transferring this dialogized Big Bear intact into the novel, Wiebe orders the voices in such a way as to rank the possible meanings of Big Bear's life into a hierarchy, presided over by the Word of God.

The story of the Indians' failure to fuse their polyphony into monovocality can be read as an allegorical restatement of Wiebe's warning in "For the Mennonite Churches: A Last Chance"<sup>41</sup>: like the Mennonites, the various tribes refuse to recognise shared religious belief as the only true foundation for social unity. They cannot put aside old quarrels and differences and see themselves as "a particular people from various nationalities bound together by a faith" (PDM 7).

Big Bear attracts Wiebe's interest because his actions at Frog Lake realize Wiebe's Mennonite ideal of pacifism. In an outline of The Temptations of Big Bear dated March 1, 1972, Wiebe explicitly defines Big Bear's heroism in terms of that ideal:

In contrast to Sitting Bull and Crowfoot, he [Big Bear] carried on a much more realistic campaign to protect his People from the whites than fighting; than fulsome surrender. His strategy of passive resistance has, in the 20th C. at least, proved the only truly viable one to bring about change in a democracy. [RWP 26.15.3]

Like all Wiebe's Mennonite protagonists, Big Bear must choose whether to listen to the voices of other men or to the voice of his God. When Big Bear refuses early in the novel<sup>42</sup> to be touched by the holy water of either Catholic or Methodist missionaries, and accepts only the rain that comes directly from the Only One, he articulates the Mennonite ideal of direct personal communication with God,

unhindered by any intervening social hierarchy.

The agents of Anglo-Canadian imperialism in The Temptations of Big Bear intervene between the Indians and their God. Prior to the coming of the Government, the Indians read signs of The Great Spirit's presence everywhere on the landscape. Like a sacred text, readable through the "quintuplet senses" (VL 132), the land tells the Indians "everything they needed to know" (TBB 77). Rain, sun, rivers, winds, and especially the black buffalo against the snow-covered prairie, stand like the writing of the Only One on a giant page. But this sacred text exists in a single, fragile copy. Whites write over the Great Spirit's signs with their houses, roads, fences, and surveyors' stakes. The rigid steel rails of the Canadian Pacific Railroad cut across the prairie landscape like a brutal slash across a carefully written page. By writing over the Indians' fragile sacred text, Whites intervene between the Indians and their God.<sup>43</sup>

Wiebe reiterates the idea of White intervention by having Governor Morris "cut off the sun" (17) which shines directly on Sweetgrass's face. John McDougall, on top of a hill, stands between the body of a dead warrior and the sky (48).<sup>44</sup> Leonard Bloomfield traps the Crees' "sacred stories" in linguistic and anthropological discourse. David

Mendelbaum imprisons Big Bear's Sacred Bundle in the American Museum of Natural History. The hangman's rope chokes the spiritual life of the Indians, who believed the soul resides along the nape of the neck. All these images have in common the element of White intervention between the Indians and their Great Spirit. Furthermore, George and John McDougall, Alexander Morris, and all the other characters who promote White imperialism in God's name, behave in a manner inimical to the Mennonite ideal of the separation between church and state.

Near the end of the novel, Wiebe uses Big Bear's baptism, accepted in a state of delirium, to strike an Anabaptist blow against the Catholic doctrine of salvation by the sacrament of baptism. Menno Simons held that "baptism on confession of faith alone was Scriptural" (Bender 8); the ritual itself does not ensure redemption, because it is only the outward symbol of the personal experience of salvation. Like the baptism of infants, Big Bear's baptism represents an empty travesty of true baptism. It does not signify an informed, voluntary, responsible decision to accept redemption from sin through Jesus' suffering.<sup>45</sup>

Critics and reviewers have in general overlooked these characteristically Mennonite elements in The Temptations of Big Bear. David L. Jeffrey articulates the prevailing view

when he says that by shifting his focus from Mennonites to Native Indians, Wiebe "progresses from the perspective of one subculture in the mosaic to another, as though by chapters toward one large anthologic Canadian novel" (199).

Jeffrey speaks as though Wiebe's "anthologic Canadian novel," would embody a polyphonic vision of nationhood, as though Wiebe's oeuvre granted equal validity to all Canadian voices. But as Bakhtin maintains, overt polyvocality offers no guarantee that an author repudiates a monologic conception of social order or metaphysical truth.<sup>46</sup> Close examination of the many varieties of utterance contained in The Temptations of Big Bear shows Wiebe ranking Canada's voices according to a single, entirely consistent set of Mennonite criteria.

Wiebe views the Canadian mosaic from a fixed perspective, as it were. Moreover, he never loses sight of the common geographical locus and the common humanity of Canada's heterogeneous society. When Wiebe shifts his focus from one sub-culture to another, he searches always for unacknowledged common languages and shared beliefs which might form the foundations of a common social identity. Even as Wiebe's attention shifts from one social group to another, even as his novels register an increasingly acute awareness of speech diversity, Wiebe continues to articulate

a monologic vision of the world.



NOTES TO CHAPTER 5: THE TEMPTATIONS OF BIG BEAR

1. One of Wiebe's sources is John McDougall's Opening the Great West (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1970).
2. In "On the Trail of Big Bear," Wiebe notes that "to Commissioner Irvine of the Mounted Police he is simply a troublemaker, always demanding and never agreeing" (VL 134).
3. See Coral Ann Howells, "History from a Different Angle: Narrative Strategies in The Temptations of Big Bear, Journal of Commonwealth Literature 17 (1982): 161-173, for an illuminating discussion of Wiebe's counterpointing of linear chronology and experiential time. Big Bear's memories and prophetic visions in particular extend the temporal scope of the narrative outside the twelve years between 1876 and 1888.
4. Unless otherwise indicated, parenthetical page references appearing in Chapter 5 refer to The Temptations of Big Bear (Toronto: McClland and Stewart, 1973).
5. Wiebe uses these words to describe his struggle to find Big Bear amongst the documentary records. See "On the Tail of Big Bear," A Voice in the Land, ed. W.J.Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981) 134.
6. Ceremonies differ from rituals in that they mark off one state of historical affairs from another. Rituals implicitly deny linear change by re-enacting a little slice of history over and over again. Because of their different perceptions of time, the Whites in The Temptations of Big Bear mostly hold ceremonies, while the Indians conduct rituals.
7. Cf. R.P.Bilan's claim that nothing much happens in the opening scene of The Temptations of Big Bear, in his review of The Scorched-Wood People, 172.
8. See The Dialogic Imagination, pp. 162-166 for Bakhtin's discussion of the functions of the rogue, the clown, and the fool.
9. Note Wiebe's use of the term "the voice," and his fusion of the Indians' Great Spirit with Jehovah.
10. At the same time, however, few readers would find it easy to ignore the glaring gap between Morris's idyllic vision and the harsh historical realities of life under the White regime. As Wiebe presents them, Morris's words provoke readers into understanding "actively" rather than

"passively," judging the truth-value of Morris's vision by testing it against their own knowledge of subsequent historical developments.

11. The less significant changes function only to add conciseness (for example, Wiebe substitutes "on this ground" (27) for Morris's "on this bright day with the sun above us" (231)); and to make the speech consistent with the new date and function which he assigns to it. According to Morris's record in The Treaties of Canada, the speech forms part of his opening address to the assembled Indian tribes at Fort Pitt of September 7, 1876. Wiebe shifts the speech to a date six days later. In The Temptations of Big Bear it comprises part of the closing ceremony of September 13, after all the chiefs but Big Bear have signed the treaty.

12. See examples on pages 23, 25, 29, 33, 146-7, 201, 396, and 398.

13. Since Morris also speaks in the name of God, Wiebe has in effect dialogized the Bible and countered Morris's Biblical canon with his own Mennonite hierarchy of Biblical passages. Wiebe dialogizes the Bible in a second sense by allowing Christian readers to hear it re-voiced in the words of Big Bear's defence-speech.

14. Bakhtin uses these words to describe Pushkin's Onegin.

15. See "On the Trail of Big Bear," where Wiebe expresses his anger over the omission of regional history from the school curriculum (VL 134).

16. The other means is to offer fact-and-figure summaries couched in direct authorial discourse, as in Chapters 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1

17. In Bakhtin's classifying system Type III.1.c (Bakhtin 1984, 199).

18. See Sherrill E. Grace, "Structuring Violence: the 'Ethics of Linguistics' in 'The Temptations of Big Bear,'" Canadian Literature 104 (Spring 1985): 7-23, which discusses the same phenomenon from three different theoretical perspectives.

19. See, for example, my own opening synopsis in the introductory section of this chapter; also Robert Lecker's emphasis on the line and circle images that pervade the text, in "Trusting the Quintuplet Senses: Time and Form in The Temptations of Big Bear," English Studies in Canada, 8 (Sept 82): 333-48.

20. See also Sherrill E. Grace's discussion of "narrative of contiguity" and "narrative of substitutions" in "Structuring Violence," pp. 9, 14.

21. Wiebe's remark to Robert Kroetsch in "Unearthing Language," reveals his attitude to post-modernist playfulness: "Bob, you're always horsing around with language! You tend to use it in ways in which it is not normally used. Which is all right, but at a certain point one gets confused and language is no longer useful in looking at the world" (Neuman 236).

22. Elsewhere, Bakhtin pushes his theory of secondary utterances further towards its logical conclusion, arguing that all language acquisition and use involves appropriation of other people's words. Every individual comes to consciousness in a world already aswam with other people's words, "words that are already populated with the social intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 300). To speak at all, one must therefore seize these alien words and make them one's own. Strictly speaking, each voice attempts to imperialise over the public language, to create a little empire with every utterance.

23. What Wiebe calls "irony," Bakhtin would call "hybridization" or "internal dialogization." Interestingly, Wiebe's term "the minority story," evades the question of which minority story he is telling in The Temptations of Big Bear. Wiebe liberates Big Bear's story only in so far as it permits him to articulate his Mennonite point of view. A second noteworthy detail in this speech is Wiebe's subtle shift from "truth" to "truths," which may be read as a parry of an anticipated attack by Kroetsch on his monologic vision.

24. In Chapter 4.2, where John Delaney makes love to Sits Green on the Earth, Wiebe dramatises a bursting out of the other suppressed in the White Anglo-Canadian protestant self: "saying anything, everything, letting pour out the words he refused to know coiled and squirmed deep inside him...which he had not even recognised all the three years they were ramming up in his throat before anyone who would have understood them, plugged much of him speechless" (231-2).

25. In Rudy Wiebe, Where Is the Voice Coming From? (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 135-43. Also published in Fourteen Stories High, eds. David Helwig and Tom Marshall (Ottawa: Oberon, 1971); The Narrative Voice, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); Personal

Fictions, ed. Michael Ondaatje (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Horizon: Writings of the Canadian Prairies, ed. Ken Mitchell (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Modern Stories in English, eds. W. H. New and H. J. Rosengarten (New York: Crowell, 1975); Fiction of Contemporary Canada, ed. George Bowering (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1980).

26. VL 143-49; also published as "All That's Left of Big Bear," Maclean's (September 1975).

27. VL 132-141; also published in Journal of Canadian Fiction, 3, 2 (1974): 45-8.

28. Bakhtin defines "chronotope" as "time space" (1981, 84).

29. Cf. Maria Campbell, who hypothesises that Wiebe did not write Big Bear's great speeches himself, but that the spirit of Big Bear possessed Wiebe and wrote them for him. See Mandel, 151.

30. This argument does not deny that similarities may exist between Wiebe's religious outlook and the Crees'. Wiebe's comments to Donald Cameron (quoted in Part II of the present chapter) highlight his sense of these similarities, as does Wiebe's image of "interlacing suns" (330) in The Temptations of Big Bear. Wiebe also draws attention to the homophonic identity of the "Sun" and the "Son," to suggest that on certain points the Christian belief-system overlaps that of the Cree.

31. Wiebe at times quotes Mendelbaum almost word for word: "The soul entered the body at birth and left at death. It resided along the nape of the neck" (Mendelbaum 158) cf. "The Cree believe that a person's soul comes to him at birth and resides along the back of the neck" (VL 148).

32. See Bakhtin 1984, 195-6 for a definition of "hidden polemic."

33. In W.J.Keith, A Voice in the Land, 39-47.

34. Bakhtin 1984, 110-111.

35. Arguably, this is what actually happened to The Temptations of Big Bear, when readers missed the Mennonite point of the story altogether. Having been published at a time when North American society was engaged in a massive enterprise to recoup the voices of its silent minorities, The Temptations of Big Bear was read as an effort to recover

the authentic Cree meaning of Big Bear's life. Such a reading bypasses the epigraph from Acts 17, which filters the meaning of Big Bear's life through a Biblical system of significances.

36. BMC 159.

37. See Grace 15-19.

38. Edgar Dewdney also draws attention to the semiotic function in his letter to Sir John A. Macdonald: "Big Bear's voice would be unbelievable in Parliament. The deep rich timbre of it alone, forget all sense (so rarely needed anyway) would devastate any opposition" (113).

39. Wiebe stresses the common humanity of Whites and Indians in his interview with Donald Cameron:

CAMERON: How do you write from the viewpoint of people whose whole view of the world is so different?...

WIEBE: It poses a lot of formal problems, but there are some human problems that it doesn't pose. We're so aware now of the particular problems of the Indians and their different world view that we forget that they're human beings. In every way that's important they are exactly the same as you and me" (Cameron 151).

40. See the many constructions of Big Bear listed by Wiebe in "On the Trail of Big Bear," VL 134.

41. Published in VL 25-31; also published in Christian Living 11/6 (June 1964), 26-28; The Mennonite 79 (28 July 1964), 467-69; revised and reprinted as "Last Chance for Mennonites?: We Must Leave our Middle Class Cultural Paradise and Strive for our Spiritual Heritage," in Canadian Mennonite 14/3 (18 Jan. 1966), 7. (Earlier version printed in VL.)

42. Page 23.

43. The front and back endpapers in the hardcover edition of The Temptations of Big Bear contain maps of the West in 1976 and 1888 respectively. The first map contains mainly natural, irregularly-shaped features--river, hills, lakes--a sparse scattering of place-names, and only one straight line: the border between Canada and the United States. Conspicuous on the second map are the black, squarish patches of the Indian reserves, a greater number of place-names and straight-line borders, and the ugly, suture-like path of the iron road. But in Big Bear's final vision of the future, "the Forks he recognized unchanged" (410). The land, like a giant palimpsest, still contains intelligible signs

of the Great Spirit for Wiebe to read.

44. Wiebe alters his source to add this idea of white intervention between the Cree and their god. In Opening the Great West, from which Wiebe takes this scene, John McDougall mentions only "standing beside the dead warrior" (38). Wiebe has McDougall "stand with one foot on either side of the dead warrior" (48).

45. Wiebe leaves no room for doubt that Big Bear retains his traditional religious beliefs. Moments before Big Bear lies down to die ("to finish the long prayer to The Only One that was his life" [414]), Horsechild hangs Chief's Son's Hand around his father's neck, and Big Bear "felt a warm weight against his soul.... Such happiness broke up in him" (415).

46. Bakhtin 1984, 182.

CHAPTER 6: THE SCORCHED-WOOD PEOPLEFreed into Certain Bondage

## I

In The Scorched-Wood People, Wiebe tells the story of the Métis leader Louis Riel and the so-called rebellions at Red River in 1869-70 and on the Saskatchewan in 1885. Wiebe's reconstruction of this well-known chapter in Western Canadian history is predicated on his belief that "the fundamental freedom of any people is neither political nor economic, it is spiritual" (VL 161). The Métis' struggle begins as a fight for political representation, economic autonomy, and land rights, but it ends as a crisis of religious faith.<sup>1</sup> Riel begins as a man of peace, a word-man rather than a bullet-man: "People have words; they don't have to kill each other!" (SWP 54).<sup>2</sup> But the lies and trickery of Sir John A. Macdonald, and the priests' refusal to intervene in political affairs, cause Riel to despair in the power of words to overcome the forces of oppression that besiege his people. "To those who will not listen to words," Riel declaims, "guns must speak" (225). But as Riel's prophetic vision of the peaceful, Edenic New Nation

crystallises more and more clearly,<sup>3</sup> Wiebe shows that Riel's "war of extermination" (228) contravenes the ideals of peace and love he struggles to realize. Nor does the Canadian Government escape Wiebe's vehement condemnation. Although purporting to conduct its affairs under the motto "God and my Right" (198), the judicial authorities show a flagrant disregard for the jury's request that Riel receive the mercy of the Crown.

Wiebe's manuscript notes show that he considered many alternative titles for this novel.<sup>4</sup> The one he selected derives from the French term "Bois-brûlés," the name the Métis first chose to identify themselves as a distinct community. A memorandum amongst Wiebe's manuscripts states that "'bois brûlé' is best translated as 'scorched wood' as, for example, the wood left standing after a forest fire."<sup>5</sup> As well as restoring the Métis' former name, the title of the novel carries broader connotations of survival and possible regeneration after apparent annihilation. Although the lost "rebellions" leave the Métis people "crushed" (328) economically and politically, Wiebe's story offers a historical foundation for rebuilding communal selfhood and spiritual life. The idea of renewal applies also to the process of understanding the past. Riel was found guilty of high treason and executed in 1885, but the historical process of discovering the meaning of "his body on the end



of that rope" (351) still continues. The Scorched-Wood People, Wiebe's most explicitly polemical novel, participates in the ongoing dialogic reinterpretation of history. Like The Temptations of Big Bear, The Scorched-Wood People re-opens a court case closed officially many years ago. Wiebe enlists readers to perform jury duty, and instructs them to judge Riel's and the Government's actions and words in the light of Mennonite morality, not Canadian law.

Wiebe departs in The Scorched-Wood People from the polyphonic narrative modes developed in his two previous novels, and adopts a form conventionally known as "dramatic monologue." The epigraph to the first edition of the novel, "And who has made this song?/ Who else but good Pierre Falcon,"<sup>6</sup> invites readers to imagine they hear the entire story from the mouth of a historically authentic Métis bard, Pierre Falcon. But while the epilogue formally classifies The Scorched-Wood People as dramatic monologue, Wiebe activates dialogizing forces in the text. Close analysis of the mutable, ambiguous relations between the voices of the author, the narrator, the protagonist, the other characters and the readers yields ample evidence to support Bakhtin's claim that "compositional forms in and of themselves do not yet resolve the question of discourse type" (1984, 193).

