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Traumatic Cultural Encounters in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*

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Rudy Wiebe is one of the few Canadian writers to animate magnificently a Christian vision in literature. His experience, which is particularly ingrained in Mennonite Christianity, is extremely impressive but his maturity and talent as a writer comes to the fore through his art of replicating and imitating the conscience of the Canadian West. For Wiebe, the key focus is always on how an individual or community performs in its endeavor to live according to genuine values. As Allan Dueck says, "Before a people can know who it is today, they must know who it was in the past...indeed, for any culture seeking its identity, a knowledge of its origin is essential" (Quoted in Moss 86).

Rudy Wiebe's novels pre-eminently give voice to the minority cultures of the Mennonites, the Indian and the Métis. As Sam Solecki observes, "simply by writing about such ostensibly regional individual events and group... Wiebe asserts their importance and remembering becomes an act with an ethical dimension" (*The Canadian Forum* 707). Wiebe's socio-political concerns are integral to his artistic endeavor. By relating the present with the ancient history Wiebe aspires to enable the Canadians to know their origins and who they are.

Rudy Wiebe's classical novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a moving epic of the tumultuous history of the "opening up" of Canadian West when the arrival of the Whites threatens the traditional way of life of the natives. Big Bear is constantly at the centre of the novel, and it is the tale of this Cree Indian chief and his people. *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a story of promises made, but not kept, by white invaders, promises of hardship and starvation. Big Bear is also the representative of the doomed society of Plains Cree Indians who refuses to sign a treaty, chooses a reserve or recognizes white ownership of the land. Rudy Wiebe himself writes about the condition of Indians in *A Voice in the Land*:

For by the spring of 1879 it was finally becoming clear even to government officials that the buffalo was on the brink of annihilation; that the 15000 prairies Indians, already decimated by smallpox were actually dying of malnutrition. Several thousand had wintered with Big Bear at the Forks because there were still some buffalo there and because he alone of all the ancient and traditional chiefs (in contrast to Hudson's Bay and government sanctioned chiefs) had never yet signed any treaty surrendered anything to the white man.

The ominous and dangerous new beginning of their native life is reflected in the opening sentence of the novel, "Sweet-grass had signed the treaty," that comes without any warning. The signing refers to the 'X' marks of the Indian, 'One great splattered

original with twenty nine pens'. The 'X' (cross) marks "forever" extinguished, as the Prime Minister liked to say it, all native rights," (*TOBB* 9). The Indians, crossing out their culture and themselves by putting the 'X' marks, were unaware of its implications and ultimate doom that awaits them once they bow down before the cruel and unsympathetic Whites.

Sweetgrass dedicates his signing of the treaty to God. He is befooled by the White men regarding their promise of protecting the buffalo. With this his dream of establishing brotherly relations and understanding with the whites collapses. The bizarre manner of the whites, in acting contrary to their promises, is extremely puzzling to these innocent, gods-like natives. Deceit and treachery are not their survival tools on this planet which according to their world view equally belong to all men. Simple and credulous Sweetgrass says to the Governor Morris:

The Great Spirit has put it in our hearts that we shake hands once more, before all our brothers. That spirit is above all, and under his eye every person is the same. I have pity on everyone who lives by the buffalo. ...I am thankful when I feel the First One is looking on us both as brothers. May this earth here never taste a white man's blood. I thank God I can lift my head, and when I take your hand and touch your heart, as I do now let us be one. (*TOBB* 18)

Signing the treaty means getting entrapped in the evil designs and stratagem created strategically by the mentally and technologically superior whites. Big Bear has some inkling of their cunning designs and regrets the decision of his people which can not be revoked and altered, "Every man was blind when making the treaty." He says before the advent of White missionaries they were rich and had plenty of land, food and clothing. Although pronouncing the names of the Queen, the Great Spirit and the Governor himself is a deliberate endeavor of the Whites to execute their plans smartly, yet Big Bear fails to understand their tactics.

