RUDY WIEBE AS NOVELIST:
WITNESS AND CRITIC, WITHOUT APOLOGY

by

T.W. Smyth

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Ph.D. degree
Centre for the Study of Religion
University of Toronto

© Copyright by T.W. Smyth 1997
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

0-612-28061-6
ABSTRACT

RUDY WIEBE AS NOVELIST: WITNESS AND CRITIC, WITHOUT APOLOGY

SMYTH, T.W. (Ph.D. 1997)

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

A typological reading of Rudy Wiebe's *My Lovely Enemy* and *A Discovery of Strangers* reveals an implicit witness to the Christ of the Incarnation and a sustained critique of both church and state. His method of indirection favours parabolic form in a promotion of meaning.

The dissertation begins with an exploration of the influence of John Howard Yoder, as spokesperson for an Anabaptist theology that, while emphasizing discipleship over faith, is founded solidly on a Christocentric orthodoxy as articulated by the Swiss theologian Karl Barth. The complex internal dynamics of Wiebe's texts are examined in the light of the theoretical principles articulated by the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin.

After a brief discussion of the complexity of typology, and its role in *The Blue Mountains of China*, the continuity of Wiebe's writing is explored in a typological reading of *The Temptations of Big Bear*, *The Scorched-Wood People*, and *The Mad Trapper*.

*My Lovely Enemy* is understood as a complex intertextual labyrinth (reflecting a sustained Kroetschian playfulness) seemingly focussed on a contemporary banal affair. In an exploration of a Christian understanding of love, the parabolic witness of the prophet Hosea's unfailing forgiveness of the unfaithful Gomar to the promise of divine forgiveness of a wayward Israel becomes the hermeneutic clue to the Incarnation as the typological measure of Wiebe's text.
A Discovery of Strangers, an imaginative retelling of the meeting of the Yellowknife Indians and the 1819-22 Franklin expedition on Canada’s arctic tundra, founded on extensive use of the officers’ journals and Dene Indian stories, explores western civilization’s propensity to impose order on an inherently strange world and to reduce the other to the same. Wiebe’s adaptation of the White documents leads to a metaphorization of the narrative. Through the parable of the Good Samaritan, the sacrifice of the incarnated Christ is revealed as intrinsic to a reading of this discovery of strangers.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: Theological Context</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: Literary Context</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: Typological Reading</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: &quot;Where Is The Voice Coming From?&quot;</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: Earlier Novels (1973-1980)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Temptations of Big Bear</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scorched-Wood People</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mad Trapper</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter VI: My Lovely Enemy</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Banal Affair</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger Meanings</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The Black Bridge&quot;</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirection and the Parable</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent and Resurrection</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter VII: A Discovery Of Strangers</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Picturesque and Strangeness</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document and Art</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Narrative as Parable</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterword</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: The Repudiation Of Neo-Kantianism</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Free Indirect Speech In &quot;Over The Red Line&quot;</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: Comparison Of A Discovery Of Strangers</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Patrick White's Voss</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study arose from an appreciation of the density and challenge of Wiebe's My Lovely Enemy. His willingness in that novel to put himself at risk, particularly as a confessing Mennonite, by tackling subjects often considered taboo, and to measure them creatively against his Christian faith, had immense personal appeal. That appreciation has been heightened, first, by reading his most recent novel, A Discovery of Strangers, and then by reading both novels in the context of the theological writings of John Howard Yoder, his confessed theological mentor. These and other diverse secondary works, especially those of Yoder's own theological teacher, Karl Barth, of Graham Ward and Jean-Luc Marion, and the reflections on novelistic discourse by Mikhail Bakhtin, have served to reveal the eminence of Wiebe's craft, his commitment to the Other, and his remarkable sensitivity to the problems and possibilities of literary witness. (See "Appendix 1")