The dramatic monologue form does not in itself eliminate linguistic diversity from the novel. Although Wiebe's manner of marking the borderline between voice zones differs from that used in his two previous novels, the text of The Scorched-Wood People serves nonetheless as a meeting place for many voices. Wiebe organises the voices into a new configuration in The Scorched-Wood People, according to a principle of embedding rather than one of juxtaposition or syncrisis as used in The Blue Mountains of China and The Temptations of Big Bear. The text of The Scorched-Wood People resembles a Chinese box of voices within voices within voices. As a result of this practice of embedding, internal dialogization becomes more pervasive and more complex than in any of Wiebe's other novels. The intentions of two, three, four or five authors may come together within the arena of an utterance. The utterance itself thus becomes "metis," multi-accentual,<sup>7</sup> a site of social struggle, as several authorial wills compete to control its meaning. Within the space of the verbal sign, as in the geographical region of the North-West, disparate voices co-exist in a fluctuating state of harmony, forging and breaking alliances with one another, clashing and then making peace, precisely as do the inhabitants of Riel's "strange empire."<sup>8</sup>

This view of the text does not deny that the final thrust of The Scorched-Wood People is rhetorical and

monologic. It does, however, call into question the prevailing critical view that Wiebe uses Falcon and Riel simply and invariably as spokesmen for his own opinions.<sup>9</sup> W. J. Keith suggests there is a "coalescing of the viewpoints of author, narrator and protagonist" (1981a, 102). To a degree, this claim has validity. On some questions, the author, the narrator and the protagonist do speak in unison against common foes. As Sam Solecki argues, Wiebe aligns himself with Falcon and Riel with the aim of engaging in battle on two "contestational fronts" (5). The author, narrator and protagonist speak together as natives of Western Canada and as Christians, to voice a concerted challenge to the official, Ontario-centred, secular interpretation of the "Riel rebellions."<sup>10</sup>

However, such a reading underestimates the degree and significance of internal dialogization in The Scorched-Wood People; it fails to take full account of Wiebe's refractive, often circuitous manner of address. Wiebe, Falcon and Riel do not reach a consensus on every issue. On some questions their voices break apart and enter into conflict. Monologism breaks down further because Riel's voice, which dominates the text, splits into two: a thundering "Old Testament voice" and a gentler, more resigned "New Testament voice." Moreover, numerous voices, aside from Riel's, claim attention in The Scorched-Wood People, and the role of these

"minor" voices should not be underestimated. On the question of violence in particular, the embedded utterances of minor characters, alluding to passages from the New Testament, exert dialogic resistance against Riel's "Old Testament voice."

Clearly, although The Scorched-Wood People effects a shift from a polyphonic to a monologic narrative form, Wiebe eliminates neither speech diversity nor dialogue from the text. The dialogic elements in the novel reward detailed consideration not because they reverse the overall monologism of the text, but because leaving them out of account leads to a serious miscalculation of where Wiebe's authorial voice comes from.

## II

Two accentual systems co-exist in The Scorched-Wood People, sometimes reinforcing each other, at other times conflicting. Wiebe's practice of embedding each speaker's utterances within utterances of other speakers automatically ranks the voices into what might be called a compositional hierarchy. At the same time, Wiebe invokes a second criterion for ranking the voices in the text: those passages from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount which encode the

central tenets of Mennonite morality.

Wiebe's practice of embedding deserves detailed consideration, for it activates the first of these two accentual systems. The Scorched-Wood People consists of Wiebe's authorial utterance, which allegedly consists of Falcon's narration, which in turn contains the utterances of all the other characters including Riel, whose voice dominates the text and contains the utterances of numerous other characters. By using Pierre Falcon as narrator, and allowing Riel's voice to transmit the utterances of other characters, Wiebe adds extra tiers to the "great dialogue" (Bakhtin 1984, 71) between the author and the characters.<sup>11</sup>

On each of these levels, the framing utterance forms a context for the framed utterance. It mediates between the framed utterance and the reader, determining the reader's understanding and evaluation of the words reported. The framing utterance subordinates the framed utterance by exhibiting it as a reified, bounded object.<sup>12</sup> In principle, the voices lowest on the hierarchy enjoy the least political autonomy, because their words are colonized several times over by all the speakers who report their words. Therefore, the further removed a character stands from the author on the compositional hierarchy, the more compounded the hybridization of his or her discourse. Not two, but three or

more authors might express their separate intentions in these compositionally subordinate utterances.

At the top of the "great dialogue," this hierarchical power structure is clearly evident in Wiebe's political relationship with Falcon. Both literally and figuratively speaking, Wiebe dictates Falcon's monologue to make it serve Wiebe's own rhetorical and polemical purposes.<sup>13</sup> Wiebe postulates an audience which customarily sees Métis society from a distanced, external perspective, a perspective that precludes an empathetic understanding of their grievances. He therefore enlists Pierre Falcon, a member of the Métis community, to build a foundation for the reader's empathy. Falcon lends the story an "immediacy and credibility that only an individual--and, more specifically, a Métis--witness could provide (Keith 1981a, 98). He leads Wiebe's posited audience across the "untouchable divide of wilderness and blood" (11), to immerse them imaginatively in the Métis' world. Wiebe cannot provide Riel and the Métis with a jury of their peers, but he can compel readers to imagine how they themselves might react if confronted, like the Métis, with the duplicity of Sir John A. Macdonald, the discriminatory laws and policies of the Dominion government, and the fanatical inter-racial hatred and violence of Ontario's Orangemen. With Falcon's aid, Wiebe allows the jury of readers not only to know about "the

conditions...that necessitated our actions" (319), but also to feel with Riel and the Métis.

Wiebe's authorial intentions dominate Falcon's discourse to so great an extent that dramatic monologue lapses into direct authorial monologue.<sup>14</sup> When, as Keith observes, "Falcon's individual presence fades for pages at a time" (1981a, 99), the author takes over the narratorial function. Translating Keith's observation into the language of Bakhtin, one may say that Wiebe refrains from objectifying the voice of his narrator. Bakhtin's description of Turgenev's skaz proves equally applicable to Wiebe's minimal objectification of Falcon's voice in The Scorched-Wood People:

Both the narrated story and even pure skaz may lose all trace of conventionality and become direct authorial discourse, expressing without mediation the author's intention.... When introducing a narrator, Turgenev in most instances makes no attempt to stylize another person's distinctly individual and social manner of storytelling. The story...is narrated by an intelligent and literary man of Turgenev's own circle. Thus would Turgenev himself have spoken, and spoken of the most serious matters in his own life. There is no orientation here towards a socially foreign skaz tone, nor towards a socially foreign manner of seeing and conveying what is seen. There is also no orientation towards any individualistic manner. Turgenev's skaz signifies autonomously; there is one voice in it and this voice directly expresses the intention of the author. (1984, 191)

Customarily, dramatic monologue creates only the illusion that a single voice speaks;<sup>15</sup> in Wiebe's hands the illusion comes close to being a reality. In The Scorched-

Wood People, Wiebe's intentions so dominate Pierre Falcon's discourse that the narrator has very little language of his own. Wiebe identifies Falcon as socially alien in only one respect. Expletives such as "God be praised" (17), "by my sainted father" (31), and "God grant it" (277) remind readers of Falcon's Roman Catholicism. Except for these expletives, Falcon speaks a social dialect which does not differ markedly from Wiebe's own. A comparison of Falcon's voice with that of Frieda Friesen shows how little Wiebe attempts to reify either the social or the individual features of Falcon's voice. Falcon's English does not echo Métis French as Frieda's echoes Low German; nor, except very sporadically, does Wiebe impart to Falcon's story the "voiced" quality of skaz.<sup>16</sup> For the most part, Wiebe ushers his narrator onto the stage not by fashioning a particular narrative voice with a distinctive manner of speaking, but through overt narratorial self-referentiality: the use of first-person pronouns in narratorial utterance, Falcon's proffered thoughts, feelings, and his direct narratorial addresses to readers.

As Wiebe's intentions shape Falcon's utterance, Falcon, in turn, guides readers toward an understanding of Riel and of all the other characters whose speech he (Falcon) reports. To take full stock of the other voices and languages Falcon transmits, it is necessary to recognize



that Wiebe does not always maintain a sharp borderline between narratorial and reported speech. In direct speech, or compositionally marked dialogue, Wiebe uses clear typographical markers (inverted commas, italics, paragraph breaks, indentation) to indicate that the spoken or written words in question should be attributed to someone other than Falcon. Indirect speech, by contrast, always entails some interweaving and blending of the framing utterance with the reported utterance. Indirect speech may wander between loose paraphrase and near-verbatim quotation, and thus leave room for doubt as to which words belong to whom.<sup>17</sup> Moving further away again from direct speech, Wiebe uses a variety of "concealed" (Bakhtin 1981, 303) forms of quotation, paraphrase, and mimicry. In these instances, perception of speech diversity depends not on standard typographical and syntactic markers but rather on the sensitivity of readers to stylistic inconsistencies. If the concealed languages of others coagulate into compact, stylistically distinct blocks, the borderline between narratorial and embedded utterances remains relatively distinct.<sup>18</sup> The borderline becomes blurry and uncertain, however, whenever Wiebe scatters the words of others diffusely through Falcon's narratorial utterance--a word here, a phrase there, elsewhere a hinted allusion.<sup>19</sup> Wiebe also makes deliberate play with the barriers between reporting and reported utterance by having Pierre Falcon abruptly dissociate

himself from words offered initially as his own.<sup>20</sup>

Falcon's monologue, by framing and at times weaving itself into the utterances of the characters, can determine the reader's orientation towards them. Falcon's mediations separate the "good-guys" from the "bad-guys" in the story, according to whether they serve or thwart Riel and the Métis' political cause. For example, Falcon condemns

the so-called poet Charles Mair--anyone who tried to sing his verses while riding a horse would fall off in broken rhythm--who weekly sent long letters about how easy it was to make a fortune off the poor dunces at Red River to his Ontario brothers, who as regularly published them in the Toronto Globe. (26)

Amongst the "good guys," Falcon's most explicit and wholehearted endorsement goes to Dr. Augustus Jukes, who defends Riel against the charge of insanity. Falcon's mediations create a favourable framing context for Jukes' words, heightening their air of wisdom and their rhetorical force:

Poor fool; it was immoral to hang him; clearly he was mad. The necessity of hanging him was simply, clearly Sir John A.'s Conservative politics. You believe that? Many Canadians, even many Métis believe and will believe it; but I cannot. I agree with white-haired Dr. Augustus Jukes, senior surgeon of the North-West Mounted Police, that we are too likely to call men whose understanding of life goes counter to our usual opinion, insane. Sanity becomes then a mere matter of majority opinion, not a test of the wisdom of what is spoken. (330)<sup>21</sup>

One of Falcon's most important functions in the text is to "stage direct," or create the concrete physical settings

in which Riel makes his major speeches. His narratorial descriptions of the particular contextual circumstances surrounding Riel's utterances affect the reader's evaluation of them. Falcon frequently draws attention to Riel's charismatic spirituality, and declares his own faith in Riel's visionary powers. He urges readers not to dismiss Riel's prophetic utterances as the rantings of a madman or the vituperations of a political megalomaniac:

Let me tell you immediately, Louis Riel was a giant. If God had willed it, he could have ruled the world.

No, no, hear me out, and you will believe it too.

(36)

In statements such as this one, Falcon creates a favourable framing context for Riel's speech. At times, however, he opposes the protagonist, and so frames Riel's words in an less than flattering way. For example, Falcon's narratorial interjection in the following passage places Riel in the same category as Deacon Block in Peace Shall Destroy Many and Adam Ross in First and Vital Candle. The narratorial interjection warns readers against surrendering to Riel's impassioned, hate-filled rhetoric:

[Riel:] "O God my God, make me holy that I have the courage for glory, and for agony...for decision."

He was almost erect on his knees now, the prayer book held like a talisman or a sword, high in both hands before his eyes, his voice like thunder:

"Remember O Lord the children of Babylon in the day of Jerusalem; who cried, Raze it, raze it to the ground! O daughter of Babylon, who will be destroyed; happy she be he who rewards you as you have served us. Happy! Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the stones!" (187)

Through the varying mediations of the narrator, the author

expresses his ambivalent attitude toward the protagonist,<sup>22</sup> discriminating between the morally commendable and the morally reprehensible aspects of Riel's behaviour.

At one step further removed from the author, the chain of command remains intact in so far as Riel's intentions can colonize the words of other characters and influence the reader's orientation towards them. In the following passage, for example, Riel appropriates Bannatyne's word and forces it to serve his authorial will; Bannatyne thus speaks from a position at the very bottom of the compositional hierarchy:

"I trade with all who trade honestly with me,"  
 said Bannatyne.  
 [Riel:] "How 'honest' do they have to be to  
 trade...from that big powder magazine in your store?"  
 (42)

As this brief survey of each tier of the "great dialogue" demonstrates, the same pattern of dominance and subordination reproduces itself at every level in the text of The Scorched-Wood People. Wiebe's authorial intentions decide how readers hear Falcon's voice; Falcon's intentions, in turn, help determine the reader's orientation towards the words uttered by Riel and the other characters; and because Riel, too, incorporates others' words into his own speech, his intentions affect how readers interpret and evaluate them. Wiebe's practice of embedding ranks the voices into a compositional hierarchy, with each voice subject to the authorial will of the speaker situated immediately above. As

in an army, a chain of command extends between the many voices which speak in Wiebe's text.

### III

However, this "chain of command" does not always withstand the dialogizing forces Wiebe unleashes. Internal dialogization compounds itself in the text of The Scorched-Wood People. On each tier of the "great dialogue," competing authorial intentions struggle not only within reported utterance, but also within the words of the reporter. Wiebe frequently parodies the parodist, and colonizes the colonizer. He may release an embedded utterance from its imprisonment within the discourse of a reporter who tries to make it serve a new purpose. Wiebe thereby allows voices which play a minor compositional role in the text rise above their official station, and address readers more directly, by-passing the mediating influence of the appropriative voice which immediately contains it. No longer do readers encounter embedded utterances only as bounded objects in another character's speech. Despite their lowly place on the compositional hierarchy, Wiebe sometimes empowers the "minor" voices to demand an equal hearing. In short, the text re-enacts the political struggle it depicts: rebellion erupts on the page as in the historical North-West.

Vološinov offers the following description of how parodied discourse may exert a counterforce against the voice which attempts to appropriate its power:

The verbal dominant may shift to the reported speech, which in that case becomes more forceful and more active than the authorial context framing it. This time, the reported speech begins to resolve, as it were, the reporting context, instead of the other way around. The authorial context loses the greater objectivity it normally commands in comparison with reported speech. It begins to perceive itself--and even recognizes itself--as subjective, "other person's" speech. (121)

Surveying the text of The Scorched-Wood People for examples of counter-appropriations of the kind described by Vološinov, the first point to notice is that Falcon never seriously challenges Wiebe's authorial omnipotence, because Wiebe allows his narrator virtually no language of his own with which to articulate such a challenge.<sup>23</sup> However, the hierarchy does begin to crumble on the lower tiers of the great dialogue. Falcon is crowded out of the text as much by Riel's voice pushing up from "below" as by Wiebe's authorial intentions impinging from "above." Despite the fact that Riel's utterances are contained in Falcon's narratorial discourse, Riel frequently upstages Falcon.

Wiebe endorses Riel, for example, on the question of the priests' moral obligation to support the political cause of the Metis people. On this issue, author and protagonist band together against narrator. Falcon, despite his doubts,

continues to respect the church and the authority of the priests.<sup>24</sup> Wiebe therefore empowers Riel's voice to exert a "counterforce," to rise above its official rank in the compositional hierarchy, and play the dominant role in its dialogue with Falcon's narratorial voice:

In a moment he [Riel] faced André again, his eyes hard as diamonds shining while the wind rattled the house in long, shuddering gusts. Rain dashed over the roof again and again.

"...We are in great need now, much greater need than when a herd over the next ridge could save us. If you have nothing to do or say now but 'Obedience, quiet obedience'," he shrugged suddenly. "What good is the pope, vicar of God, if he doesn't know we exist?" (202)

The narratorial frame, which mentions the hardness in Riel's eyes and the rain and wind dashing on the roof, hints of something sinister in what Riel is about to say. However, Riel's voice harnesses the concerted powers of pathos, logic and rhetorical interrogation to compel readers to grant the validity of his argument. Falcon's subtle, understated warning carries far less dramatic force than Riel's words.

Wiebe's patronage of Riel may be explained by the fact that Riel's ideological position corresponds closely in several respects with Wiebe's Mennonite Brethren beliefs and values. Like Wiebe, Riel disapproves of alcohol. He repeatedly advocates peace and attempts to show love towards his enemies: "Help us find a way to be good to our enemies" (287). Like John Reimer in The Blue Mountains of China, Riel endeavours to create a revolution for social justice. He

strives (like the Mennonite Brethren)<sup>25</sup> against an ossified, over-institutionalised church: "What good is the pope, vicar of God, if he doesn't know we exist?" (202). Riel also gives voice to Wiebe's Mennonite belief in the continual renewal of God's word through direct dialogue between each individual and God:

"Only priests can speak for God," he [Riel] said bitterly. "And they always say what has always been said...they all say exactly the same old thing. Do you think God has had nothing new to say to anyone in two thousand years?" (180)

The priests' comprehension of God was bound by the Church, by the necessity of formula, but the revelation of those who dared believe took the believer far beyond that. (329)

In an interview with Brian Bergman, Wiebe highlights his agreement with Riel on the questions of social justice and the church's responsibilities towards the poor.

Responding to Bergman's observation that Riel turns against the Catholic church, Wiebe says,

Yes, and one of the interesting things is that he hits the Catholic church on exactly the same point that the Anabaptists did: that is, the church putting form and structure over and above justice to the poor--the kind of human justice that everyone should expect. So on the Saskatchewan in 1885 the priests are saying, in effect: to the Hudson's Bay Company, listen to the government--they know what's good for you. And Riel says: how can we listen, how can we go and worship in your Church when our people are starving at home and our children are cold; how can we do that? On the Saskatchewan in 1885 the Church just totally abdicates that responsibility for justice which is part of the whole Jesus message. Part of Jesus' message was that when he came to this earth he would proclaim freedom and justice for the poor of the world--that fits in well with what the Anabaptists were saying and I find that very intriguing." (Bergman 167)



It is vital to notice that Riel's voice may break out of its bondage within Falcon's narratorial utterance, but in doing so it only reiterates its subjection to Wiebe's authorial intentions. Like Gabriel Dumont, who finds himself "freed...completely into his most certain bondage" (224-5), Riel's voice shakes off the influence of its immediate superior in the text, only to act in closer accord with the will of a higher authority.

But this higher authority has a markedly ambivalent attitude towards Riel. Wiebe supports Riel's cause but cannot condone his lapses into physical violence. Wiebe therefore puts two distinct languages into the mouth of his protagonist: a language of peace and love which enjoys Wiebe's full authorial endorsement, and a language of hatred and violence against which Wiebe levels his condemnation. Riel can switch, for example, from

"O most holy Lord Jesus, strengthen my faith. Help me to love my people according to your mercy, which is beautiful beyond measure. Amen." (188)

to

"...give us hearts of steel, that our knives may find their bones; when they would tear our daughters from us, tear out their hearts, rot them in the sun of your wrath, let beasts swarm in the strings of their intestines...execute vengeance on the heathen, steel us in hatred, your divine and perfect hatred...." (226)

The duality of Riel's voice means that Wiebe's dialogic

angle to it cannot remain constant or unambiguous. In the two passages quoted above, Riel's two languages separate into stylistically distinct blocks, but on many occasions the two blend and interweave so closely that Wiebe's dialogic angle to Riel's voice must itself become doubled. Wiebe stylizes Riel's "New Testament voice," but parodies Riel's "Old Testament voice." Wiebe grants Riel's gentle "New Testament voice" sufficient opportunity to speak in self-defence; but in freeing Riel's thunderous, vengeful "Old Testament voice," Wiebe follows the lead of Judge Black, Chairman of the Métis National Committee, who "had decided to allow Riel to hang himself as effectively as his uncontrollable temper could manage" (65).