Big Bear is unable to understand how so many chiefs like Sweet-grass, Big Child and Star Blanket, sacrificed their lands to the Queen. Governor Morris tells Big Bear that most of the chiefs have signed the treaty and made their marks. "They all agree it is good" (*TOBB* 32). But Big Bear deems it an unwise and unpardonable act to sign without discussing with every single chief. "The land is one for us all so we must all talk and agree" (*TOBB* 33). Governor Morris adopts a different tactics to tame and control Big Bear through this stern warning:

Whether you make your mark or not, the white men will come. Whether you take a reserve or not white settlers will take land and the Queen Mother will say it is theirs. We can do nothing. White settlers will take land and the Queen mother will say it is theirs. We can do no more, these words to which so many chiefs have set their marks, on this leather, are our last words. (*TOBB* 33)

Rudy Wiebe primarily depicts how cultural encounters are a traumatic experience and how the ethnic minorities try their best to retain their cultural mooring and identity. Of all the chiefs, Big Bear bravely resists the offer to sign the treaty and represents laudable efforts to retain the old ways of native culture. What is happening all around to

the Indian and his powerlessness to prevent the grinding effects of modern civilization cause his suffering? The white missionaries, traders, settlers, soldiers, policemen, government officials behave indecently and awkwardly with Native Indians. But they are united in their inability to comprehend Big Bear's vision of North West in which Indians, Métis and Whites can live together at peace with one another and with the land.

The tone of *The Temptations of Big Bear* is elegiac and its time is that of the end of most things for Indian people- the end of their culture, their rituals, their sacred places, their open grasslands, and the end of buffalo centered economy. Thus, Big Bear truly emerges as a tragic hero because he feels that he is fighting a losing battle and yet he does not give up, "the man who affects us for eternity not the conquering kind but the suffering man." (Salat, *The Canadian Novel* 102)

The positive side of the political and cultural invasion of the Canadian North becomes highlighted in Sweetgrass' decision to sign the treaty. He is of the firm conviction that acute starvation has led to the doom of his people. But in such critical circumstances when there was scarcity of food the white men helped them by providing food and other necessary items so that they could survive with ease.

Amid the throes of flux and change the natives find it difficult to survive due to vanishing buffalo and consequently starve in the winter of 1878-79. As Crowfoot expresses the pathetic conditions of his people in following words. "My people are starving because someone has stopped buffalo from coming north this winter. Here and there our hunters find a few lonely buffalo and now children cry at night for hunger. What will my people eat in spring?" (*TOBB* 95). The extinction of buffalo is on the rise and soon there will be no buffalo left in Canada as Laird, the Lieutenant Governor of the territories would write in his report, 'after ten years it is feared the buffalo in Canada will have become nearly extinct.' (*TOBB* 70)

Arrival of the white man on the pious land of the natives is a fatal blow to their life style. From old to young every one is feeling threatened. The spark of resentment and dissatisfaction, regarding the promises made in the land treaty, kindles fire especially among the young brigade in the Big Bear's camp. Their dependence upon buffalo hunting for food always saving them from starvation speaks volumes of their passionate and immortal love for traditional past. But without land they find decreasing number of buffalo a threat to their survival. Kingbird never gets enough meat in the camp to satisfy his hunger. For Crowfoot's adopted son Poundmaker it is better to die fighting than being hungry deprived of food. "I sometimes hear a thought I was never a warrior like you and my father Crowfoot, that fighting toward death is better than being dragged there by hunger. (*TOBB* 187)

Big Bear in his council meeting mentions the promises made in the land treaty which the white Government never bothered to take cognizance of. He finds his both hands empty as far as those promises were concerned. "All I find there is the Iron Horse on its track choking the Earth, throwing sparks to set the prairie burning and it of course has no concern since it can outrun any fire" (*TOBB* 202). Sitting Bull tells Crowfoot that his children are crying with hunger. Crowfoot mentions "The treaty says we will be fed when there is famine." Sitting Bull ridicules and spits in the name of treaty and says: "I have seen treaties signed by commissioners in the name of White skin government that

said they would give rations every day, not just in famine. And they would build everyone houses, food and houses are the treaties said.” (TOBB 103)

The deep fraction and widening differences in his own community wake Big Bear out of his inertia. He convinces his people of the power of unity that can prove to be a lethal weapon in this fierce battle of survival against the dangerous outsiders and in establishing “a peaceful empire” on their own land. Consequently the distant dream of driving the monstrous whites out of their land will be fructified:

We are small here, we are smaller there and who hears up? Who stirs in his sleep when a single buffalo runs? But when a heard moves, ahhh-we too must shake the ground we must speak with one thundering voice, we must have huge reserve for us all, for our hunting for our life where we will live as the treaty says we can. (TOBB 203)