I cannot adequately thank Charles Lock and W.J. Keith for their supervisory role, each in his own way, in the preparation of this thesis, particularly for their patience throughout the whole process. While I am ultimately responsible for the text as it stands, those conversant with the work of these scholars will recognize their individual marks upon it; its strengths reflect their influence. Others to whom I owe a major debt of gratitude include Dennis Duffy, John Howard Yoder, Leslie Lewis, Robert Hulse, Ken Hewitt, Scott Couling, Joe Wright and, of course, my wife and family.
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title/Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACW</td>
<td>&quot;The Artist as a Critic and a Witness&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMC</td>
<td>The Blue Mountains of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOS</td>
<td>A Discovery of Strangers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLE</td>
<td>My Lovely Enemy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Playing Dead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDM</td>
<td>Peace Shall Destroy Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWP</td>
<td>The Scorched-Wood People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBB</td>
<td>The Temptations of Big Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UL</td>
<td>&quot;Unearthing Language: An Interview with Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WVCF</td>
<td>&quot;Where is the Voice Coming From?&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

As John Howard Yoder has informed me\textsuperscript{1}, Rudy Wiebe expressed chagrin upon the appearance of some early reviews of My Lovely Enemy - many voicing bafflement, disenchantment, and even shock. In one of the first assessments, Mark Abley, writing for Maclean's, accuses Wiebe of "losing control of his language," of "vacillations of subject and tone," views the novel as "torn between the realistic and the visionary," and concludes with the dismissive judgment - "It is difficult to take seriously a novel whose central revelation is 'A man was made to love woman on all fours'" (56). In another magazine review, this one in Chatelaine, Judith Timson is equally unenthusiastic, citing "an irritating stream of consciousness style," as she dismisses it as "an earnest but not particularly enjoyable novel" that "meanders, none too successfully, back and forth between the present...and the past" (6). As far as Wiebe was concerned, My Lovely Enemy contains sufficient clues to promote a careful elucidation of the text; clearly, these had not been grasped.

The scathing comments by David Lyle Jeffrey in a literary journal late in 1983 would have been particularly disappointing - "[My Lovely Enemy] seems, indeed, to be as unfriendly as any book could be to its author's hard-earned reputation...[it] is cliché-ridden, hackneyed, and trite in its ultimate statement" - since Jeffrey himself was among those who "only recently celebrated...that reputation" ("Lost Voice" 111). Earlier, he had assessed Wiebe's The Blue Mountains of China as "by any standard a remarkable novel, one of the best in this country in our time...probably the most demanding novel English speaking Canada has yet produced" ("Search" 185-186).

This thesis contends that such misreadings of My Lovely Enemy - misreadings that
continue - attest to the critics’ failure to read carefully and perceptively. This novel is not a tentative early effort but the product of an established author. His previous writings should have provided some intimations, particularly to critically-informed readers, as to how this text might be read. It is no aberration; along with its successor, *A Discovery of Strangers*, it continues to challenge a limited perception of reality, encouraging “a whole new way of seeing” the world. As a critic of both church and society, Wiebe continues to witness to a radical Christian faith, without apology, in either the popular sense of ‘confessing fault’ or the technical sense of explaining his position.

In his early essay “The Artist as a Critic and a Witness” (1965) written while at the Mennonite college at Goshen in Indiana, Wiebe articulates the nature of that role, stating explicitly that his faith in Jesus Christ is “the foundation stone of all my thought patterns” (41). His readers have been given no reason to think he has since changed his mind. The ‘radicality’ of Wiebe’s position is such that, as Susan Whaley claims, his Christianity “informs” (Whaley 316) his work in that it permeates his writing and is its *raison d’être*. Further, W. J. Keith is right in claiming that “the emphasis [in his novels] is always on the individual believer rather than on the articles of faith in which he believes” (Intro BMC n.pag.), but only in so far as Wiebe is concerned more with what the believer does than with what he confesses. One cannot, or should not, assume, however, that at any time Christ, the object of faith, is not both the ultimate focus and the measure of his writing. One cannot, for example, see him in one instance as interested in general social or ethical issues, and at another as espousing specifically Christian concerns. Whether he is writing about Big Bear, Almighty Voice, James Dyck, or Greenstockings, what he understands of Christ is always the controlling paradigm. Concomitantly, one should not think that the importance of the
ostensible subject of his discourse is thereby diminished; for Wiebe, it is only in Christ that anything gains its value. His indubitable love for Canada’s north-west and for the people who have walked its trails and paddled its rivers is founded on, and perceived through, the love revealed in the Incarnation.