Wiebe's authorial intentions invade Riel's speech from four different directions. First, Wiebe works through the narratorial mediations of Pierre Falcon concealed "above" Riel on the compositional hierarchy. Second, Wiebe refracts his intentions through the voices of other characters whose speech Falcon transmits, characters who occupy the same level as Riel on the compositional hierarchy. Third, Wiebe enlists the minor voices of the text in a surprise attack from "below": the voices Riel appropriates, no less than Riel's voice, can rise above their lowly station, and command a degree of attention out of all proportion to their official rank on the compositional hierarchy. And fourth,

Wiebe uses strategies of anacrisis in the hope of refracting his authorial intentions through the reader's existing inner speech..

Many voices other than Riel's find a place within Pierre Falcon's narration. The compositional hierarchy ranks these voices as Riel's peers, but despite their equal status, they remain unobtrusive in comparison with the protagonist's voice which dominates--indeed at times monopolises--the text. A parallel thus exists between the prevalence of Riel's voice over its potential rivals in the text, and Riel's tendency to domineer over all other voices in the North-West. Riel proclaims that "the Provisional Government must represent all the people of Red River" (62), yet a tyrannical element in his personality compels him to shout down dissenting voices. Riel can say, on the one hand, "We people of the North-West demand, all of us together, our just rights!" (57); but on the other hand, he cannot tolerate those who do not to vote in favour of his proposals: "You can all go to the devil, we shall have a province! No matter how you traitors vote!" (64).<sup>26</sup> In his passionate desire to realize his prophetic vision of an Edenic New Nation, Riel violates the moral and social principles he struggles to attain. In particular, he contravenes the right of all individuals to act according to their conscience. Not surprisingly, since the free exercise

of individual conscience forms one of the cornerstones of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Wiebe proclaims his opposition to Riel on this point: Charles Nolin rises to his feet and shouts, "I was not sent here to vote at your direction! I vote according to my conscience" (64). Wiebe here refracts his voice through that of one of Riel's most dangerous adversaries, a "bad-guy" whose words the reader might initially be inclined to dismiss.

The execution of Tom Scott dramatises most explicitly Riel's tyrannical imposition of the word of God on the people of the North-West. Wiebe foregrounds the offensive qualities of Tom Scott's speech: "You call that a trial?...A jury of nothing but Pope ass-lickers, holy jes-ugh!" (81); "Jesus Christ Rev...I just escaped like any fucking prisoner will" (83); "That fart wouldn't dare shoot an Orangeman!" (84). But he also takes care to register that in the moments before being shot, as Tom Scott's "mouth found those solid words" (87) of the Lord's Prayer, ugly blasphemy transforms itself into sincere, desperate worship. But Riel has already given the order to exterminate Scott's dissenting voice.

Scott's execution for blasphemy--the official charge is "insubordination" (79)--prompts a chorus of predictable condemnatory remarks from Riel's political adversaries. Donald Smith argues that "To k--shoot him is the worst

possible political blunder" (85). Sir John A. Macdonald says with wry satisfaction "Now he's gone and shot a man" (88). Dr. John Christian Schultz rouses the wrath of Orange Ontario with "Tommy Scott was most foully and unnaturally murdered! Murdered!" (92). Although these three voices condemn Scott's execution for their own reprehensible reasons, their claims resist easy dismissal because they allude to Tom Scott's humanity and (albeit inadvertently) to God's commandment "Thou shalt not kill."

Wiebe refracts his most telling condemnation of Riel and his association with the Métis "bullet-men" through a drunken anonymous voice slurring tall stories-- "rumours" Falcon calls them--in the saloon:

If Riel was such a fucking Christian like he is always yelling, so kind and uniting everybody, always praying in the Cathedral over there with those nuns...why not let [Reverend] Young have it [Scott's body] to send to Ontario so his mother could bury it proper? Why not?.... They'd never let anybody see what they done to him before they finally got the poor bugger ki--

Elzéar Goulet and Gabriel Dumont were at the doorway, coming in, and the evening darkness behind them pushed them up perhaps a little larger than they really were, although they both were large enough even in ordinary light. The whole room was floating with silence; as if a big hand had wiped over all the men and not one could remember the word just taken out of his mouth. (90)

Through a social dialect far removed from his own (and thus constituted as a bounded object in the text) Wiebe gives voice to the moral contradiction implicit in Riel's practice of killing his way towards a peaceful, Christian utopia.

Falcon's discourse then takes over to point out that the Métis giants, Goulet and Dumont, intimidate the non-Métis community into not applying the word "kill" to Riel's execution of Tom Scott. At the same time as he dramatizes the Métis' repression of the word "kill," Wiebe gives this word a special resonance in the text. Goulet and Dumont refuse to allow the word "kill" to sound within their hearing, but Wiebe's intention is precisely the opposite. He wants his readers to hear "kill" loud and clear. By repeatedly curtailing the word "kill," Wiebe places the accent squarely upon it.

Moreover, curtailment is a strategy of anacrisis. The reader must add the crucial missing phoneme to "ki--" before the sense of the passage becomes at all clear. Instead of condemning Riel's "execution" of Tom Scott directly and explicitly, Wiebe enlists the voice of the reader to do it for him.

Wiebe also opposes Riel by enlisting the aid of voices Riel has captured parodically in his utterances. These lowly voices, appropriated several times over, occupy the most subordinate position on the compositional hierarchy. Theoretically, their words bear the stamp of several authorial wills: the speaker's, Riel's, Falcon's and Wiebe's. Despite the vertical distance which separates them

from the highest seat of authorial control, Wiebe can empower these lowly voices to break out of their imprisonment within Riel's "Old Testament voice." Like Riel's voice in relation to Falcon's, these subordinate voices can exert a counterforce against the voices which attempt to appropriate them.<sup>27</sup> Wiebe can accomplish such a release because the lowly voices bring another voice into the text, the voice of the highest authority known to Wiebe:

[1]"And the Church of course must control everything," [2] said Riel. It was early afternoon but the light in the small church was turning grey, almost sinister. [3] "Dear children, be obedient. Be simple and content with anything on earth, because God will give you perfect happiness in heaven. If the company pays you ten cents for a ratskin and later sells it for a dollar, don't complain. Your reward is in heaven. When speculators get you drunk and take your land scrip for ten dollars, don't beat them up when you're sober. Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord, perhaps on earth but more likely in hell, that's where I'll really repay those with their bellies so tight full on earth every day. [4] I've heard it all that Father, and I hate it." (201)

Riel's voice speaks "alone"<sup>28</sup> in Section 4, while in Sections 1 and 3, he parodically revoices the words of the priests. Wiebe empowers Riel to parody the priests' words in Section 1, but in Section 3, the relation between the voices becomes extremely complicated and ambiguous. Riel revoices the priests' words which in turn revoice the words of another: Jesus. The priests draw their argument from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. (Section 3 ranges between loose paraphrase and direct verbatim quotation of Matthew 5:3-

12).<sup>29</sup> But the priests invoke the power of Jesus' words for an illegitimate reason, to defend their own hold over the people. Wiebe endorses Riel's parody of the priests' parody of Jesus' words, because he agrees with Riel's belief that the church should show more concern for the poor than for the preservation of its own power.<sup>30</sup> However, Wiebe does not entirely reject the priests' argument. He supports the priests in so far as they resist any violent action. Falcon warns in Section 2 of something amiss in Riel's speech, and as Riel speaks in Section 3, his voice becomes progressively more bitter and angry, culminating in the pure hatred of Section 4. An element of parody creeps into Wiebe's handling of Riel's utterance. Since Wiebe intensifies this parodic effect in proportion to the dominance of Riel's "Old Testament voice," Wiebe does not allow Riel to succeed entirely in vanquishing the priests' words. In this passage, Wiebe gives his wholehearted support neither to Riel nor to the priests, but only to the words of Jesus subordinated in their utterances. Like Thom Wiens in Peace Shall Destroy Many, who wants to scrape Jesus' words bare of their "acquired meanings" (PDM 237), Wiebe searches through the layers of historically conditioned human voices, to find "God's revelation" (PDM 237) concealed permanently at the heart of the words.

By bringing Jesus' words into the fray, Wiebe refers



the moral issues in question to the highest authority he recognises as a Mennonite. By this capitulation, Wiebe turns the compositional hierarchy of the text upside down. He allows Jesus' voice, the lowliest voice, to inherit the text as it were, to decide the meaning and authority of all the utterances which, in compositional terms, dominate the text.

#### IV

The unwieldiness of any thorough analysis of relations between the voices which speak in the text provides an index of the complexity of Wiebe's narrative technique in The Scorched-Wood People. Close analysis of the text reveals a degree of internal dialogization unparalleled in any of Wiebe's other works, a shifting, labyrinthine pattern of refractions of the authorial voice. The prevailing notion that Riel functions consistently and exclusively as a mouthpiece for the author leaves these complexities entirely out of account. Wiebe articulates a highly ambivalent attitude towards Riel, and toward the other characters who participate in the struggle to possess the North-West.

Wiebe calls into question the clear borderline separating allies from enemies in The Scorched-Wood People. The Métis experience of ambivalence, divided loyalties and

racial plurality functions metonymically to dramatize a universal plight. No-one in the text, no matter what his or her racial heritage, has a unitary social identity. John Christian Schultz, inflamer of Orange Ontario, is a Roman Catholic, like Riel. Sir John A. Macdonald, like Riel, is a Conservative. Riel's Quebec Liberal "friends" threaten to discredit his prophetic witness altogether. Wiebe dramatizes the continuous materialization and dissolution of walls and party lines as allegiances shift and evolve over time. Having modelled a world where battlefronts multiply and intersect, and where friends cannot wholly be differentiated from foes, it is hardly surprising to find Wiebe articulating an ambivalent attitude towards his protagonist and all the other members of the dramatis personae.

Wiebe's cautious, careful, discriminatory approach to Riel brings to mind a remark he made to Donald Cameron:

the ones that one would think closest...are the ones most to be mistrusted...because they will most easily lead you astray, you know--on important points, always.  
(147-8)

Wiebe treats Riel with extreme caution because he shares so many of Riel's values and beliefs. He enlists Riel's support to fight opponents on the two "contestational fronts" (5) identified by Solecki, but on a third front Wiebe struggles against his protagonist. Whenever Riel strives to gain social justice, Wiebe endorses his political cause; but when Riel succumbs to the temptation of violence,

Wiebe treats him as an adversary.

Interesting parallels exist between the North-West rebellion and the historical circumstances surrounding the birth of the Mennonite Church. During the Reformation, the early Mennonite Church defined itself expressly against the ossified, hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic church, against Luther's militaristic alliance of church and state, and most particularly against the violent methods espoused by certain radical factions within the Anabaptist movement. Riel's "fight for the love of God" (219) bears a remarkable resemblance to the bloody campaigns organised by the charismatic Anabaptist leaders of the Muensterite and the Davidian sects. These men of vision tried, like Riel, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, but were defeated by military forces marshalled by the state.<sup>31</sup>

The Scorched-Wood People may be read as a parable against violence. Wiebe provides many images of violence turning against its perpetrators. In the opening chapter, McDougall's driver reaches for a rifle concealed amongst furs, but inadvertently aims the weapon at himself: "he had come up at the wrong end! He was clutching the barrel" (16). At Duck Lake, Crozier's men accidentally load the ball before the powder, causing the cannon to backfire (238). These images corroborate Kenneth Hoepfner's contention that

Wiebe disagrees with the idea that the Métis nation failed in its struggle with the Canadian government because Riel's mission interfered with their adopting the best military strategy. The Métis failed to become a permanent new nation because they became militarily engaged with Macdonald's government. (442)

The vignette of Annie Dumont and her two suitors, Patrice Tourond and Napoléon Nault, indicates how the contenders for the North-West might otherwise have behaved. On the eve of the Battle of Batoche, as the "son[s] of Ontario" (92) and the sons of the North-West prepare to kill each other (unmindful that they are also sons of a God who loves them all) Annie lies between her two suitors and tells them, "I love you both and you've been so good, both of you, always considerate and gentle and not fighting" (290). The patience and restraint of Patrice and Napoléon provide a moral standard against which to measure the behaviour of those who contend for control over the North-West. This vignette also offers an suggestive image of dialogized utterance: Annie, concealed in darkness, speaks to "each of them and together as if they were only two people alone in the world" (290).

Annie Dumont speaks to her two lovers as Wiebe imagines God speaks to humankind. Her words become dialogized as soon as they leave her mouth and lodge themselves in the separate psyches of her addressees. The contestants in the North-West Rebellion all claim they fight in defence of the Word of

God, yet each group hears the Word very differently. More often than not, they appropriate God's Word to legitimise greed and oppression. Wiebe denounces the intolerance and hypocrisy of a nation which calls itself Christian yet equates prophetic communication with insanity:

When Jukes was asked during the trial, "If it could be proved that a man is labouring under an insane delusion that he is in direct communication with the Holy Ghost (I would ask, why should that be an insane delusion? Cannot the Holy Ghost communicate, directly, to whomsoever he--it--wishes?), would he be responsible for that act?", he replied,

"Men have held very strange, remarkable views on religion and have been declared insane until they gathered great numbers of followers and became leaders of a new sect and then, suddenly, they were great prophets and great men. Take Muhammed, for instance. Few believed him, most thought him mad, but he carried out his belief at the point of the sword and so convinced half the world of that which, if he had failed, would have been considered simply a delusion of the mind. Is this direct fraud, honest delusion, organizational power, or truly guidance from the divine? I would not be qualified to say." (330)

Jukes' words have ramifications which extend far beyond the question of Louis Riel's sanity. They bring into focus a question central to Wiebe's entire oeuvre: do religious doctrines gain ascendancy as a result of their absolute, innate truth-value or because tyrannical, imperialistic individuals and groups seize control of the course of history and impose their beliefs violently upon others? Augustus Jukes' words implicitly concede to the historicity of all human perceptions of absolute truth. This concession does not necessarily deny that absolute, monologic truth exists; but it does say that humankind can only gain access

to such truth dialogically, that is, as it manifests itself in the contingent, multi-voiced world of historical actuality.

Jukes' presentation of the problem of the historicity of absolute truth offers a possible key to one of the most puzzling aspects of Wiebe's narrative technique in The Scorched-Wood People. Wiebe shifts his narrator up and down from ground-level to an elevated position of post-historical omniscience, even to the extent of permitting him to speak posthumously. As Falcon shifts between these two positions, one a correlative of dialogic vision, the other of monologism, Wiebe holds the two in a tense balance, as if at once accepting and denying the historicity of all human perceptions of truth. Falcon's immersion in the Metis life-world acknowledges the cultural and historical relativity of all human truths. When Falcon speaks from ground-level, Wiebe implicitly concedes that human constructions of meaning are always provisional, products of ongoing historical processes of social struggle and communal discovery. Through the posthumous, extra-historical voice of Falcon, Wiebe can imaginatively transcend the perceptual limitations of all who remain bound within the contingent historical world, where truth can only be discovered dialogically. Falcon's post-historical omniscience, his view from "beyond the grave" (184) works rhetorically to de-

historicize, and hence authorize, truths which Wiebe believes to be the absolute.

Falcon's dual narratorial position implies that absolute Truth exists, but until the moment of death and revelation, human perceptions of that truth must remain provisional and contingent on historical and cultural circumstances. In The Scorched-Wood People, Wiebe already perceives the gap between Truth and human knowledge which he will investigate further in My Lovely Enemy.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6: THE SCORCHED-WOOD PEOPLE

1. Wayne A. Tefs, in "Rudy Wiebe: Mystery and Reality," Mosaic XI/4: 155-58, objects to Wiebe's Christian colonization of Native Indian and Métis historical experience. He argues that in The Scorched-Wood People, Wiebe supplies a religious answer to what is essentially a political question: "casting their plight in spiritual germs [sic] blurs the origins of their dilemmas" (158). Tefs' argument overlooks or perhaps rejects one of the main points Wiebe tries to make in The Scorched-Wood People: that God is the ultimate author of history and all the questions and dilemmas, political or otherwise, which confront humankind. Tefs comes perilously close to adopting the same position as Father André who claims "you cannot mix religion and politics" (201). Riel's reply to André parries Tefs' critical objection in advance: "If we are whole people, we mix everything we are" (201). In The Scorched-Wood People, as in all his other novels, Wiebe dramatizes the hypocrisy which arises when people confine spiritual life to a separate compartment within the psyche, isolated from and irrelevant to all other aspects of human experience.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all further page references appearing parenthetically in Chapter 6 refer The Scorched-Wood People (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

3. Thomas Flanagan, one of Wiebe's major sources for The Scorched-Wood People, offers an explanation of the word "prophet" which appears to have influenced Wiebe's treatment of Riel:

Today, in common parlance, prophecy has become confounded with prognostication; but in origin the two are distinct. A prophet is primarily one who speaks from the living inspiration of God.... Now the prophet may incidentally tell the future, but his main concern is to reveal God's will to mankind. The prophet...should be carefully distinguished from the priest. A priest is an official, a functionary, who owes his position to the organisation which he serves. A prophet is extra-institutional; he has the authority of divine charisma manifested in his holy life, his visions and revelations, his ability to work miracles. "Louis Riel: Insanity and Prophecy," ts. RWP 41.6D, p.7.

4. Wiebe lists the following possible titles for the novel: Aliens, The Sixteen Years War, Founder of Manitoba, Riel and Gabriel, Troubles on the Saskatchewan, A World Destroyed, Nation of Burnt Wood, The Burnt Wood People of the Plains,



Burnt Wood Nation, Scorched Wood, People to Burn, Singed Wood People, President of Manitoba, Second Coming, and Gabriel's Army. RWP 39.6, 39.8, 41.11.

5. RWP 39.6.

6. This epigraph was omitted from the New Canadian Library Edition of The Scorched-Wood People.

7. See Vološinov 23 for further discussion of "multiaccentuality" in the utterance.

8. One of Wiebe's sources for The Scorched-Wood People is Joseph Kinsey Howard's Strange Empire: Narrative of the North-West (New York: Morrow, 1952).

9. Reviewers and critics of the novel usually assume Wiebe and Riel speak as one; see Sam Solecki, Review of The Scorched-Wood People, in VL 174-178; "Giant Fictions and Large Meanings: The Novels of Rudy Wiebe," Canadian Forum, 60 (March 1981), 5-8, 13; and W. J. Keith 1981a, 82-104.

10. Solecki explains that

to write sympathetically about Riel and the Métis is, in effect, to challenge directly the Innis-Creighton thesis with its favourable view of the inevitability of the Eastern (Ontario-Quebec) economic and cultural imperative in the West. In this interpretation of Canadian history Macdonald's policies, including his vision of the CPR as the necessary extension of the St. Lawrence, are seen positively as creating a physically, economically and legally unified Canada. From this more or less official viewpoint, to be for Riel and the Métis is to be not only against Macdonald but also against that vision of a federally unified Canada which he was instrumental in implementing and which is still ideologically dominant today. (VL 174)

11. See Gérard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), Chapter 5, for an alternative system of terms for describing embedded utterances.

12. In her Preface to Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Caryl Emerson states that "[Bakhtin] understands that the frame is always in the power of the framer, and that there is an outrageous privilege in the power to cite others" (xxxvii).