Big Bear has a dream of establishing a place where the Métis, Natives and the Whites live peacefully with each other. He strongly highlights the promises made by the Governor Morris to the Métis: “The Métis are my children too: It is my business to look after them we will make all contented.” (TOBB 203)

Big Bear is so innocent that he reels under the twin tempting offers of Whiteman’s treaty with its lofty promise of reserved land, Police protection, blanket, food and assistance on the one hand, and the way of staunch resistance by Sioux under the powerful and extremely robust Sitting Bull on the other. The magic of these seducing and dangerous enticements force Big Bear to backtrack from his earlier dream of his quasi-Christian faith in the camaraderie and the possibilities of some equitable communal sharing of western prairie by Indian and Whiteman. Big Bear challenges and wholeheartedly defies the whites and their treaties for the longest time but he is aware that white culture is numerically and technologically so powerful that they can not resist for long. The gradual extinction of the buffalo that sustains the Indians symbolizes a similar fate awaiting the Indians. His temptations are, therefore, to choose between two kinds of death: “a death-defying death or resigned death.”(Keith, *Epic Fiction* 20)

The beginning of the novel offers a befitting example of Whiteman’s brutishness. John Mcdougall, son and successor of a devoted Methodist missionary, reports a conversation with Shaw who is an aspirant to be a founder of the Alberta ranching industry: “John, your father is gone. You surely won’t remain in missionary work any longer. This land’s all empty, look at it. I see nothing but progress here from now on; so let’s work together in the stock business, you on this side of the mountain and I am on the other. I will give you half my stock right now” (TOBB 48). The gradual killing of the buffalo has made the land empty. It is also empty because the Indian, his soul and his prayer, is departing. Shaw’s callous offer and the pronounced gospel of progress are really disgusting. The Indian’s readiness to relate their whole existence, each and every act to divinity, is undoubtedly impressive. The land, which was a source of life for him and his band, has been taken from them by the whites. It was on this land that Big Bear used to run buffalo. The benevolent and Master Creator God had gifted them the land- the breath and heartbeat of their life, so that they could celebrate the beautiful fragments of life:

This land belonged to me. When I had it I never needed your flour and pork... Before many of you were born I ran buffalo over this place where you have put this building and white men ate the meat. I gave them my hand as a brother, I was free, and the smallest person in my band was as free as I because the Master of life had given us our place on the earth and that was enough for us. But you have taken our inheritance, and our strength. The land is torn up, black with fires, and empty. You have done this. And there is nothing left now but that you must help us. (TOBB 398)

Wiebe endeavors to identify us with the Indians and experience their fatal entry into history through their eyes. This identification with Indian is achieved by their plain and simple speech, their love of nature and their innate religiousness. Indians are portrayed as the true preserver of values professed but not practiced by the Whitman. The conscious step of depicting the Indians still heathen and far from conversion, despite intense missionary efforts, is surpassed by the natural elements of empathy. The predicaments of Big Bear resemble the condition of Christian hero confronting a triad of temptations- to sign the treaty, to take up arms, and finally, to despair, the greatest possible sin in Christian theology- clearly evoking an analogy to the three temptations of Christ in the wilderness. Wiebe's Indians are no saints; they are sinful men yet capable of redemption. *Saturday Night Review* analyses the novel thus "Something like a true story The Temptation of Big Bear is social realism raised to the level of elegy? A gorgeous lamentation." (Salat 102)

Edgar Dewdney's letter to John McDonald is a testimony to Big Bear's powerful influence and integrity resulting in his non- acceptance and rejection of the treaty. He takes notice of Big Bear's voice and perception which can do wonders even in Parliament. It is his voice, and his perception which draws more and more people to him. "His voice would be unbelievable in Parliament. The deep rich timbre of it alone, forget all sense (so, rarely need anyway) would devastate any opposition, including Blake" (TOBB 113). Big Bear's strong logical thinking surprises Edgar Dewdney to the extent that he compares his mind to a civilized 'Oxford debater'. Big Bear's paganism and simplistic outlook in life is absolutely unbelievable. "His concept of life is of course pagan and simplistic in the extreme, but oddly enough in argument the mind of this stubby native seems as logical, almost civilized as any Oxford debater" (TOBB 114)