13. Strictly speaking, Wiebe's rhetorical and polemical strategies form part of one authorial endeavour, because the targets of Wiebe's polemic manifest their hegemony only in so far as they comprise part of the "inner speech" of Wiebe's posited reader. In other words, Wiebe attacks not the dominant historiography itself, but the reader's belief in its truth-value. See V. N. Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, Chapter 3, for a discussion of "inner speech."

14. Falcon's dramatic monologue corresponds to Type III.1.b in Bakhtin's classificatory system, but lapses into Type 1.

15. Bakhtin might argue that the term "dramatic monologue" is deceptive, for this "monologue" is always double-voiced discourse, unidirectional or varidirectional, stylising or parodic, depending on whether or not the author's objectives reinforce or oppose those of the narrator.

16. See Bakhtin 1984, 191 for a definition of "skaz."

17. The following quotation exemplifies indirect speech and the possibilities for blurring or sharpening borders between narratorial and reported utterance:

[1] The hall rang with clapping, and Gabriel had the satisfaction of getting a hand on Richard Deacon who suddenly stood up in the middle of the crowd, waving his fist and yelling that [2] Riel was nothing but a killer, that he personally had marched to Red river in '70 with Wolseley to--[3] and heaving him bodily out the door. (198)

Falcon speaks in Sections [1] and [3], while Deacon's voice occupies Section [2] blended with linguistic elements which reflect Falcon's point of view.

18. For example, in the following quotation Falcon's narratorial discourse flows smoothly into an imitation or unmarked quotation of the language of Wolseley's men:

Toward evening they [Wolseley's soldiers] tried burning an effigy again but there was no anticipation in it; the flames at its sodden trousers frizzled into smoke. They'd got the job done and what a shit of a job of bull work walking and walking it had been. Was there nothing to drink, no fucking women? (123)

19. For example, Falcon persists in using the term "rebellion" in his own speech, without marking it as another's word, even though he draws explicit attention to the flawed logic behind the charges laid against Riel:

So the blame for the rebellion could be placed on Riel....He must be totally to blame, for everything; for purposes of his trial the shooting was blatant, open rebellion.... The lost rebellion of course quite destroyed our people. (316, 328)

Does Falcon here quote another's word in a consciously parodic manner? Or does he speak the word himself and hence claim it in some measure as his own? Or does he use the word to refer to a rebellion against God rather than against the Canadian Government?

20. Twice in the following passage, for example, Wiebe makes a barrier between Falcon's words and those of another, where no wall initially divided the two:

The way of the cross was humiliation; the prophet must die to reveal his ultimate vision, and this conviction transfigured Riel's understanding of himself...

Poor fool; it was immoral to hang him; clearly he was mad. the necessity of hanging him was simply, clearly Sir John A's Conservative politics. You believe that? Many Canadians, and even many Métis believe and will believe it; but I cannot. (33)

21. Wiebe draws Jukes' diagnosis from Thomas Flanagan, "Louis Riel: Insanity and Prophecy": "Madness is...a term used to describe individuals who depart from the social consensus about what is reasonable.... Madness is relative to the prevailing network of assumptions about reality which characterizes a specific society at a certain time. Madness is a social fact..not a neutral term. It is used with the purpose of controlling other humans.... Since the imputation of madness is a means of social control, it follows that it cannot be discussed apart from questions such as who is called mad and who does the calling, who gains and who loses" RWP 41.6D, p.2-3). See also Hoepfner 444, 450, n.17, for additional information on Wiebe's use of Flanagan's materials.

22. To illustrate more clearly the political relationship between reporting and reported utterance, this statement assumes for the present that Wiebe and Falcon share the same attitude towards Riel. The possibility that their attitudes differ will be discussed later.

23. Cf. W.J.Keith: "By the end of the novel...Falcon has persuaded (or come close to persuading) the reader and, one is tempted to add, the author [that Riel could have ruled the world].... When Falcon speaks 'from beyond the grave' (184) as an authoritative, omniscient narrator, he has taken

over the function of the novelist" (1981a, 101).

24. See p. 284 for Falcon's testimony of his continued faith in the church.

25. See Appendix.

26. Note also the contrast between the broad, all embracing scope of Riel's "we" on page 57, and the narrowness of "we" on page 65, when Riel loses his temper at the council meeting.

27. Liesel Driediger's unsuccessful parody of the old Grackle's voice in Chapter 5 of The Blue Mountains of China provides a precedent for the rebellion of the minor voices which takes place in The Scorched-Wood People.

28. It goes without saying that even when Riel speaks "alone," his words remain internally dialogized because subject to Wiebe's authorial intentions.

29. This subversion of the compositional hierarchy depends of course on the reader being aware of Wiebe's allusion. By concealing Jesus' voice, Wiebe leaves room for diversity of response and interpretation. Anacrisis opens the way for heteroglossia. Klooss touches on the question of the novel's realized heteroglossia. He maintains that the novel has "caused serious confusion" and "controversy" among reviewers and critics (205). Klooss explains the "conflicting reviews" and the "ambivalent reception" (205) by saying that it derives from the complexity of Wiebe's narrative mode, and from the "diverging political and historical viewpoints" of the audience (205).

30. See Wiebe's account of the church's irresponsibility in the interview with Brian Bergman quoted earlier.

31. In "A Brief Biography of Menno Simons," Harold Stauffer Bender offers an account of the Muensterite uprising which may well have influenced Wiebe's thinking about Riel and the Métis at Batoche: "The [Muensterite] group...had decided to set up its own city of refuge and begin its own campaign for the kingdom of God.... In March, 1535, a large company of three hundred has seized the old monastery...and entrenched itself therein. They were unable to hold out long against the seige of the forces of the government and after one hundred and thirty had been slain, the rest were captured and executed on April 7. The sight of these 'poor misguided sheep,' as Menno called them, giving their blood and their lives for their faith, even though it was a false faith, made an extraordinary impression upon Menno" (Bender 11).

Bender's description of the fanatical Anabaptist leader, David Joris, may also have a bearing on Wiebe's characterisation of Riel: "The teachings of Joris were a strange mixture of theological fanaticism and antinomianism. He claimed to have a divine call to be a prophet and to establish the kingdom of God on earth over which he was to reign as the third David. He went as far as to teach that the work and the revelation of Christ were not adequate and that the Holy Scriptures were to be superseded by his own literally inspired writings which contained the final revelation of God" (Bender 21).

Wiebe would almost certainly have been familiar with Bender's biography, which appears in The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, tr. Leonard Verduin, ed. John Christian Wenger (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1956). In his "Biocritical Essay," J.M.Kertzer states that Wiebe completed his Bachelor of Theology degree at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in 1962 (Kertzer xv), six years after the publication of Wenger's authoritative and seminal edition of The Complete Writings.

Wiebe differentiates between the Mennonites and the violent Anabaptist sects in "Unearthing Language": "The only things [about Anabaptism] recorded in the "official" histories concerned the so-called Anabaptists John of Leiden and Jan Matthies, and their idea of the Kingdom of God coming down to earth and their having to butcher everyone in Muenster because of the kind of atrocities that they themselves committed. Coming from the other tradition, and knowing that, in the tradition of the true Anabaptists, the Muensterites were as heretical as any Roman Catholic priest selling pardons on a street corner, I doubt the official given history" (Neuman 230).

CHAPTER 7: MY LOVELY ENEMYThe Beloved Familiar and the Beloved New

## I

In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe turns away from history as it manifests itself in the broad public domain, to explore history as a phenomenon in private consciousness. The main narrative focuses on James Dyck, a happily married, middle-aged history professor who, much to his own surprise, "falls" into a passionate sexual love affair with a beautiful young research assistant, Gillian Overton. Trapped between two equally desirable but mutually exclusive alternatives--"the beloved familiar and the beloved new" (MLE 103)<sup>1</sup>--James begins a process of emotional, moral and spiritual re-evaluation. In James's mind, and in Wiebe's text, passionate sexual love takes on figurative meanings: it serves primarily as a metaphor which permits imagination to grasp fully for the first time the too-familiar Christian abstraction of God's redemptive love for humanity.

My Lovely Enemy is profoundly concerned with re-thinking, returning, recalling, renewing, and re-

interpreting, that is, with varieties of creative repetition which issue from couplings of innovation with tradition, strangeness with familiarity, difference with identity. It is therefore not surprising that Wiebe rearranges and recreates previously employed structural, compositional and thematic elements, adapting them to suit his evolving artistic-rhetorical purposes. This synthesis of strange and familiar elements at once alienates readers from the text and stimulates a desire to know it more intimately: in effect, the text becomes the reader's "lovely enemy."<sup>2</sup>

Anatomising the body of this lovely enemy, one discovers new varieties of discourse coupled with compositional forms developed in Wiebe's earlier works. Elements of the dramatic monologue form of The Scorched-Wood People and "My Life: That's As It Was" co-exist with the syncritic form of The Blue Mountains of China and The Temptations of Big Bear, and with the third person omniscient narration used in Peace Shall Destroy Many and First and Vital Candle. The four "May" chapters in My Lovely Enemy combine autobiographical narrative and stream-of-consciousness monologue. Third person omniscient narration prevails in the two "September" chapters and in the interlude entitled "The Black Bridge," while interpolated stories narrated by unidentified voices comprise the italicised sections of the text. Throughout the entire

novel, extended passages of compositionally marked dialogue play a particularly important thematic and structural role. James and Gillian engage in verbal as well as sexual intercourse. Through dialogue, they collaborate in a search for the meaning of their clichéd, yet personally unprecedented, emotional and moral dilemma. Much of the drama in My Lovely Enemy issues from a tension between James's private inner speech and the words he utters aloud to other people. Many of the novel's most crucial incidents occur in a space of dialogic interaction between James's linguistically-structured consciousness and the complex verbal milieu which physically surrounds him, but which he struggles to encompass and subsume.

My Lovely Enemy works complex innovations into the biographical narrative structure last employed in First and Vital Candle. Wiebe again begins the story in medias res, in his protagonist's middle age, from which point the narrative moves chronologically forward while glancing intermittently backwards in time to the protagonist's troubled youth, as well as to earlier incidents in regional and family history. A sign of Wiebe's increased artistic control is his ability to move smoothly back and forth between experiential and chronological time. By allowing present, past and future to vie carnivalistically in James's steadily evolving psyche, Wiebe subverts temporal linearity, without entirely



rejecting it as an organising principle for the narrative. Wiebe's authorial practices both endorse and violate the conventional manner of handling time in realist narrative discourse.<sup>3</sup>

My Lovely Enemy concerns itself with themes which might seem new, but which Wiebe has been discussing in print as far back as 1962-63 in his weekly editorials in The Mennonite Brethren Herald.<sup>4</sup> The novel also furthers Wiebe's ongoing fictional discussions of cultural and political imperialism, the plurality of identity, the problems of writing history and the hegemony of language. Two themes stand out in particular as new in the novel. First, the path of Wiebe's exploration of the ranges of love takes an unexpected turn into the realm of sexuality, a subject considered briefly in previous work, but never scrutinized at such close quarters or in such explicit physical detail. Second, My Lovely Enemy is Wiebe's most self-reflexive novel to date. It may be read as an allegorical exploration of the socio-historical dynamics implicit in all writing and reading processes. The reader-surrogate, a peripheral figure in The Temptations of Big Bear, assumes a position of central importance in My Lovely Enemy, and his struggle to understand cannot be divorced from his struggle to verbalize.

Wiebe certainly makes his readers struggle to understand the text, and to verbalize the experience of reading it. As Pierre Spriet points out, Wiebe deliberately problematizes the process of reading: "there are few pages which present no obscurity by traditional standards" (1985, 59). Very often, the dialogic angle between his voice and that of his protagonist cannot be ascertained. Gaps occur in the narrative, and at crucial points in sentences. Different times and planes of reality intersect: the fantastical and the historical, the other-worldly and the mundane co-exist in a tense balance in My Lovely Enemy. Of the dialogizing devices which allow multi-voicedness to enter the text, some remain consistent with the conventions of verisimilitude, while others flaunt the fictionality of the text. Many voices speak in James' monologue, for example, because he is "afflicted" (as he puts it) with total recall of large sections of spoken and written discourse. However, in the italicised sections of the text, Wiebe introduces other, unidentified narrative voices without explanation or apology. By permitting the codes of formal realism to overlap with anti-realist conventions, Wiebe situates readers on a "black bridge" between contradictory modes of perception.<sup>5</sup>

These and other problematic features<sup>6</sup> place the onus on readers to engage in active dialogue with the text. Wiebe

certainly stimulates anacrisis and active understanding on the part of his readers. In the process, he relinquishes a degree of semantic control over the text. More overtly than in any of his previous works, Wiebe asks readers to act self-consciously as co-creators of the meanings they "discover" in the text.

And yet, Wiebe also compromises his reader's freedom to engage in equal dialogue with the text by writing their part for them, as it were. Through James Dyck, the reader-surrogate who arrives finally at the right-reading position, Wiebe reasserts authorial control over the novel, and attempts to set limits on its semantic plurality. To an even greater degree than in The Temptations of Big Bear, Wiebe creates a tension in My Lovely Enemy between devices which release heteroglossia and devices which repress it. While anacrisis activates numerous different readings or voicings of the text, the reader-surrogate functions to standardize the readers' responses.

My Lovely Enemy thus presents a challenge to traditional monologic forms of critical exposition. Critical discourse which adopts a fixed, unitary reading position cannot hope to hear what the text says to and about its countless possible interlocutors. The discussion which follows therefore adopts a multi-focal approach. It mirrors

the text from three slightly different angles.

## II

Wiebe engages in polemic against three forms of anti-imaginative discourse in My Lovely Enemy: dominant cultural constructions of love and sexuality, the relentlessly imperialist discourses of rational cognition, and naive fundamentalist theology and moral law.

The novel replies to proponents of popular literary and cinematic treatments of sexual love which, by promoting sexism, voyeurism, and cheap, melodramatic emotionalism, trivialize a potentially profound subject. Wiebe makes frequent use of Gillian's voice in compositional dialogue to parody invalid ways of talking about "the act" (77). At the Palliser Hotel, for example, as James and Gillian (alone at last) manoeuvre towards the bed, Gillian's laughter shatters James's clichéd expectations:

"We're supposed to be...at a most crucial moment, laughter seems like, I dunno, slightly inna... inappropriate?"

"Violins...the audience leans forward, tense, 'How much will we see? What?' Not 'crucial' moment, it's the most sacred moment in the greatest voyeur art ever invented, the North American movie, what, what exactly will I see?"

"Not as sacred as the confessional when the man tells his wife, 'I'm really sorry dear, but I love her.'"

"That's it, the wife explodes!" (77)

Through this and other uses of parodic language--("Your fucking fingers are up my fucking wife's cunt!" [233])--Wiebe distances My Lovely Enemy expressly from the stereotypes which dominate all but a few contemporary stories about love and sexuality.

Wiebe endeavours to reappropriate the erotic, and give it "larger meanings" by situating sexual passion in the context of a broader metaphysical inquiry. Gillian's desire to know James "through the flesh" (153) confers an epistemological significance on the sexual act. It stands metonymically in the novel for non-rational, non-verbal ways of knowing, which open consciousness to new forms of spiritual experience:

"When the spirit of that place gathered, wrapped us up into one with itself, what did you think we were doing, eh? Fucking?"

I have detested that word all my life; it has never sounded so repulsively ugly. Her face is so close I have to lift my glasses.

"No...no...", I can mutter at last, "loving."

"Yes, dearest god I was strung by every nerve I have from all the stars and planets." (153)

Wiebe urges readers to view James' and Gillian's sexual union as more than mere "coupling." As Gillian describes it, the moment of orgasm involves more than two human entities joining physically; a larger power absorbs them, together with all the rest of humanity, into itself, momentarily satisfying a universal but seldom acknowledged human yearning for unity with one another and with God.

Compositionally marked dialogue plays a vital role in My Lovely Enemy. During their clandestine meetings, Gillian and James help each other to attain--and also to verbalize-- the fleeting joy of complete spiritual fulfilment:

"At that moment [of orgasm] I feel...totally and completely myself and completely with you, in a way I'm wiped clean of everything and in another way I've never lived so absolutely in all my mind and body. Like I was electrified...."

"Singing?"

"Yes, singing but not just one voice, a whole orchestra, being yourself and a whole orchestra, together, you understand?" (176)

In dialogic collaboration, James and Gillian discover the image of her body as a site where many voices sing in perfect unison. As in his previous novels, Wiebe employs this image of many-voiced monoglossia to signify perfect social harmony in the human world and perfect harmony between humanity and God. And yet, as James and Gillian are painfully aware, their affair puts them entirely at odds with society, and in contravention of all conventional versions of God's moral law. James' and Gillian's physical union at once integrates them into and alienates them from human society and the society of God.

While many Christian writers equate "lust" with lascivious sinful passion, Wiebe emphasises that "'Lust' in German means happiness, joy" (121). Instead of making his readers feel ashamed or guilty about their sexuality, Wiebe places the accent on the exquisite joy of sex, and uses that

joy as a starting point in his own, still distinctly Christian, rhetorical scheme. The mortician presiding at Ruth Dyck's funeral articulates Wiebe's rhetorical strategy: "Start [imagining God's infinite love] with the most perfect experience of love you've ever had" (260). The corny idea of God being "head over heels in love" (138) with humanity draws rhetorical validity from Wiebe's belief that "It's always good to tell people what you know they already know already" (148). Wiebe dramatises God's all-consuming divine love in terms of sexual passion, a mysterious, powerful, universally-known human experience.<sup>7</sup>

One of Wiebe's creative connections between human and divine love hinges on the multiple meanings of the word "passion":

[Jesus:] "...But I like your passion."  
 [James:] "Passion's a meaning that goes two ways."  
 [Jesus:] "Don't I know it." (82)

As does "peace" in Peace Shall Destroy Many, and "the good Indian" in The Temptations of Big Bear, "passion" crosses borders between speech genres in the text of My Lovely Enemy before Wiebe inserts it into a Christian system of meaning. Jesus initially employs "passion" to refer to James's moral earnestness. James's rejoinder adds a sexual meaning to the term. But Jesus' sardonic allusion to his own suffering on the cross dictates the overall direction of the novel's dialogic exploration of the word.

The internal dialogicity of the word "passion" epitomises the "double-speak" and double-vision Wiebe generates throughout My Lovely Enemy.<sup>8</sup> Realistic and allegorical codes, each with its respective system of accents, vie for dominance throughout. Wiebe gradually reverses the initial balance of power between the two. What seem at first to be insignificant circumstantial details within the formal realist code assume great importance symbolically and allegorically. Conversely, James' and Gillian's love affair, which dominates the foreground of the "May" section of the novel, recedes into the background as the scope of Wiebe's inquiry into "the energies of love" broadens. "Love," manifest initially as James' and Gillian's "bodies penetrating each other" (142), serves ultimately to focus imagination on the redemptive power of God's divine love, "the inexpressible and the so-far unimaginable for which you have always longed" (215).

By the end of My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe no longer conceals the fact that he looks through the physical-historical world at higher things. Whether he succeeds in shifting his readers' attention remains to be seen, however. The novel "consorts with the enemy" in that it employs profane language and images to lure attention towards the realm of sacred realities.<sup>9</sup> Wiebe risks leaving his readers behind by posing questions on one plane of action and answering them



on another. In the process of de-trivialising sexuality, Wiebe lays himself open to the charge of avoiding the disturbing moral and socio-political questions raised in the earlier chapters of the novel.<sup>10</sup>

Wiebe gives the last word on the meaning of James' and Gillian's love affair not to either of the people who have lived through the experience but to the authoritative other-worldly teacher-figure, the venerable mortician who presides over Ruth Dyck's resurrection:

"One for one marriage is for earth, now. Messy as it is, it's still better than indiscriminate casual mating, though human nature seems to pull that way.... It's not that you aren't married to any one there [in Heaven]; you are married to everyone." (261) [emphasis added]

If this pronouncement is a closing strategy, it seems strained and unsatisfactory because it depends on a sudden reversal, a re-translation of the lovers' intense passion into an animalistic, spiritually meaningless action.

"Indiscriminate casual mating" sounds suspiciously like a polite euphemism for "fucking." The mortician's term twists the discourse of the novel back upon itself, as if in sudden recoil from the new possibilities discovered through Wiebe's imaginative identification with his characters. Although the mortician has the last word on the moral significance of the affair, that word has already been pre-empted and parried in advance by Gillian's "What did you think we were doing, eh? Fucking?" (153). To the extent that this question resonates

and enters into dialogue with the mortician's magisterial final pronouncement, Wiebe articulates two contradictory paradigms of truth and moral value in the text--one dialogically discovered in collaboration with his two main characters, the other monologically imposed by his teacher-figure.

James is a different species of Christian from Joseph Dueck in Peace Shall Destroy Many, or Josh Bishop in First and Vital Candle, or John Reimer in The Blue Mountains of China, all of whom performed the role of the Christian teacher-figure. Although James is a teacher by profession--a "profess-or" (5) as he puts it--he does not by any means know all the answers to the moral and theological questions Wiebe raises in My Lovely Enemy. Wiebe's earlier teacher-figures exhibited a tendency to engage in pedagogical dialogues, but Wiebe satirizes James whenever he resorts to such measures. James is no authoritative custodian and disseminator of a fixed, monologic code of absolute truths and moral laws, but rather a "reader-figure," a fallible individual involved in an ongoing socio-historical process of searching for and discovering God.

James' groping dialogic struggles towards spiritual truth suggest that Wiebe views religious understanding as a process rather than a product. But Wiebe's political

relationship with James undergoes a subtle change at the point where the mortician begins to speak in the narrative. Wiebe demotes James from the role of free and equal co-author in the "great dialogue" between writer and characters, to a position of subordination to Wiebe's monologic authorial will. Although James's point of view still dominates the "September" section, an omniscient, third person past tense narrative takes the place of James's first-person, present-tense discourse which comprized the "May" section. Moreover, in the final chapter of the novel, the mortician's voice becomes absolutely authoritative. This last-minute appearance of a deus ex machina in the otherwise highly dialogized text suggests that, as in his other novels, Wiebe cannot entirely suppress his own lingering nostalgia for the fundamentalist vision of a monologic God.

### III

At both a thematic and a stylistic level, My Lovely Enemy contests the hegemony of rationalist discourse. The multi-national computer corporation, IBS, stands metonymically in the novel for all the business, scientific and government agencies<sup>11</sup> whose interests lie in expanding and consolidating the empire of rationalist discourse, thereby promoting mechanistic thought and suppressing the

powers of the imagination. James's dystopian fantasy of future research extrapolates from trends apparent to Wiebe at the time of writing the novel. He envisages a giant, voracious, computer, assimilating the heterogeneity of the world's sign systems into a single, all-encompassing master-code:

"Everything possible is already known and programmed for, all places screenable, all mystery and discovery and visible difference vanished, every word ever written or picture painted or diagram drawn or thought now looking as if it had been made by an IBS typewriter...."

"A machine transforming all words into magnetic particles, without a single human standing by?"

"Not just words, pictures too, anything, the very shapes of artefacts statistically collated, the anatomic particles of paper or cloth, do you know how many possible facts the world contains?.... The machine tracking through stacks and electronically ingesting every fragment and dust blot and homogenizing it all into one--" (74-5)

James articulates an ambivalent attitude to the prospect of a stable, universal code such as the omnivorous computer promulgates in his fantasy. On the one hand, James confesses that he "always enjoyed the cold precision of mathematics, the absolute impersonal logic of it" (1); "repeatable logic, clear balance, a graspable sensible unity and completeness" (133) take the place of the solid, permanent metaphysical certainties of his early fundamentalist Christianity. Rationalist discourse offers partial compensation for the lost "single simplicity" (133) of James's Eden. On the other hand, James also recognizes the extent to which a single, universal terminological

system, if always used "correctly," must eventually imprison human consciousness. His allusion to George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four brings to mind the role of Newspeak in Big Brother's program for ideological control:<sup>12</sup> its lexicon fixes the limits of awareness and pre-determines the categories through which the mind can assimilate reality, while the grammar of the system directs all cognitive processes into pre-determined patterns.

An examination of James's language reveals an obvious duality which expresses his ambivalence towards rationalist discourse. Whenever James wants to gloss over contradictions, or when he finds himself in awkward social situations, or wants to ward off spiritual agoraphobia or postpone some impending personal "journey into inner darkness" (232), his speech gravitates towards the safe, solid ground of labels, facts and figures. Yet he also struggles to "think different," to free his consciousness from the constraints imposed by the norms of "the necessary language" (136). On these occasions, his language violates principles of literal usage, grammatical correctness, and logical consistency. It becomes "twisted," figurative, fragmented, ambiguous, cryptic, and absurd, the very antithesis of the ideals embodied in rationalist discourse.

To "think different," James must defy the centripetal

forces which standardize and unify language.<sup>13</sup> He must break the grammatical rules which, by dictating word order and form, limit the free interbreeding of words. In his own language, he effects a "truly creative explosion" such as he wishes would occur in the circuitry of the computer:

Somewhere, someday that massive spinning information could just possibly reassemble itself beyond the control of any programmer and all that complex data would reconstitute itself in a truly inventive explosion and mother forth a treasure no one had dared imagine before.... But for a computer, such an explosion of fantastic new world would of course not be a discovery; it would be a mistake, and the whole purpose of computers, as for all technology, is to eliminate mistake. That is how to control the world: to make the unexpected impossible. Bah. (72)

To think different, James must also articulate the spaces between national languages, between speech genres, and between the words of any utterance. Keeping these spaces open prevents language from operating in the manner of a monologic signal system:

If he could name, he would know. Hast du di vielieft? his mother says to him, naming it in Low German. Not, have you fallen in love, but have you yourself in-loved?.... Enloved, 'En: a prefix meaning primarily "in" or "into"... with the old concrete force of bringing the object into a specified condition, as "shrine," "enshrine.'" Enlove? If he could only gather the words to speak. (219)

As Pierre Spriet has shown in his illuminating article, "Structure and Meaning in Rudy Wiebe's My Lovely Enemy," the unorthodox and contradictory elements pervading James's speech form part of the novel's larger "structure of incompatibilities" (57). Spriet identifies a variety of

means by which Wiebe creates effects of dissonance and incoherence in My Lovely Enemy: the deliberate confusion of times, places and identities, the magic realist fusion of verisimilitude and fantasy, the inconsistent principles of characterisation, the fusion of mimesis and myth, the asymmetry of the May and September sections, and the combination of typographical difference and syntactical continuity which simultaneously separates and joins the interpolated passages to the main body of the text--through all these means, "coherence is not just avoided; incoherence is now asserted as the new order" (1985, 55).

Spriet argues convincingly that Wiebe's refusals of rational coherence push cognition beyond its customary bounds,<sup>14</sup> and that Wiebe's elaborate structure of contradictions effects a "systematic deconstruction of logical language" (1985, 59). However, Spriet develops this point into the broader claim that

My Lovely Enemy signifies the inadequacy of words and points to a reality which cannot be put into words and which is symbolized in the text by 'the perfect white between the words.' (1985, 60)

James might attribute his limited vision to what Spriet calls the inadequacy of words: "Perhaps I could live beyond the mirror that walls me in," he speculates, "and every existence itself would metamorphose from the absurd into...what? Mystery" (142). But as far as Wiebe is concerned, Spriet's term, "the inadequacy of words,"

warrants closer investigation. Specifically, it is necessary to ask whose words exhibit this "inadequacy?" In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe returns again and again to the notion of God creating the world ex nihilo, "by talking" (218). Wiebe does not adopt the post-modernist creed that "reality...cannot be put into words"; instead, he posits a reality which has not yet been discovered by human words. From Wiebe's Christian point of view, there is no reality that has not already been put into words once and for all time by God's act of speaking the universe into being. Wiebe posits a transcendent, timeless Reality created in its entirety by God's all-inclusive, primordial Utterance. This divine, universe-creating Utterance, contains but exceeds the sum of all human utterances. The "perfect white between the words" refers to that portion of Reality which remains as yet beyond human words. Wiebe believes in, but cannot fully articulate the absolute, complete, monologic Truth beyond human words. Rather, he participates in humankind's dialogic struggle to discover that Truth.

Arguably, Wiebe locates the problem of limited human perception not in any intrinsic inadequacy of words-in-general, but in particular types of signifying systems, and particular modes of conceptualising, manipulating and assimilating language which inhibit the dialogic process of discovering Truth. My Lovely Enemy contests the forces which



push linguistic signs towards the rigid monologism of what Vološinov calls signals,<sup>15</sup> the forces which hypostatize language as an inert "system of normatively identical forms" (Vološinov 67) immune from the influence of human creativity and from all historical processes of becoming. Signal systems attempt to suppress all contextual influences; they abolish "theme" from the signified, and acknowledge only "meaning." Understanding becomes a matter of "recognizing the linguistic form used by the speaker as the familiar, 'that very same form'" (Vološinov 68), not discovering its novel "theme" in the unprecedented context of the historically concrete utterance. Hayden White's description of "formal terminological systems" proves applicable to Vološinov's "signal systems": they "envisage ... the elimination of figurative usage altogether [so that]...nothing 'unexpected' appears in the designation of the objects of study" (White 33).

Wiebe does not deconstruct language-in-general, but "abstract objectivist" models of language (Vološinov 67), which suppress the heterogeneity and the diachronicity of language. Wiebe deconstructs the "abstract objectivist" model of language by discriminating between different national languages and different social dialects. At the same time, he implicitly celebrates the centrifugal forces which maintain the heterogeneity and diachronic mutability

of language. Wiebe's text "opens" the abstract objectivist model in order to engender new possibilities for language to objectify, evaluate and re-invent itself over time. Wiebe's verbal artefact thus identifies, and to some extent circumvents, some of the limitations Spriet assumes to be intrinsic to the verbal medium in general.

As well as lamenting the limitations of human language in My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe also celebrates its powers. Were it not for words, "the perfect white between the words" would remain forever outside the realm of human awareness. Wiebe points to--and exploits--the extraordinary exploratory-creative capacities of language. He stresses that God made humankind in his own image, as a talking being. He also notes that Adam discovers, only through the act of naming, that he has no "help meet" (219) in Eden. James's mental breakthrough at Albert and Ardyth's party results from his willingness to "follow words blind one after the other as they made the path I was walking" (9). Although he cannot leave the mental path created by his exploratory words, without those words he could not even imagine the territory through which the word-path leads. When Wiebe observes in his interview with Robert Kroetsch and Shirley Neuman that "language is an actual way of looking at the world; if we didn't have language, we wouldn't see the world the way we see it now" (Neuman 236),

he refers to the potency as well as to the limitations of words.

If language is a mirror, Wiebe does not smash it. Instead, he finds its unrecognized cracks, and then arranges the pieces at judiciously chosen angles so that the mirror might begin to reflect its own workings. As Wiebe's style celebrates the plurality of language, its capacity to objectify itself, and its ability to deviate creatively from official norms, it also jolts readers into "thinking different," liberating their awareness from the usual hegemony of language. Wiebe transgresses the rules of "correct" Standard English in My Lovely Enemy. Ellipses and unfinished sentences catapult thought toward "the perfect white between the words," while puns, antecedentless pronouns, and other forms of grammatical ambiguity place readers "between the words" in another way, in spaces where contradictory propositions and/or incompatible linguistic codes overlap. The narrative also signifies its freedom from constraint by violating Aristotle's unities of time, place and action, and by flagrantly defying classical norms of generic purity.

Wiebe pushes language away from the pole of rationalist discourse, yet he also takes care to avoid the opposite extreme. Radical forms of exploratory-creative language

subvert the recognition-factor altogether, allowing "theme" to monopolize the signified entirely, thereby shattering the shared code into unrecognizable fragments:

Joyce becomes less and less human--to me, anyway. He becomes almost total brain to the point of just inventing his own language so that nobody knows what he is even writing about. (Neuman 245)

Wiebe does not speak "his own language" in My Lovely Enemy: he speaks as a member of several language communities. Although his meaning might remain obscure at times, the forms of the words and sentences remain clearly recognizable as variants of Standard English. Unlike Joyce, who "disappears into the desert" (Neuman 245) of creative mysticism, Wiebe remains strongly committed to the idea of the human community, and thus to the concept of shared, evolving norms and conventions in language. My Lovely Enemy searches for a balance between the static monologism of the signal and the diffuse polyphony of the radical exploratory-creative sign.

In the light of Vološinov's distinction between "theme" and "meaning" in utterances, My Lovely Enemy can be read as an allegorical meditation on the historicity of language. Gillian stands allegorically for the "theme" of any word or utterance, for all its unprecedented, contextually-determined significances, all the new twists accomplished on every occasion of its use; Liv stands for the "meaning," that is, for all that remains recognizably the same in a

given word or utterance despite its passage from one historical context to another: "all those aspects of the utterance that are reproducible and self-identical in all instances of repetition" (Vološinov 100), the characteristics that "remain the same in all instances of its enunciation" (Vološinov 100). Vološinov's explanation of the interdependency of theme and meaning implies that all users of language face a version of James' dilemma:

There is no theme without meaning and no meaning without theme. Moreover, it is even impossible to convey the meaning of a particular word...without having made it an element of these, i.e. without having constructed an "example" utterance. On the other hand, a theme must base itself on some kind of fixity of meaning; otherwise it loses its connection with what came before and what comes after--i.e. it altogether loses its significance. (100)

Unlike the computer, Wiebe does not use language purely as a signal system, which would eliminate "theme" altogether by denying the influence of context. Nor does Wiebe imitate James Joyce, who repudiates "meaning" altogether: without elements which trigger processes of recognition, verbal sign systems disintegrate entirely. Instead of choosing either one of these linguistic modes, Wiebe searches for appropriate ways to accommodate both. He attempts to direct the historical evolution of language without either divorcing himself from other people or creating radical disjunctions in the history of language. As James wishes to relinquish neither Gillian nor Liv, Wiebe abolishes neither "theme" nor "meaning" from his discourse. He thus embraces

both "the beloved familiar and the beloved new" in language.

#### IV

In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe engages polemically with proponents of naive Christian fundamentalism such as can be found in certain sections of the Mennonite church. Fundamentalist assumptions do to the Bible what American movies do to the idea of love, and what computers do to the "pied beauty" of language: they reduce the object of study to a standardized code, a signifying system so rigid, explicit, and self-complete as to render imaginative activity superfluous.

Mennonites, like other Anabaptist groups, rely on the Bible as their "sole source of spiritual authority" (Smith 21). As Wiebe points out in his Foreword to Peace Shall Destroy Many, they base their faith on "the literal meaning of the Bible" (7). In My Lovely Enemy, Old Hildebrandt, the minister of the Vulcan Mennonite Church, gives voice to fundamentalist literalism: he "dominated two hundred families with a formulaic simplicity of ultimate salvation" (169).

James's father, Aaron Dyck, regards Hildebrandt as the

"final ultimate and immovable authority" (123). Old Hildebrandt and Aaron Dyck "fitted together like a fist and an eye" (123), an image which, with superb economy, connotes blindness and physical violence.<sup>16</sup> Ruth Dyck gives voice to the congregation's naive acceptance of Hildebrandt's God. She questions neither his authority nor his repression of the questioning process:

He was a very good man... He always knew right from wrong. It's like a white shirt, he said, is it clean or not? If you have to ask, it's dirty. (123)

To young James, raised in the traditions of literal interpretation, Hildebrandt "seemed so ancient and powerful I mistook him for God, Ancient of Days" (123). Old Hildebrandt's tyranny matches that of Deacon Block in Peace Shall Destroy Many or Adam Ross in First and Vital Candle: he reduces the Word to a fixed code of laws, and God to "the One sure Hand of Punishment" (123).

Hildebrandt personifies all that Wiebe attempts to avoid in his manner of address: dogmatism, violence, and fear of the imagination. Like "a blast of thunderstorm" (123), Hildebrandt's sermons physically assault the congregation: "you didn't know what hit you but you were shaking" (123). By contrast, Wiebe's novel attempts to proposition rather than verbally rape its audience,<sup>17</sup> to activate imagination rather than "invasion terror" (82).<sup>18</sup>

In Bakhtinian terms, Hildebrandt enforces a monologic understanding of the Scriptures. His rigid fundamentalism denies the reader's active role as co-creator of meanings in the Bible. As well as failing to acknowledge the historical, cultural and personal contingencies which shape his own interpretation of the Bible, Hildebrandt represses any tendency in others to explore the dialogic possibilities of the Word.

The story of the Cree chief, Maskepetoon reflects obliquely on the monologic assumptions underlying fundamentalist hermeneutics. Until his middle years, Maskepetoon's "consciousness seems untextured by any complexity, either extended thought, doubt, or even hesitation" (156). He lives in the capsule of a closed cultural and historical milieu, as do the members of Hildebrandt's congregation. During the period of early contact with White culture, Maskepetoon's people regard writing and print with profound awe, much in the same way as Mennonites revere the printed words of the Bible. Reading George Simpson's observations on the Indians' attitudes to the written word, James suddenly realizes their pertinence to fundamentalist thinking, and to his own civilized, "scientific" historical research methods:

Though not one of his [Maskepetoon's] countrymen would understand a word of what was written, yet the most sceptical among them would not dare to question the truth of a story which had a document



in its favour. A savage stands nearly as much in awe of paper, pen and ink as of steam itself; and if he once puts his cross to any writing, he has rarely been known to violate the agreement which such writing is supposed to embody or sanction.<sup>19</sup> To him the very look of black and white is a powerful 'medicine'.

The power of words written down the absolute word made visible. And me wrapped in this enormous condescension regarding savage 'medicine,' in quotes. who indeed was partially civilized once he has closed his hand to make such words. The historians' fact beyond fact coming to me like a coup d'etat. (40)

Although James has long ago escaped physically from the church and family authorities who so severely limited the scope of his understanding in the past, he remains epistemologically imprisoned within fundamentalist assumptions concerning the dynamics of signification and interpretation. The image of James sitting in the narrow cone of light shed by the single bulb of the micro-reader, while everything around remains lost in grey obscurity, makes vividly concrete the idea that even in adulthood James remains trapped within the narrow confines of monologic consciousness.