Although Big Bear defies and rejects the treaty, yet the glimpses of his noble nature comes to the fore through his disapproval of the strategy of violence and cruelty in killing the white prisoners. He even intends to give them some of the things plundered from them. "I pity all these white people that we saved, he says; I don't wish harm should come to one of them. Instead of trying to do harm to them you should be giving them back some of the things you plundered from them" (TOBB 379). Wandering Spirit and his young companions pay no heed to Big Bear's words which is an evidence of the latter's diminishing stature among his people and ultimately the humiliation. Big Bear has a personal following of over one thousand, an incredible number among buffalo hunting Crees, yet at Frog Lake this orator has no influence at all over a small group of his own Rattlers, led by his own son. He stands helpless; his great words falling unto nothing as the Whiteman he has personally pledged to protect are disarmed, sported with and slaughtered before his eyes. Thus, to quote Rudy Wiebe: "Big Bear, I found, lived

these contradictions, contained these extremes of greatness and pathos.”(*A Voice in the Land* 134)

Infiltrations and intrusion by the new, “gigantic men” into a very pious land of “the god’s men” spells a doomsday for the latter. Rudy Wiebe magnificently blows the trumpet of modernism to deaden the native voices and to destabilize the smooth life of the natives. The novel encompasses not only his hero’s struggle for integrity and justice but also the whole richness and transformation of plain’s culture. He brings to limelight the pathos and adverse effects of progress upon an old-fashioned way of life through the reminiscences of the old chief, the scenes of feasting in Big Bear’s tent in 1876, and the vitality and gaiety of Kingbird and his friends. In spite of their painful display of violence and anger, the Indians are relegated to second class status in New West.

The Sioux Chief says that their houses were burned by the whites. They destroy those places “where we had stored our food.” Their women were assaulted and they got their river fouled “where we got fish and water so we died of stinking sicknesses” (*TOBB* 147). At one’s first meeting with Big Bear in 1876 one hears him describe the Indian way of life, “I have always lived on earth with my people. I have always moved as I wished to see. We take what the earth gives us when we need anything and 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?” (*TOBB* 29)

During ten years from 1876-1886 that make up the time span of the novel, one observes Indians' freedom and independence vanishing so completely that at his trial Big Bear feels compelled to plead for his people whose pitiable condition he eloquently describes:

My people are hiding in the woods, terrified- those are my children, and they are starving, driven from the land which was our great inheritance and they are running, somewhere, in the darkness, afraid to show themselves in the big light of the day....Forgive them! I plead with you; chiefs of the white law, have pity. Pardon the outcasts of my people! (*TOBB* 397-398)

The response given by the Judge in a voice “thinly hard like steel is only to correct Big Bear on one point;” “This land never belonged to you. The land was and is the Queen’s she has allowed you to use it (*TOBB* 399). The Judge says to Big Bear “You have been found guilty by an impartial Jury. I have no objection to hear what you have to say, but on one point you must be corrected.” (*TOBB* 399)

The climax of this court drama reaches when the judge gives his final verdict against the innocent Big Bear. The judge says he will not do justice to his country and its people if he does not make Big Bear realize of putting forth a bad example and if his people follow the same their conviction and imprisonment is as sure as death. He is sentenced for three years to be entrapped and imprisoned in the penitentiary of Manitoba at Stony Mountain. The Judge puts forth the final verdict regarding Big Bear’s treason-felony in this way:

Now, grey-haired as you are, you cannot be excused from all responsibility for the misdoings of your band. You have been found guilty..... The

sentence of the court upon you, Big Bear, for the offence of which you stand convicted is this. That you be imprisoned in the penitentiary of Manitoba at Stony Mountain for the period of three years. (TOBB 399)

Wiebe's portrayal of Big Bear and his struggle against the inexorable grip of circumstances and rapacious white materialism is entirely impressive. The novel is not only about the Indians of Western Canada at the end of their way of life, but it is also about the continuing problems of all civilizations faced with inevitable changes- changes that force the destruction of behavior value and the old codes of behavior. We move from specific problems or Indians to the universal. Big Bear cannot understand how land, the vital source of life, can be taken away from his people and given to someone else.