Gillian initiates James into a dialogic view of the genesis of truth and meaning:

"Hey old man, hey, when will you be, come an histor, ian you're a fact, mongerer, fact-monger, history isn't facts, its personalit, y the whole world, the universe, is personality, when will you, everything is, personali....the world is under, construction, do you feel that? always every world, is being made is conscious, ness not only faaaaaacts! do you feel that!"[sic] (88)

James learns that, whether they acknowledge it or not, historians, like all readers (including fundamentalist Bible-readers), play an active role as co-creators of the meanings they "find" in texts. The "world" of which Gillian speaks includes the world of language. Words, too, remain "under construction" (88), as each new contextualization gives their meaning a new "twist."<sup>20</sup>

James shifts from a passive acceptance of "received history" to a consciously active, creative, dialogic interaction with the documented facts of the past. At The Mine restaurant, he rejects Ricki's naive claim that history is "what happened" (192) and upholds Oakeshott's view that history "'is the historian's experience'" (192). Like the historian in Wiebe's short story, "Where Is the Voice Coming From?",<sup>21</sup> James learns to abolish the "epic distance" which separates past from present. In the italicized sections of Maskepetoon's story, James identifies with a young member of Maskepetoon's band, and recounts events as if he were a participant and eye-witness, thereby breaking out of the closed capsule of the present into a direct, imaginative apprehension of the past. This interpolated story illustrates the generic hybridity of all historical discourse: because the imagination supplements, without contravening, the facts supplied in the textual records, the story mixes documented fact with fiction. Even the most

rigorously "scientific" historical discourse issues from a dialogic interaction between the historian's imagination, the documented facts, and other historians' interpretations of those facts.

The term "professional blasphemy" (10) creates a nexus in the novel between the scientific view of historical research as a "search for whatsoever things are true" (131), and the Christian fundamentalist conviction that they have found the one "true," literal meaning of God's Word.<sup>22</sup> On an allegorical level, James's "fall" from monogamy<sup>23</sup> may be interpreted as a loss of the innocence of monologic vision and unitary language.<sup>24</sup> Gillian's first words to James alert him to the possibility of a space between human knowledge and absolute truth: "For your prayer to be answered, would you have to know he [Riel] was not hanged?" (9). In dialogue with Gillian, James levers himself into a space between profane and sacred speech genres, where erotic language blends with the ritual language of the Holy Communion:

She has pushed me, perhaps I have fallen into that perfect white between what few words I have found into another world--drink me, eat me, all you have to do is taste me, come, drink ye all of it... (45)

James leaves the "single simplicity" (133) of Eden, and enters a confusing heteroglossic realm ruled by principles of doubleness, contradiction, ambiguity, paradox, hybridity. James remarks repeatedly on Gillian's "contradictory tongue" (78); physically, she embodies paradoxical qualities such as

"slender softness" (17) and "velvet steel" (17). Sexual intercourse becomes a metaphor for dialogic verbal intercourse, out of which may issue hitherto unthinkable possibilities, new constructions of reality, and unconventional readings of canonical books of the Bible.

The fundamentalist notion of literal speech and reading presupposes a "natural" reality and an epistemologically neutral "ordinary" language. In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe replies to these monologic assumptions which underlie fundamentalism by demonstrating that linguistic structures in part determine conceptions of the "ordinary," and that such conceptions differ radically from culture to culture, from place to place and from one historical epoch to the next. Realities such as the paddle-steamer and the written word, which nineteenth-century North American Whites accept as entirely ordinary, seem too preposterous to be believed by Maskepetoon's people.

Wiebe registers the limitations and biases of specific national languages, such as Low German ("which has no abstract vocabulary beyond 'sin' and 'decent' [91]), English (with its bi-polar separation of things from actions [136]), Nootka (a "monistic" language [226]), Hopi (which makes no distinction between past, present and future [226]), Greek (which "cannot say 'forever' [226]) and German (which "has

no word and so no concept for 'goodbye'" [227]). Wiebe also draws attention to the plurality of speech genres which operate within any given national language by constantly "twisting" or re-translating key words in the text. Puns, word-play, rapid shifts between speech genres, and shifts of grammatical function pervade the text of My Lovely Enemy. Wiebe's artistic practice thus corroborates Gillian's contention that

"There is no universal natural logic fundamental to language which explains the world to everyone in exactly the same way. Every language is its own personal logic. Our language makes us think in one personal way, and we cannot see another." (227)

The linguistic heterogeneity and semantic plurality of the text embodies a contradiction of fundamentalist postulates concerning ordinary reality, unitary language and literal, correct meaning.

Fundamentalist thinking confuses figurative with literal signification, proposing a natural, unchanging, one-to-one equation between signifier and signified. In his dialogue with James in the university library, Jesus suggests that all language use involves some degree of figuration:

"All words are image, speaking is the only way human beings can handle large reality. But the difference between the image and the reality has to be clear." (141)

No living human language has attained the state of a formal terminological system which eliminates figurative usages

entirely. Jesus intimates to James that human beings have no other way of describing God than by making implicit analogies between "Him" and the realities of their known milieu. Not even the Apostles enjoy exemption from this human limitation: conventions prevailing at the time they wrote the Gospels caused them to remain silent on the matter of Jesus' sexuality, and on other "private" bodily matters such as excretion.

At the Palliser, Wiebe's Jesus tells James, "'You limit God's breath too much, to one custom's way of doing and thinking'" (84). James's dialogues with Jesus draws particular attention to the historical, cultural and individual psychological forces shaping all verbal constructions of God, absolute truth and moral law. Jesus suggests, for example, the "awesome gulf between spirit and matter" (135) resulted from the influence of neo-platonism on Christian theology. God's maleness, too, derives from the social structures and values prevailing in "middle-eastern patriarchal" (140) society in which the image of a father connoted responsibility and concern for "the whole clan, all related to each other through him" (141).

Interestingly, Wiebe's own implication in the process he writes about is clearly apparent throughout My Lovely Enemy.<sup>25</sup> Some of the same social values as prevailed in

"middle-eastern patriarchal" society are perpetuated in the writing of a twentieth century Mennonite Canadian male.<sup>26</sup> For example, one of the several explanations Wiebe's Jesus offers for God's masculine gender not only has a distinct male bias but is also couched in overtly and covertly sexist language:

"When man speaks of 'God as Mother' her acts usually become so closely identified with nature...that he forgets the image-ness and begins to think the words as physical actuality...[and] starts acting out copulation and birthing and begins to think he's God while he's doing it.... They begin to worship Nature...and that's idolatry, worshipping the thing made rather than the maker of it. But God subsumes and is far beyond both Nature and Image. So it is better to contemplate the concept of GOD THE FATHER.... You are then forced to contemplate the creation of the world not as the act of physical birth out of God's womb, but rather as the act of being spoken into existence by Words coming out of God's mouth." (141-42)

Besides employing "man" rather than "human," and using "Nature" to evade the biological fact that only females are as yet capable of giving birth, Wiebe grounds the logic of Jesus' argument on an unstated assumption that only males are capable of speech!<sup>27</sup>

Wiebe does not deny that his--indeed every person's--attempts to decolonize the Word inevitably colonize it anew.<sup>28</sup> My Lovely Enemy replies, in a sense, to Menno Simons, who urged his followers to obey the Word of God rather than the words of humankind. Wiebe challenges this clear dividing line between human and divine words by pointing out that the Scriptures--the revealed Word of God--

have been refracted, sometimes many times over, through the voices of human beings. God's Word, as humankind has access to it in the Scriptures, is inevitably "adulterated" or creatively "corrupted" by its human mediators. By drawing attention to this internal dialogization in the Word, and by accentuating the gaps, evasions, ambiguities, contradictions, and the wealth of unexplored semantic possibilities in the Bible, Wiebe warns against unthinking, passive acceptance of the received, literal version of the God's Word. Only through a process of constant reappropriation and semantic renewal does the Word avoid ossification, and retain its potency as the "living Word."

The novel identifies three stages in the evolution of James's view of the Word. During his childhood, James must learn large portions of the Bible verbatim. Church and family require him to know the Scriptures by rote, or "by heart," but it remains a language "understood but never truly spoken" (253), and therefore a contravention of the Anabaptist ideal of free, responsible choice to accept Christianity. James moves into a second phase when he reacts against this oppressive imposition of the Word. Having been afflicted with total recall, James cannot expunge the Bible from his memory,<sup>29</sup> but he can express his contempt for the authorities who imposed it upon him by reciting it in a parodic manner. Throughout the novel, whenever James quotes



fragments from the Bible or from hymns, he almost invariably gives them a sharp ironic twist. However, he comes to see his irony as a manner of consorting with "the enemy": the parodic impulse implicitly recognises the authority of the voice against which it reacts:

Irony is the fundamental attitude of slaves; of those who react to their world but who are not strong enough to determine or create for themselves. They live the mollusc's life of waiting and reaction, the only self-determination a supposedly superior sneer--who said that? Perhaps I thought it myself. (167)

Jesus urges James to "forget the quotation marks" (142) around the word "love," to renounce the irony which proclaims the Scriptures as "other." Paradoxically, James can free himself from the human authorities who oppressed him in the past only by embracing "the enemy" Word as his own. He thereby enters a third phase, that of active, dialogic, personal understanding of the Word.

Bakhtin's distinction between the externally authoritative word and the internally persuasive word offers a theoretical explanation of the difference between James's initial and final attitudes of acceptance. Externally authoritative language is assimilated by "reciting it by heart" (Bakhtin 1981, 341). Its authority is imposed from without rather than granted willingly from within. The externally authoritative word entirely subjugates the voice of the person assimilating it. By contrast, internally persuasive discourse amounts to a "retelling in one's own

words" (Bakhtin 1981, 341). The listener grants it authority voluntarily because the internally persuasive word provides dialogic corroboration of something the listener already accepts as true. "Tightly interwoven with 'one's own word,'... the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin 1981, 345).

Whereas externally authoritative discourse segregates itself from other discourse which might undermine or challenge its authority (Bakhtin 1981, 343), the internally persuasive word "enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts" (Bakhtin 1981, 345-46). James begins to relax his rigidly ironic attitude by first engaging with the Holy Sonnets of John Donne:

"'Death be not proud,'" he said over them [Liv and Becca] into the darkness. "'Though some have called thee/ Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;/ For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow/ Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.'"

"Don't say that unless you mean it," Liv a motionless length suddenly.

"He means it," Becca said.

"I do," he said. "Yes."

"It helps in that language, eh?" Liv said, not ironically.

"King James." (247)<sup>30</sup>

Donne's sonnet offers a creative, dialogic revoicing of I Corinthians 15: 22, 25-26, which Young Aaron, James's nephew, reads over Ruth Dyck's coffin at her funeral:

"'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. And the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.'" (250)

James's adult baptism--the rain which falls on his face out of the clear blue sky--comes at a moment of dialogic interaction between three elements: Aaron's reading of the passage from Corinthians, Donne's sonnet reverberating in James's inner speech, and a non-verbal sign of love in the mortician's look of "profound tenderness" (251) towards Olena, which itself becomes a variety of writing (the thought materialized in his [James's] head as if the look had written it: only love can so destroy" [252]).<sup>31</sup> At the moment of baptism, words "materialising" within James's psyche reach a dialogic "consensus fidelium" (Littell 66) with the Word entering James's psyche from without.

James's physical love for Gillian starts him on "a trail far beyond words" (58). But at the end of that trail, he returns to the Word, "like a rediscovery of a known land" (117). Vision, imagination alone is not enough. Nor, by itself, is the Word. The two must combine dialogically to engender what Wiebe regards as genuine belief.

James' and Maskepetoon's stories both illustrate this dialogic principle. James learns the Word by rote as a child, but cannot begin to understand what the Bible says about the power and mystery of God's love until he experiences the intensity of passionate sexual love with Gillian. Maskepetoon travels to the same spiritual place

from the opposite direction. He receives his vision of peace--his arm, swollen to gigantic size, sitting like a wall between his people and their enemies--but he does not know what that vision means, until the Methodist missionary, Rundle, gives him a Cree syllabic Bible and teaches him to read. Maskepetoon can readily embrace Christianity only because "Rundle's teaching seems largely to corroborate what Maskepetoon himself has already come to understand about life" (156).

James returns to the Word, where he started, to find he knows it for the first time. No longer the rigid monologic code of laws which Hildebrandt propounded, the Bible is composed of "words you have to keep learning the meaning of again and again" (74). At each re-reading one discovers "theme" and "meaning," the beloved familiar and the beloved new. Wiebe's description of Young Aaron's Bible in the final scene of the novel<sup>32</sup> points to the pertinent qualities of the dialogized Word which yet forms a common orientation point for Christians: "The black book unfolded limp over his hand as fine used leather" (249).<sup>33</sup> Flexible rather than stiff, bearing signs of frequent use rather than sequestration from the wear and tear of daily life, this book makes concrete the idea of the living Word.

Wiebe implies in My Lovely Enemy that the locus of the

realized Word is not in the physical pages of the printed text, nor in the mouth of any single human authority on Biblical exegesis, but in "the space between" believers who strive to discover its meaning dialogically throughout history.<sup>34</sup> The Bible provides a foundation for the Church, a site where many different varieties of Christian belief intersect. God emerges into view not only in extra-verbal space (through vision or revelation), but in interlocutory space in the novel. On both occasions on which Jesus appears to James, he stands in interstitial spaces. At the Palliser Hotel, Jesus "stands between the bed and the wall, the wall against which the bed is tight" (78). In the Religious Studies section of the university library, Jesus stands "between books" (135) which contain "the groping wisdom of man moided from ages" (136).

As well as returning to the Word, James also returns to the church. James's imagination has no monopoly over God, whose possibilities, Wiebe implies, exceed the sum of all human imaginings. Unlike Emily Dickinson, who "could write with complete confidence, 'The soul selects her own society [God]--/Then--shuts the Door'" (134), James cannot enter into society with God without also re-establishing dialogue with other believers. He does not enter the same kind of church he knew as a child with all its intimidating moral controls, but a free society of the faithful made up of

equal interlocutors endeavouring to reach a "consensus fidelium." The final paragraph of the novel presents an image of James listening and speaking, an image of harmonious dialogue with humanity and with God:

He wanted to listen his loved ones into life, now, even the ones who were no longer here.... and he prayed to see them all at once and know them all, not distinctly and separate, even himself, but all one. For he understood they all together had to speak or he could never say what was ready to be if only it would be spoken. So he opened his mouth to make that. And much more. (261-2)

V

As far back as Peace Shall Destroy Many, Wiebe expresses his awareness of the cultural relativity and historical contingency of his own religious convictions. By the time he publishes My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe has intellectually rejected the fundamentalist assumption that a single individual or society, no matter how strong their faith, can be certain of possessing the one and only valid, definitive interpretation of the Scriptures. Because the Scriptures cannot be divorced from the process of their own becoming, they threaten to dissolve into an plurality of equally valid, contextually-conditioned readings. From this premise, it follows that Wiebe's Word cannot claim more validity than any other reading of the Scriptures. No reading, including his own, can exempt itself from the

socio-historical processes whereby meaning comes into being. To prevent his religious convictions collapsing under the weight of his own logic, Wiebe must appeal to an extra-historical authority. Hence, in My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe opens up a gap between Truth and human knowledge. In so doing, he effectively doubles the Word. Wiebe differentiates between God's absolute, extra-historical, monologic Word which exists independently of humankind's capacity to perceive it, and the dialogized Word-under-construction, as human beings can know it. Although Wiebe may have rejected fundamentalism at an intellectual level, the fact that he needs to double the Word, and set one part on higher, extra-historical ground, attests to his lingering nostalgia or yearning for the "single simplicity" (133) of the fundamentalist outlook.

Wiebe's theology of the doubled Word poses an implicit challenge both to Mennonite and to Romantic assumptions about artistic creativity. In her review of My Lovely Enemy in the Conrad Grebel Review, Magdalene Redekop reflects that

It is no accident that we [Mennonites] have many historians in our midst. Our inhibitions about sex are as nothing compared to our hostility to the power of the imagination, but both derive from a common Puritan source. Sex, after all, produces children but the imagination produces what my father used to call "uetgedochte Geschichte" (thought-up stories). Like Plato, we have figuratively banished poets from our commonwealth--except, of course, insofar as fiction and imagery act as decoration on a didactic message. (59)

In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe disputes the traditional Mennonite

view that human creativity tampers hubristically with God's primordial creation. A number of historical and literary allusions suggest that "thought-up stories" are not, in fact, "new," but are retrieved by the writer from the vast domain of God's creation that exists outside the sphere of existing human awareness. Wiebe likens the "fantastic new world" (72) created by a computer's "truly inventive explosion" (72) to Christopher Columbus' discovery of the Bahamas. (The Bahamas were not new; the limited knowledge of Europeans made them seem so.) Similarly, Wiebe's allusion to the Jorge Luis Borges' story of the discovery of the imaginary planet Tlön removes any axiomatic dividing line between fantasy and fact, invention and discovery: "Whatever place those brilliant men thought they were discovering actually already existed" (15). And Maskepetoon's travels, which bring him into contact with a world as yet undreamed of in his culture, suggests that categories such as "fantasy" and "reality," upon which the notion of imaginative "creation" depends, have no autonomous extra-historical existence, but remain contingent upon the state of human knowledge in any given time and place.

By positing a world new to humanity but already familiar to God, Wiebe not only challenges the Mennonites' traditional "hostility to the power of the imagination," he also disputes the romantic myth that the individual artistic



imagination creates from nothing. Wiebe suggests in My Lovely Enemy that only God can create ex nihilo; anything humanity can "create," imagine or invent already exists, because it has already been pre-empted by God.<sup>35</sup> If God has already "thought of everything, finally and forever and from the beginning and all time" (80), should not the so-called "creations" of the human imagination be more accurately be described as "discoveries"? And if imaginative "creation" involves discovering realities which God has already created by talking, does it not follow that human "creative" discourses must inevitably contain an element of the prophetic?<sup>36</sup> My Lovely Enemy gives a new twist to Wiebe's familiar question "Where is the voice coming from?".

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7: MY LOVELY ENEMY

1. Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers appearing parenthetically in Chapter 7 refer My Lovely Enemy (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983).
2. Robert Kroetsch describes Wiebe's manner of handling language as erotic in the light of Roland Barthes' notion of "bliss." See "Mirror, mirror, show us all," Rev. of The Scorched-Wood People, Books in Canada, 7/1 (Jan. 1978), 14.
3. Pierre Spriet discusses other ways in which Wiebe violates while at the same time endorsing the discourse of realism. See "Structure and Meaning in Rudy Wiebe's My Lovely Enemy," in Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik, eds. Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985), 53-63.
4. Wiebe edited the Mennonite Brethren Herald from its first issue on January 19, 1962 until June 28, 1963. My Lovely Enemy contains themes and motifs included in the following issues: the distinction between the laws and the spirit of Christianity (May 18, 1962); giving the bride away at weddings (June 8, 1962); knowing the Bible by heart without accepting its truth personally (June 13, 1962); the necessity of constant re-evaluation of belief (July 20, 1962); people who turn the world upside down (August 17, 1962); the necessity of renewing truth (October 5, 1962).
5. "The Black Bridge" is the title of the short section between "May" and "September" in My Lovely Enemy.
6. Pierre Spriet offers a comprehensive analysis of the obstacles to coherent reading in "Structure and Meaning in Rudy Wiebe's My Lovely Enemy," in Robert Kroetsch and Reingard M. Nischik, eds. Gaining Ground: European Critics on Canadian Literature (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1985), 53-63.
7. My Lovely Enemy, of course, participates in the cultural construction of this allegedly "universal" human experience of sexual desire and gratification. See n.9 below, for a brief discussion of sexism implicit in Wiebe's signifying practices.
8. See Hildebrand (1982) for a thoroughgoing discussion of the interplay between realist and allegorical codes in Wiebe's earlier writing.