Big Bear, in defense of his crime, discloses his deepest affections and concern for the white people most of whom were his friends killed at Frog Lake. He painfully realizes his diminishing and deteriorating influence among his people; especially his extremely young, passionate and impatient people including his own son. He says "My heart sank when those white men at Frog Lake were killed; I had eaten with all of them and some of them were my friends, but when some came to my people with news of the fight at Duck Lake my young men ignored my words." (TOBB 396)

Big Bear always wants to do good to other people because he thinks through such acts he can please The Great One. But after his unjust imprisonment, conviction and subsequent exploitation by the white machinery his grief ascends to its apex;

I was away most of the winter, hunting and fishing for my family north in the Moose Hills and when I got back the day before the killing the young men despised me because I would not talk with our half-brothers I always understood that it pleased the Great Spirit for men to do good. But this summer with this round iron around my leg, my heart is stretched out on the ground. (TOBB 396-397)

Turbulence looms large over Big Bear's tragic fate. In spite of his unusual awareness of what is happening and the great powers he has possessed in the old world, is forced to recognize that his world has been so thoroughly disintegrated that even his good name has been robbed from him:

There was a time when young men sat around me to listen; I was the great chief of the First People. But now they laugh at me. For some time they have been trying to take away the good name I have lived so long, and now they have done that very well. It will do them no good but they have thrown away my name. It is gone and I am old. (TOBB 334)

The pitiable condition of Big Bear is clearly revealed in the above lines. His spirits are severely jolted by the chaotic elements which are unleashed by the whites' arrival.

Big Bear's vision of the world, "slit open with unending lines, squares, rectangles..." (TOBB 409) emphasizes the inexorable destruction of the Indian culture. Big Bear's gradually diminishing stature among his people also becomes evident. While initially he is an eminent and respected leader, he slowly loses his charismatic influence among his people. His voice is no longer respected in the community councils. "Big Bear becomes, Lear in rags as he walks about wearing only a shabby old blanket" (*A Voice in*

the Land 134). Big Bear is not merely an individual but a representative of the River People and his humiliation reflects the decline and annihilation of the culture.

The stubborn technological advancement of the new civilization stamps its authority on the Crees as Wiebe feels there is no escape for them from this life threatening and extremely irresistible progress. The Indian way of life- a good life as Big Bear remembers it, ends with their inevitably unsuccessful attempt to reassert their legitimate rights through force. Big Bear can see the imminent destruction of the traditional native Indian culture and yet knows he can not resist the force of change. Frank Davey aptly argues:

In Wiebe's views there is no escape for the Crees from the vise- grip of circumstances; only Big Bear's continuing refusal to follow the tempting ways of total surrender or total resistance can temper the inevitable Indian collapse with dignity and nobility. In this refusal to accept the conventional human responses to persecution Big Bear takes on the role of the Christian martyr; like Christ himself he stubbornly clings to a non-violent but fixed moral stance that with equanimity accepts the risk of death. Thus the least Christian of Wiebe's novels in its overt content is the most powerful in its Christian implications. (14)

Big Bear is both a representative figure and a symbol for a lost way of life. The Christ analogue is made explicit when Big Bear after the Fort Pitt Massacre says: "You have thrown my name away and I will have to lift what you did at Frog Lake; my back will have to carry what you did at Fort Pitt" (*TOBB* 228). Thus in his suffering and humiliation Big Bear finally emerges as a Christ figure who bears the cross on his back. Wiebe's perspective on history affirms the cultural heritage and identity of demoralized and oppressed people.

From the days of North America, European settlers forced Natives aside, taking over their land on which they lived for thousand of years. Big Bear envisioned a North west in which all peoples lived together peaceably in the 1880s, made history by standing his ground to keep his Plains Crees nation from being forced on to reserves. The buffalo food supply was vanishing, but Big Bear led his people across the prairie, resisting pressure to cede rights to the land and give up freedom in exchange of temporary nourishment. The struggle brought starvation to his followers, tearing apart the community and eventually his own family. The story follows Big Bear's tragic life as he lives through the last buffalo hunt, the coming of the railway, the pacification of the Native tribe, and his own imprisonment.

Big Bear thinks that the Whites have a passion for changing things and that "kept them running forever and frantic. They never had rest."