9. From a feminist point of view, Wiebe also "consorts with the enemy." Although Wiebe challenges the notion of love which prevails in male-dominated societies, and dramatizes the appropriation of the female body and mind by patriarchal discourses, his aim is not to release any repressed voice of feminine subjectivity but to insert the term "woman" into an alternative patriarchal system of signification. A feminist reading of My Lovely Enemy would find ample evidence supporting the argument that Wiebe decolonizes the female body only to colonize it anew. The women in My Lovely Enemy remain objects of male perception. Mother, sister, wife, daughter, mistress, friend--Wiebe identifies all the female characters in relation to James Dyck. The women seem to stand in a circle around James Dyck, illuminated solely by the light of his desires. Politically speaking, it makes little difference whether the women are products of James's or Wiebe's projected desires.

My Lovely Enemy parodies but also reinforces patriarchal encodings of the real. In the love-scenes, Wiebe's writing straddles the borderline between parody and approbatory imitation of the Harlequin Romance. Even when Wiebe unambiguously satirizes James for his automatic, unconscious reversion to sexist attitudes, Wiebe's text consorts with its enemy by reaffirming "the maleness of the gaze" (Hutcheon 1989, 159). Ostensibly, Wiebe repudiates binary thought, and rejects patriarchal practices which turn women into a commodity (for example, giving away the bride, or feeling guilty about entering into a sexual relationship with another man's wife). Yet James and Wiebe both assert semiotic control over the female body, thus reinscribing the patriarchal power structure they contest. Like Vološinov's sign, the female body becomes a site of struggle in My Lovely Enemy. Wiebe wrests the power to decide its meaning from other men, only to subordinate it to his own rhetorical purposes. The textual politics at work in My Lovely Enemy thus parallel those implicit in The Temptations of Big Bear.

The description of a specifically male God speaking the universe into being (141-42) must also attract what might be called "the feminist gaze." This passage ostensibly parodies phallogentrism, and yet it is difficult to dismiss the possibility that it functions also as a disguised form of direct authorial discourse. Wiebe gives contradictory signals as to the dialogic angle between his own voice and that of his narrator. He also leaves open the question of whether James dreams or hears Jesus' voice. By these means, Wiebe conceals his own position very effectively: he makes it impossible to decide the status in the text of Jesus' description of God-as-Author-of-All. If one interprets the passage as a parody of phallogentrism, Wiebe still consorts with the enemy by hypostatizing the transcendent, monologic,

extra-historical Word (discussed in Section V of this chapter).

At many points in My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe raises issues central to feminist literary theory and criticism, however, his own attitudes remain open to question. When a writer working in an academic environment in the 1980s names his protagonist James Dyck, and positions that protagonist between a fair goddess-figure (Liv) and a dark seductress (Gillian), it is difficult to imagine he writes unselfconsciously and without irony. The question is, who is the target of this irony? Does Wiebe parody phallogocentric narrative? Or does he parody a certain school of feminist literary critical discourse? See also Hutcheon (1990) for Wiebe's comments on speaking for someone of a different gender or race.

10. Wiebe does not pursue the question of a collusion between "patriarchy and private enterprise" (70), for example.

11. Wiebe names business, science and government as "the enemy" on page 73.

12. Wiebe alludes to Nineteen Eighty-four on page 11; Cedric Whitling-Holmes' description of the gruelling work of shovelling coal is taken from Orwell's essay "Down the Mine."

13. My Lovely Enemy also replies to Anglo-centricity in that James struggles against enforcers of British cultural authority such as the Oxford English Dictionary, the tweedy Oxford graduate Harold Lemming, and the English accent of Cedric Whitling-Holmes.

14. "The novel tends to perturb and confuse the reader and at the same time to spur him into seeking a higher level of awareness" (Spriet 1985, 61).

15. See V. N. Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, 67-71 for definitions of "signal," "theme," and "meaning." Vološinov's terms "theme" and "meaning" will be placed between inverted commas in order to distinguish them from their counterparts in traditional literary critical discourse.

16. This image would seem to owe something to the short poem which opens Margaret Atwood's Power Politics: "You fit into me/ like a hook into an eye/ a fish hook/ an open eye."

17. The recipient of a proposition does not indeed make the initial movement towards sexual union, but unlike the rape victim, she/he does have the right of veto. With the proposition, desire must be bilateral before sexual union can take place.

18. Wiebe writes in My Lovely Enemy as if always bearing in mind Robert Louis Stevens' remark that "to make our idea of morality centre on forbidden statements is to defile the imagination...and to introduce into our judgements of our fellow-men a secret element of gusto" (149).

19. Wiebe dramatizes the Whites' exploitation of the Indians' naive attitude to the written word in The Temptations of Big Bear.

20. On both occasions Jesus appears in the My Lovely Enemy, James must twist to see him.

21. "Where Is the Voice Coming From?," Fourteen Stories High, eds. David Helwig and Tom Marshall (Ottawa: Oberon, 1971) 112-121; subsequently published in The Narrative Voice, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); Where Is the Voice Coming From? (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Personal Fictions, ed. Michael Ondaatje (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Horizon: Writings of the Canadian Prairies, ed. Ken Mitchell (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); Modern Stories in English, eds. W. H. New and H. J. Rosengarten (New York: Crowell, 1975); Fiction of Contemporary Canada, ed. George Bowering (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1980).

22. Gillian's husband, the pedantic, stale, tweedy Harold Lemming, "the archetype of rational man" (Spriet 57), lives up to scientific professional ethic far more "successfully" than does James.

23. Wiebe surrounds James' and Gillian's first moments of physical contact with allusions to the fall of Adam and Eve. James's first impression of Gillian alludes to the nakedness of Eve, "Between heads and shoulders I saw a girl with long hair so dark it appeared black, so long it seemed momentarily she was wearing nothing else" (8). More than once he refers to "the fall" of her long hair (12, 41). Their kissing is described as "Tasting for the first time" (17), and having tasted, they feel "instinctively secretive" (17).

24. Metaphorical equations between words and the female body support such a reading: "he held both Gillian and Liv transliterated into each other" (193); "his hand rested on her back, curved like a sensuous letter" (224).

25. This argument assumes Wiebe, rather than James, should be held responsible for Jesus' words. However, because Wiebe's dialogic angle to Jesus words remains unclear, it is also logically possible to argue that Jesus is a figment of James's imagination, and that Jesus' sexist arguments and language derive from James' rather than Wiebe's ideology.

26. See n.9.

27. See n.9.

28. In his debate with W. P. Kinsella, Wiebe adopts the position that some colonizations (of Indian experience, in this case) remain superior to others, both morally and with regard to their historical truth-value. See Rudy Wiebe, "Proud Cree Nation Deserves Much More Than 'Funny' Stories," Globe and Mail, Saturday, Feb. 17, 1990.

29. Wiebe emphasizes James's "total recall" of the Bible on pages 117-18.

30. The words which follow this quotation in the text emphasize that James runs from the Word in High German, but returns to it in English.

31. Aaron goes on to quote Donne unwittingly as he reiterates the meaning of the passage from Corinthians in his own words: "death shall be no more" (251).

32. The image of the Bible illustrates the double accent of Wiebe's discourse. The Bible functions as a trivial circumstantial detail in the realist code, but carries great weight in the allegorical code.

33. Wiebe again refers to the "limp book" on page 253.

34. See Appendix I, "Early History and Doctrines of the Mennonite Church."

35. This principle would also apply to the meanings created by readers in the process of interpreting the text.

36. Cf. Redekop's review of My Lovely Enemy, the Conrad Grebel Review (Fall 1983), p. 59.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Where Is Your Voice Coming From, Rudy Wiebe?<sup>1</sup>

The question, "where is the the voice coming from?" haunts all of Wiebe's work. Ironically--and yet predictably, considering the historicity of all words--this intriguing question does not originate with Wiebe as is commonly thought. George Hildebrand identifies its source in Denis de Rougemont's essay "Religion and the Mission of the Artist":

What Paul Valery calls "the gods"...would be for certain other people the Holy Spirit, and for others still a message from the unconscious. Sometimes, we imagine that this instantaneous vision has revealed in a lightning flash the existence of a secret way, which it remains only to follow; and sometimes we have the impression that we invent the way while advancing upon it. This problem...torments...the artist.... Do I invent...or is it rather that I discover a reality? Do I project into the cosmos the forms of my spirit, or is it rather that I espouse by the spirit some of the objective forms of the real?.... Where does the voice come from? Who speaks? Myself, or the Other? Such is the predicament which the intervention of the Holy Spirit creates in a man." (qtd. in Hildebrand 1977, 66)

Wiebe explores aspects of this "predicament" throughout the course of his writing career. The Mennonites of Wapiti mistake Deacon Block's voice for God's in Peace Shall Destroy Many. Big Bear experiences confusion over the relation between the Great Spirit's, the Queen's, and the

commissioners' voices. James Dyck cannot distinguish between his own words and other people's utterances lodged in his memory: "for God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Who said that?" (247).

Wiebe's readers find themselves confronted by precisely the same question: "who said that?" As the internal dialogicity of Wiebe's texts becomes more complex and pervasive, the question of the provenance of voice becomes more problematic for the reader. From The Blue Mountains of China onwards, it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain Wiebe's relation to the voices of the characters/narrators, and increasingly difficult to ascertain their relations to one another. In "The Vietnam Call of Samuel U. Reimer," Wiebe does not entirely settle the question of whether Sam dreams or hears God's call. Wiebe also blurs the dividing line in The Scorched-Wood People between Riel's genuinely prophetic utterances, and those provoked by his all too human emotions and aspirations. Similarly, the "unending wordless cry" of The Almighty Voice in "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" might issue from the creative imagination of the historian-narrator, or the narrator may momentarily have escaped the constraints of linear time, to apprehend directly the sound-phenomenon of The Almighty Voice as he/it once existed in objective reality in 1897. In My Lovely Enemy, readers



frequently cannot ascertain "who speaks": does James dream Jesus' utterances, for example, or do they form part of Wiebe's magic-realist discourse?<sup>2</sup>

Wiebe casts further doubt on the provenance of voice by using strategies of anacrisis--"eliciting and provoking the words of one's [reader] interlocutor" (Bakhtin 1981, 110). As Wiebe resorts more and more to anacrisis, it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between the reader's voice and Wiebe's: neither monopolizes the role of "the author." In My Lovely Enemy, Wiebe dramatizes James Dyck's discovery of the dialogic relation between himself and the Bible. At the same time, Wiebe places his readers in precisely the same predicament as James. Wiebe's writing becomes so cryptic, so riddled with gaps, disjunctions and ambiguities, that at certain moments, one cannot decide who is "writing" the text. Wiebe blurs any clear dividing line between finding meaning in the text, and imposing meaning on it. Like James, one becomes conscious that each act of reading re-writes or re-voices the text. "Wiebe's text" effectively shatters into a plurality of texts "written" or "voiced" by a multitude of reader-authors. Where, now, is "the voice" coming from? Does it come from Wiebe? From his readers? Which readers? Which of the many voices which inhabit the psyche of any given reader?

By many different paths, then, Wiebe guides his readers again and again to this central question "where is the voice coming from?" From Wiebe's evangelical Christian point of view, it is a highly rhetorical question, an anacritic device designed to make the reader contemplate the ultimate provenance of voice. If Frieda Friesen articulates Wiebe's sense of where the voice comes, Wiebe is telling his readers that "it all comes from God." Frieda quite literally regards God as the Author of All. Of her own story, she says "What I tell I remember only through God's grace" (BMC 7). The corollary of such a belief is that Wiebe's own writing-- indeed all human utterance--is a form of double-voiced discourse, as much a product of "God's grace" as of conscious and subconscious human volition.

David L. Jeffrey maintains that "within the self [of Rudy Wiebe] are many voices, contesting for the pen as for the heart" (199). Wiebe certainly eludes easy categorization by permitting so many labels to be applied legitimately to him: Mennonite (by birth and by choice), Russländer, Anabaptist, Protestant, Christian, member of an immigrant family, native of Western Canada, White man, male, speaker of Low German, High German and English, member of family, local, regional, national and international communities, as well as of academic, literary and church communities. Wiebe's novels deal precisely with the problem of ordering

the many voices of the self, and they all assert the same hierarchizing principle. But "Where, in the many-voiced self, is Wiebe's voice coming from?" This question can be answered by asking another question: "to whom does Wiebe think he is speaking?" Wiebe's novels, articles, and editorials identify several groups in Canadian society who might legitimately be considered Wiebe's addressees. However, one may also argue that, like Frieda Friesen, Wiebe remains aware of a non-human interlocutor. If Wiebe expresses his own view through the voice of David Epp III in The Blue Mountains of China, he asserts that "[God's] ear hears each word fall" (137). The many voices of the self assume an order which centres on this postulated divine Addressee, this Other who asks, as Gillian Overton puts it, "the question we're all answering, whether we know it or not" (MLE 220).

Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky envisaged God as an interlocutor, a remark which would also seem highly pertinent to Wiebe:

Dostoevsky seeks the highest and most authoritative orientation, and he perceives it not as his own true thought, but as another authentic human being and his discourse. The image of the ideal human being or the image of Christ represents for him the resolution of ideological quests. The image of this highest voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it. Precisely the image of a human being and his voice, a voice not the author's own, was the ultimate artistic criterion for Dostoevsky: not fidelity to his own convictions themselves taken abstractly, but precisely a fidelity to the authoritative image of a

human being.... A question is put to the ideal image (how would Christ have acted?), that is, there is an internal dialogic orientation with regard to it, not a fusion with it but a following of it. (1984, 97-98)

Bakhtin maintains that although Dostoevsky never loses sight of "the true word" (1984, 98), he does not let it "colour the work with the personal ideological tone of the author" (1984, 98). Wiebe differs from Dostoevsky in this respect, for his rhetorical intentions pull all his novels back from the brink of full polyphony. As the foregoing chapters of this study have endeavoured to demonstrate, Wiebe introduces speech diversity into his texts only to insert the many voices concerned into a new monologic order, centred on the voice of Jesus, Wiebe's sovereign Other. In Dostoevsky's novels, "The cognizant judging 'I,' and the world as its object, are present not in the singular but in the plural" (Bakhtin 1984, 99). In Wiebe's work, by contrast, this plurality of 'I's, and the plurality of different worlds they bring into being, all remain subject to Wiebe's divine Other, and to the ultimate Reality encoded in the Scriptures. Each of Wiebe's texts thus becomes a microcosmic utopia, in which "the image of this highest voice must crown the world of voices, must organize and subdue it" (Bakhtin 1984, 97).

As well as organizing and subduing the many voices which speak in Wiebe's texts, Wiebe invokes the authority of "the highest voice" in an attempt to subdue the many

autonomous voices of his readers. Wiebe allows "the voice of the text" to dissolve into a plurality of voicings or readings, only to reassert monologic authority and unitary meaning with the aid of the divine word or Sign as deus ex machina. At least, such is Wiebe's intention. In practice, while Christian readers may accept Wiebe's claim to be capitulating to God-the-Author-of-All, non-believers might still say that Wiebe is the author of God. Wiebe does not succeed in dispelling all doubt about where the voice comes from.

Doubt also remains as to where Wiebe's voice comes from on what is commonly called "the Canadian mosaic." Many positions have been legitimately attributed to Wiebe by critics involved in the ongoing dialogic process of mapping the many divisions and subdivisions of literary discourse. Dennis Duffy views Wiebe as a historical novelist, a descendant of Sir Walter Scott. He groups Wiebe with writers such as William Kirby, Gilbert Parker, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Hugh MacLennan, Howard O'Hagan, Peter Such, and Timothy Findley. Leslie Monkman and Terry Goldie present Wiebe as a member of a White imperialistic culture which ascribes semantic value to--and asserts "semiotic control" over--Native people. Linda Hutcheon writes of Wiebe as a metafictionist, and a post-modernist, while Ken McLean sees him as a writer of evangelical and ecclesiastical fiction.

David L. Jeffrey's "Post-War Canadian Fiction," categorizes Wiebe according to a chronological criterion, whereas critics such as J. Thiessen, Margaret Redekop, Elmer F. Suderman, and Hildegard E. Tiessen place the emphasis on Wiebe's Mennonite cultural heritage and beliefs. George Hildebrand argues that Wiebe should be viewed not as a Mennonite but as a Christian allegorist. George Woodcock, Laurence Ricou, and Brian Bergman group Wiebe with other Canadian prairie writers such as Frederick Philip Grove, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell and Sinclair Ross. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin look at the post-colonial aspects of Wiebe's work, as does John Thieme's discussion of Wiebe's re-visionary history. W. J. Keith places Wiebe in the same category and Tolstoy and other writers of "epic fiction," while Patricia Morley regards him as a comedian.

This list, although by no means exhaustive, illustrates the diverse taxonomical principles critics have applied to literary discourse. The list bears some resemblance to the absurd taxonomy which intrigues Michel Foucault in Jorge Luis Borges' Chinese encyclopaedia, the taxonomy which "disturb[s] and threaten[s] with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other" (Foucault xv). Wiebe's writing, too, calls into question the dominant criteria for differentiating Self from Other, the criteria commonly employed to define and order the component pieces

of "the Canadian mosaic." Wiebe breaks up "the very site" (Foucault xvi) upon which the propinquity of the mosaic's pieces usually becomes possible. And by thus deconstructing the posited unitary plane on which the pieces of the "Canadian mosaic" meet, Wiebe asks "whose version of the mosaic is THE Canadian mosaic"? Wiebe writing asserts that "the Canadian mosaic" remains "under construction," as Gillian Overton would put it. As the foregoing chapters attempt to show, Wiebe's novels draw their own moral, spiritual and linguistic maps of Canadian society, exploiting the fact that "the mosaic" cannot, for the time being at least, be divorced from the historical process of its own becoming.

The notion of Canada as a unitary cultural mosaic, like Wiebe's question "where is the voice coming from?," bears out Wiebe's contention that "the true difficulty with problems is expressing them" (MLE 142). Both invoke a spatial metaphor, a synchronic perspective inimical to the purpose of demonstrating Wiebe's acute awareness of the historicity of ideology, culture and language. It is necessary to reiterate not only Wiebe's sense of the historicity of the mosaic, but also his persistent tendency to subject language to a form of philological enquiry. In an allegedly post-Christian socio-historical context, Wiebe's texts attempt to release suppressed Scriptural meanings of

words such as "peace," "grace," "Jesus," "God," "Christ," "damn," "good," and "love," words heard in the everyday speech of "average Canadians" (Wiebe 1963, 3). By re-accenting and re-valuing these words, Wiebe intervenes self-consciously in the unfinished history of human ideology and language. His evangelism involves an attempt to redeem the "'captial-W' Word in the beginning was" (Neuman 236) from what might be called its "fallen" state in the socio-historical world. Wiebe thus at once exploits, and yet yearns to reverse, or terminate, or transcend "the historical process of Becoming" (Vološinov 105) in language.<sup>3</sup>

Wiebe's novels implicitly de-naturalize a number of assumptions and "methodological fictions" commonly employed in literary critical discourse. By suggesting that the artist "unhides the hidden,"<sup>4</sup> "unearths" intangible realities that God has already created, Wiebe challenges the romantic myth that the artist's "creative" imagination makes new worlds entirely independently and ex nihilo.<sup>5</sup> Wiebe's vision and his methods also contest traditional literary-critical notions of "the author," "the reader," "the text," "the meaning," "the style," "the language," and "the word." But again, it is essential to reiterate that Wiebe campaigns not to denounce monologic vision per se, but only monologic vision arising out of human constructions of the true (other



than his own). Wiebe activates the dialogic principle with the immediate aim of demonstrating the cultural relativity and historical contingency of secular and other-Christian hegemonic discourses.<sup>6</sup> Yet beyond that immediate aim lies another, ultimate objective: to discover the transcendent monologism of an extra-historical Truth spoken by God and recorded (in part) in the Scriptures. For Wiebe, God is ultimately both "The Author" and "The Reader"; the Bible is "The Text," the paradigmatic authoritative "Word"; and "The Meaning" can only be known to humankind at the time of the final Revelation.