Surveyors sticking in poles with wires and government agents sending massages and missionaries talking talking to stop stop stop stop and settlers ripping up land and knocking down trees and wolfers dashing about scattering poison and killing wolves and buffalo. (*TOBB* 101 -102)

Big Bear is held responsible for the sins of his people and he is loaded with the weight of those misdeeds of his tribe. "The multiplied and outrageous reports we heard

about this old man, all the sins of his tribe, and a great many they never committed, laid upon his shoulders in the public print" (TOBB 385). On the question of Big Bear speaking at the thirst dance Stanley Simpson tells the court in the positive and affirmative tone that Big Bear wanted to cut the head of the white people. "Yes, I heard him speak at the thirst dance at Frenchman's Butte. He was speaking to several Indians, some of his band wood Crees and he cut up a piece of tobacco, and he said he wanted his men to cut the head of the white people off the same as he cut this piece of tobacco off. He wanted the head of the master who is over the soldiers." (TOBB 365)

Big Bear is charged with treason-felony but he can't understand the justification of such baseless and absurd charges leveled against him. Due to his involvement in evil and unpardonable act affecting the honor of the Queen and the Crown, the Court in its partial and prejudiced verdict based on lopsided arguments shortlists the following charges:

Then you are charged this Friday, the eleventh day of September, 1885, that you, not regarding the duty of your allegiance which you owe to the Queen, with other evil disposed person, compassed to levy war against the Queen in Canada, against her Crown and dignity, and on the 2nd April you did so at Frog Lake, on the 17th April you did so at Fort Pitt, and subsequently, on the 28th at Loon Creek; and take notice, that you have the op -(TOBB 355)

The Court holds that Big Bear has associated himself unlawfully with his band against the government. He is accused as a culprit who does not deserve an acquittal from the serious charges he is entrapped in.

Big Bear becomes heroic in his tragic death and reminds us of one of the courageous soldiers who do not take to flights against heavy odds but stay in the battlefield of life to fight to the finish and lays down his life. An event from the Crimean War (1854-56) waged on an epic scale by Turkey, France and British against Russia will not be out of place here. A cavalcade of merely six hundred soldiers armed with sabers was commanded to take on the much more powerful enemy, largely outnumbering them. Reconnaissance had not been carried out properly to assess the army's strength and arms. It was an unequal battle between Cavalry and artillery. The cavalry soldiers knew that death was a forgone conclusion; nevertheless they fought heroically till almost all of them died on the battlefield because they knew:

Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die. (Tennyson 43-45)

Santiago of Hemmingway's novel *The Old Man and The Sea* is also a brave and heroic character. The villagers in the novel consider Santiago as an old fisherman who runs out of luck and can not fish anymore. But Santiago surprises them by going far out into the sea to fish. Santiago catches a marlin and is able to bring the fish ashore as a Skelton only to die later on. Tired as a result of his superhuman exertion, Santiago proves that man has extraordinary powers to survive and endure and that "a man can be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemmingway 89). Man is not made for defeat. Man can attain dignity and self-respect only by his constant effort to conquer evil. The sea

symbolizes the vast universe in which lie hidden treasures for any one who has the will and the courage to go and find them. In this light it is essential for human beings, as for Santiago and Big Bear to continue striving whatever the odds.

Harry Morgan the hero of *To Have and Have Not*, even after he has been deprived of his boat, carries on his struggle for survival like Big Bear, during the American depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. He agrees to take the Cubans, after they have robbed a bank, to Havana, knowing fully well that they will attempt to kill him. He has his own plans and succeeds in killing four of them single-handedly. The story teaches us that no man can achieve much singly - a super - imposition. What he has achieved has been achieved single handedly.

Wiebe's efforts in highlighting the genuine struggle waged by the prairie leaders against the cruel forces of the White devils who plan to rob the Canadian Indians of their land, culture and ultimately their identity, do not end in fiasco. The destruction of Big Bear and his Cree is not a negligible episode in Canadian expansion to the west, but a tragic event of national magnitude. Thomas King rightly says, "Wiebe captures the pathos and the emotion of native people at a certain point in their history and he does it well ... Wiebe points out to us that Canadian has not come to terms with native peoples, that there is unfinished business to attend to?" (*MELUS* 16). Ultimately one can argue that Big Bear sees the truth but he is not all powerful. What Big Bear felt the community simply did not understand and he could not convince them of it? It is the superbly artistic glimpse of Rudy Wiebe that he attributes the failure of his vibrant fictional heroes like Big Bear etc to the collapse in societal fabric that ultimately takes in its sweep the entire community.

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