Like Wiebe, Bakhtin and Vološinov resist traditional literary-critical usages of certain key terms, but their reasons and the precise nature of their objections differ considerably from Wiebe's. Bakhtin and Vološinov oppose not the lower-case designations employed in common literary-critical usage, but the monologic outlook enshrined in the definite article and the singular form of the noun: they oppose "the author," "the reader," "the text," "the meaning," "the style," "the language," and "the word," all of which insidiously reinstate the monologic assumptions they attempt to overthrow. Wiebe, by contrast, would object to these terms on the grounds that in conventional usage, they perpetuate the dominance of "God-alienated language" (Wiebe 1962, 4) in western society.

This contrast is absolutely crucial because it reflects the radical discrepancy which underlies the superficial similarity between the world-views articulated by Wiebe on the one hand, and by Bakhtin and Vološinov on the other. All three men envisage the socio-historical world as a ceaseless contest between centripetal and centrifugal forces.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is precisely this shared model of social and political struggle which makes the theories of Bakhtin and Vološinov so appropriate a tool for analyzing Wiebe's writing. Yet Wiebe's religious outlook remains fundamentally at odds with the historically-grounded world-view articulated by Bakhtin and Vološinov. Wiebe acknowledges the historicity of truth as human beings can know it, but he also posits the existence of an absolute, authoritative Truth which exists irrespective of the state of human knowledge.

Wiebe invokes the dialogic principle with very different objectives to those Bakhtin and Vološinov have in mind. Bakhtin and Vološinov oppose all forms of centralized verbal-ideological control, irrespective of the benign motives of its perpetrators, whereas Wiebe, instead of condemning monologic vision per se, writes against those secular and pseudo-Christian agencies of ideological control which interpose between God and human individuals. Nor does Wiebe view verbal-ideological diversity as an end in itself.

For him, it is a necessary stage in a larger movement toward the ideological and spiritual unification of humankind. While Bakhtin and Vološinov espouse the democratic ideal of a free, ideologically-diverse, polyphonic society, Wiebe struggles to liberate people from what he sees as a spurious, spiritually disorienting form of freedom into the "certain bondage" of God's divine authority.

The world-views of Wiebe and of Bakhtin and Vološinov are each capable of subsuming the other. From Wiebe's point of view, Bakhtin and Vološinov remain blind to the metaphysical realities that exist beyond the horizon of the socio-historical world. Conversely, Bakhtin and Vološinov would probably number Wiebe amongst many people who, throughout human history, have invoked the power of an imaginary super-human being to implement their own values and objectives. If Wiebe could enter into direct dialogue with Bakhtin and Vološinov, he might ask "where do the allegedly 'free' voices in democratic societies come from?" And Bakhtin and Vološinov would reply by asking "where does your voice come from, Rudy Wiebe?"

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

1. Cf. Wayne Tefs, "Where Is Your Voice Coming From Rudy Wiebe?," Canadian Dimension 13/2 (1978) 51-2.
2. In "Dialogue at an Exhibition," Prairie Fire 11/2 (Summer 1990) 88-95, Wiebe's magic realist mode creates the same confusion. Does the narrator imagine or hear aloud the voice of the shaman's dance garment?
3. Indeed, the spatial metaphor and present participle in the question "where is the voice coming from?" expresses Wiebe's yearning to transcend diachronicity.
4. See Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden," Journal of Canadian Fiction 3/3 (1974) 43-45. The present argument differs substantially from Kroetsch's although it appropriates Kroetsch's term. For Kroetsch, "the hidden" refers to "a concealed other experience, sometimes British, sometimes American" (43) concealed in the Canadian word. For Wiebe, it is the undiscovered part of God's creation that is "hidden."
5. See Wiebe's references to the story of Michaelangelo's release (rather than creation) of the figure captured in the marble, VL 133.
6. Wiebe acknowledges the historical and cultural contingency of his own Truth, yet at the end of each novel he affirms it anyway.
7. This shared vision perhaps has its source in Stalinist Russia. The theories of Bakhtin and Vološinov covertly oppose the same totalitarian policies as caused Wiebe's parents to flee from Russia to Canada in 1930. Like thousands of others, Wiebe's parents escaped but did not forget Stalin's oppressive rule. Although born four years after his parents' arrival in Canada, Wiebe knew life in a totalitarian Russia indirectly, through stories told by his parents, and other Mennonites of their generation. It seems reasonable to suggest that these stories of life in Russia might have had a profound and lasting influence on Wiebe's paradigms of the socio-political world.

APPENDIXEarly History and Doctrines of the Mennonite Church

The bearing of Wiebe's theological training on his writing has been almost entirely overlooked in critical discussions of his work. Yet Wiebe's paradigms of language, and hence his authorial objectives and strategies, emerge more clearly in the light of information about the history, politics and doctrines of the Mennonite church. With the aid of this information, it becomes possible to identify one of Wiebe's most important yet least acknowledged authorial objectives: to test Menno Simons' doctrines of the Scriptural Word.

Menno's doctrines evolved in response to a particular set of historical circumstances. During the period leading up to the Reformation,<sup>1</sup> the Roman Catholic Church had seized monopolistic control over the Bible.<sup>2</sup> The Church appropriated the authority of the Word by assuming the role of sole mediator between God and the populace, having erected and progressively reinforced a number of barriers between the Scriptures and the populace. All church services were conducted in Latin, and the Vulgate (the Latin version

of the Bible) was confirmed by the Church at the Council of Trent (1546) to be the sole official version. To consolidate its authority further, the Church strongly opposed printing, for if copies of the Bible proliferated amongst the lay community, the priests would be rendered redundant (Eisenstein 157). Because so few outside the clergy knew how to read, the Scriptures were further locked away from general view. Believers had no option but to trust in the clergy, who in turn were subject to the authority of the Pope, the political structure of the Roman Catholic Church being strictly hierarchical, with the Pope at the head, and a rigid chain of command extending downwards to the congregation. Because the Pope was believed to be God's supremely authoritative representative on earth, monovocality characterized the absolute Word.

The Reformation liberated the Bible from these multiple constraints. This enormously complex and violent upheaval which gave birth to the Protestant Churches--including the Anabaptists, among whom the Mennonites were numbered--involved an attempt to overthrow Church-dominated Christianity, and replace it with Book-dominated Christianity. The history of the early Mennonite church, and of the Protestantism in general, cannot be divorced from the history of print technology, the spread of literacy, and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages.<sup>3</sup>

These trends had profound and far-reaching socio-political and historical effects: for one thing, they gave the laity direct access to the Scriptures. The results were cataclysmic. Europe exploded into bitter sectarian conflict; the Word shattered into fragments. Gone were the days when God had only one voice. The many factions of Protestantism waged war not only against the Catholic Church but also against one another, each group struggling to assert the absolute authority of its own reading of Scriptures. The Reformation movement wrenched the Word back into the field of social struggle, releasing the multi-voicedness repressed for so long by the Roman Catholic Church.

So tight was the security surrounding the Bible prior to the Reformation that even the lower ranks of the clergy were forbidden to read the text.<sup>4</sup> When Menno Simons was ordained into the Catholic priesthood in 1524, he had never once been allowed to open the Bible or read the teachings of Jesus for himself. Two years after Simons' ordination into the Roman Catholic Priesthood, doubting the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, he "ventured with great trepidation to open the covers of this forbidden book" (Bender 5) to discover that

it contained nothing of the traditional teaching of the Church on the mass. By that discovery his inner conflict was brought to a climax, for he was now compelled to decide which of the two authorities was to be supreme in his life, the church or the Holy Scriptures. (Bender 5)

This description of Menno Simons' first look into the Bible provides a paradigmatic image of the dilemma facing each one of Wiebe's protagonists: they must all choose between the authority of the divine Word and the authority of the words of human beings. Wiebe dramatizes the difficulty of distinguishing between these two kinds of authority: God's Word is accessible to human awareness only as human voices speak it and hear it in concrete linguistic and historical contexts.

Amongst the various branches of the Protestant movement, the Anabaptist groups carried the principle of Biblicism (Bible-centredness) to its furthest extreme.<sup>5</sup> In addition, their belief in the free expression of individual conscience created the greatest potential for releasing the heteroglossia of the Scriptures. By reading the Bible, all literate individuals, no matter what their social standing, could "hear" God speaking to them personally:

While Lutherans and Reformed claimed the assistance of governing councils and university facilities in their interpretations, and Catholics of a highly organized hierarchy and the church fathers, the Anabaptists insisted that each individual must decide the Bible message for himself. The greatest degree of liberty must be granted the individual conscience in spiritual matters. Anabaptism was the essence of individualism. (Smith 21)

The problem was that God said different things to different people, and who could arbitrate as to which message was the most authentic and authoritative?



All Wiebe's novels dramatize aspects of this question. Wiebe follows Menno Simons in that he recognizes the potential dangers implicit in the more extreme applications of the Anabaptist ethos of individualism: what would stop the voice of God from disintegrating into a plurality of equally valid human voices? Theoretically, any charismatic individual with a working knowledge of the Bible could set up shop as an authority on religious matters, and could lead unwary followers into heresy and bloodshed. Any individual's reading or voicing of the Bible might be promoted by force of personality or arms as THE definitive meaning of the Word.

Fanatical, charismatic leaders such as Jan Matthys, Jan of Leiden and David Joris attempted precisely that (as did Louis Riel, as Wiebe presents him, in The Scorched-Wood People). The massacre of the Muensterites at the Oude Kloster in March and April 1535 (Bender 12), and David Joris's attempt to supplant the Scriptures with his own inspired writings (Bender 21), confirmed Menno Simons' belief that communal controls must check the power of each individual member of the church. (Wiebe's representation of Riel's violent attempt to found a New Nation in the Canadian North-West corroborates Menno Simons on this point.) Although Menno and his followers believed in the expression of individual conscience, they found it necessary to set

limits on the heteroglossia of the Word. Unrestrained, it threatened to unleash religious anarchy.<sup>6</sup>

From Menno Simon's point of view, the early history of the Mennonite Church showed that the extreme decentring of the Word which permitted the rise of fanatical, charismatic Anabaptist leaders was no less dangerous than the extreme centring of the Word enforced by Catholic church. Menno Simons attempted to avoid both extremes to which God's Word could be pushed, and Wiebe follows him in that his writing searches for a balance between the monologic and the dialogic principles.

However, Wiebe's fiction subjects Menno's doctrines of the Word to rigorous testing in different historical situations. Menno formulated three main principles for offsetting the heteroglossia released by the doctrine of individual conscience.<sup>7</sup> First, he eliminated countless hermeneutic options by insisting that only literal readings of Christ's teachings were valid. Second, he stressed the dangers of taking short sections of the text out of their context and "distorting" their meaning through recontextualization. Either overtly at the level of theme, or tacitly at a methodological level, Wiebe's novels (and some short stories<sup>8</sup>) interrogate these doctrines.

Simons' third measure to restrain heteroglossia consisted in promoting regular Christian fellowship: members of the Church were required to engage in dialogue, to air their differences with an ultimate view to reconciling them.<sup>9</sup> Although Menno Simons could not accept the dogmatism and corruption of the Catholic church, he did not oppose the institution of church per se. Menno believed that "the doctrine of the church and its correct organisation and discipline was one of the most important doctrines of Christianity" (Bender 22). He promoted literacy amongst the common people not in order to render the church redundant but "because only a membership able to read and discuss the Bible could serve in the church" (Littell 43).

By supplementing the practice of private Bible reading with communal Bible study and group discussion, Menno effectively set up a dynamic interaction between the peculiar private contexts and the shared public context in which the Scriptures could be interpreted. In Bakhtin's terms it may be said that the doctrine of individual conscience militates against the monologic principle, and prevents the Bible from deteriorating into "a new table of the law, a new weight like a cement block" (Littell 59). Fellowship, by contrast, aims to knit the many-voicings of God's Word into a coherent unity, thereby preventing it from dissolving into a plurality of disparate but equally valid

human voices.

Menno's policies imply that the Word "lives" throughout history in the mouths of people talking to each other, endlessly reappraising the meaning of the Scriptures. This is not to say that the Mennonite Church eschews theological doctrines, but rather that it generates and regenerates such doctrines dialogically, as Littell suggests:

The Anabaptist sources...presuppose a different understanding of the way truth is discovered and articulated from that of the Catholic or Reformers' parties. For them truth was given by the Holy Spirit, the governor of the people of God. The setting for its articulation was brotherly discussion. Truth was not defined by an ecclesiastical monarch or secular prince. Neither was it laid out by professional scribes reading and interpreting a book. It was discovered by the whole body of the faithful and represented a consensus fidelium when stated. (66)

All Wiebe's novels contain an image of consensus fidelium, an image of individual voices joining in song, or speaking freely as one. Like Menno Simons, Wiebe grounds his practices on a belief the Word must continually disintegrate into a variety of individual readings and at the same time continually reconstitute itself anew through dialogue between church members, (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit). The meaning of the Scriptures is thereby constantly being renegotiated in a space where centripetal and centrifugal forces co-exist. Through the dynamic interaction between these two opposing forces, the Scriptures retain a degree of semantic integrity without ossifying into dogma,

and retain their sacred status and absolute truth-value, without ceasing to function as "a social phenomenon that is becoming in history" (Bakhtin 1981, 326).

Wiebe certainly proceeds on the assumption that the "Living Word" must remain in the arena of social struggle-- or die. In his articles and in his fiction, he insists that the world Mennonite community must be free to "live into"<sup>10</sup> an understanding of the Word because, as Littell puts it, "the [Biblical] canon is closed, but the history described in the Bible, the providential works of God, are by no means finished" (59). Wiebe contends in "For the Mennonite Churches: A Last Chance," that Scriptures must not be allowed to ossify into a fixed, monologic code of laws:

For the Anabaptist vision to survive at all, it must be reinterpreted by people who will not fear to leave behind those things that deserve to be left there.... The main thrust of the churches as such must be to reapply the Biblical interpretations of the Anabaptists --and the Biblical interpretations which we can now see they lacked--to our time.

As the twentieth century is different from the sixteenth, so will our expression take different forms from those of the original Anabaptists.... (VL 28, 27)

In the same article, Wiebe makes a case for releasing heteroglossia on the synchronic as well as the diachronic plane. He accepts that since Mennonites are scattered in pockets across three continents, in widely differing social and natural contexts, subject to dissimilar laws and diverse cultural influences, the world Mennonite community's reading of the Scriptures is subject to an unrelenting

assault by divisive forces. Wiebe urges fellow-members not to practice ethnocentric Christianity, but to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to preserve the semantic integrity of the Word:

In Africa, Central America, Japan, Indonesia, and India, the work of missionaries from various Mennonite churches has shown that Christi Nachfolge [following Christ] depends on no way whatever upon blood strain or type of clothes (if any). In North America too, there are congregations of all major Mennonite churches which have Negroes, Indians, and Mexicans as members, but these are not the congregations that have much say at conference level.<sup>11</sup> (VL 27-8)

Wiebe's novels articulate the paradox of "a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses" (Bakhtin 1984, 81). The Word--indeed all words--manifest themselves in Wiebe's novels in the process of their continuous historical "becoming" in the socio-historical world. And yet Wiebe conceives of such "becoming" as humanity's communal, dialogic search for "a larger meaning of life, a larger meaning of the universe, which all the universe is going towards" (Neuman 234).

In "Unearthing Language," Robert Kroetsch teases Wiebe for his naive fundamentalist belief in "that 'capital-W' Word in the beginning was" (Neuman 236). But as Sam Solecki points out, "Wiebe insists that the word be incarnated in history, that his heroes translate it into praxis" ("Giant Fictions," 8). By their very existence as well as through the stories they tell, Wiebe's novels situate the Word in

the midst of various fields of social struggle, so that it never ossifies into monolithic dogma, but instead continuously evolves and renews its power to mean in response to testing historical circumstances and unprecedented linguistic contexts.<sup>12</sup> Wiebe's novels thus express a profound sense of the historicity of the divine Word, its involvement in an ongoing dialogic process of becoming. At the same time, Kroetsch is right to point to the legacy of--or nostalgia for--the unitary certainties of fundamentalist thought and language which linger even in Wiebe's most artistically innovative writing. A paradox thus underlies all Wiebe's novels: the Word frames history in that the Bible defines for Wiebe the ultimate or "larger meaning" of events; and yet, history also frames the Word--human beings have access to the "capital-W' Word" only in the form of historically contingent, "small-w" human utterances which people apprehend in specific socio-historical contexts.

NOTES TO APPENDIX

1. Wiebe indicates his awareness of the special significance of the period immediately prior to the Reformation in My Lovely Enemy, where it constitutes Harold Lemming's special area of interest.
2. Bakhtin's references to parodic versions of Biblical and other Christian discourses (1981, 70 ff.) suggest that Rome was not completely successful in suppressing the heteroglossia of the Word.
3. For a detailed analysis of the correlations between the growth of Protestantism and the spread of printing and literacy, see Eisenstein 145-84.
4. The following biographical material on Menno Simons is taken from Bender 4-29.
5. Smith asserts that "The Anabaptists relied more exclusively and more devotedly upon the Bible than the others as a guide in their search after God... The Bible to these prophets of a new world-order was the sole source of spiritual authority" (21).
6. See Smith 21-22.
7. See Littell 9-22 on Menno Simons' doctrines of the Word.
8. For example, "Millstone for the Sun's Day."
9. In conjunction with this third policy, Menno urged that any individual who refused repeatedly to reconcile his or her position with that of the majority should be banned or excommunicated from the church. "They soon accumulated a well-defined body of beliefs and practices agreed upon by congregations and conferences to which they insisted all members of the group must subscribe, or remove themselves from the fellowship of the body" (Smith 22).
10. Wiebe invokes the concept of "living into" an understanding of something in The Temptations of Big Bear, where Edgar Dewdney says that "Big Bear has lived into his own understanding of that land" (115).
11. The "conferences" might be viewed as the democratic parliamentary sessions of the Mennonite church. At these yearly meetings, representatives (elected democratically by the congregations to which they belong) discuss and vote on doctrinal and administrative matters.



12. Cf. David L. Jeffrey, who argues that in Wiebe's novels "religious questions are always tested in the crucible of personal crisis" (1981, 180).

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