As such, he cannot be viewed as promoting a Kantian or early Hegelian understanding of Jesus as simply the great teacher who presents a way of life, simple or complex (we shall see how such a perception invalidates much of Penny van Toorn’s critique). He does, of course, lay great stress on “the new way for man to live” (BMC 215) proclaimed by the Jesus of the Gospels, but underlying that proclamation is the great kerygma, the person of Jesus the Christ, who is the Word, the Gospel, the Good News. To appreciate the “deep structure” of that proclamation, to grasp the full substance of that “foundation stone,” it is essential to view it in the context of biblical typology, in which Christ is the defining antitype. Wiebe’s method as a writer consists in “deploying [the originary kerygma’s] dimensions” (Marion, God 144) as the implicit “measure” (Ward, “Mimesis” 2) of his writing.

In that early Goshen essay, Wiebe also articulated his fundamental method of indirection:

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, even if he were supposed to convince them. (ACW 42)

His task is, clearly, not to attempt “to convince them” of anything, but to present an imaginative work for their “pleasure.” By pleasure, he explicitly does not mean “the
guffawing stupidity that goes for pleasure on today's TV menu," but what "arises from exploring the widest range of the mind and the senses" (43). He claims that the things in life that matter cannot be approached directly. If the novelist "attacks them head on and blurts them out," they "simply disappear" (44). To talk about life, love, or God himself, the writer must resort to figuration. It is only by means of symbols, by parables, by fiction, by "prodding people into thinking" (47), that the artist can cause them to see things differently, and perhaps catch a glimmer of what they may become.

While he reserves for himself the twin roles of "critic and witness" to both the Mennonite community and the broader western society, he categorically rejects the role of philosopher, theologian, devotional writer, and, particularly, that of preacher. His commitment to 'indirection' leads him to the more shocking claim, in light of his staunch support of the church itself, that "by means of artistic indirection the novel will inevitably teach and that more profoundly and eloquently than either history or sermon" (44).

The implications of Wiebe's method of indirection will continue to concern us throughout the course of this essay, particularly as it relates to what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the dialogic ("Everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" [Holquist, "Glossary" 426]). A number of critics, particularly Ina Ferris, David Jeffrey and more recently, Penny van Toorn, have examined Wiebe's writing in light of the work of Bakhtin, who has argued for the inherent dialogic character of the novel, claiming that the voices therein, while subject to the author's orchestration, retain a freedom and independence of expression, preserving their autonomy in an interactive heteroglossia ("It is that which ensures the primacy of context over text. At any given time there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, psychological - that will insure that a word uttered in that
place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” ["Glossary” 428]).

While his critics suggest that Wiebe gives promise of pursuing this dialogic model within his method of indirection, their assessments of his achievements have been mixed. Ferris, although applauding the generally dialogic mode of The Blue Mountains of China, claims that Wiebe, nonetheless, remains too pedagogically intrusive, reverting in the novel’s conclusion to a ‘preachy’ monologic affirmation that undermines the conventions of the novel: “the final chapter conveys a sense of attenuation, verges on cliché and commonplace that obscure the significance of Wiebe’s effort” (”Religious” 95). W.J.Keith, however, reminds us that Reimer’s sermon (Ferris’s “‘preachy’ monologic affirmation”) is followed by “a further ten pages” and contends that Wiebe’s “position” is “embodied in the final inconclusive discussion between Reimer and Friesen” (Epic 59). Jeffrey, surprisingly in light of his later castigation of My Lovely Enemy, also takes issue with Ferris, applauding the challenges made to the conventions of the novel: “Wiebe both illustrates his practice of fiction as prophetic vocation and also, as he sophisticates these challenges, writes some of his most successful passages and, in passing, his brightest vindications of the standard novelistic conventions which he seems to abuse” (“Search” 182). Van Toorn, however, agrees with her, claiming that, for all the evidence of the dialogic within his texts, Wiebe seems ultimately compelled to subvert the dialogic by reverting to monologic closure, and extends that critique across the gamut of Wiebe’s novels, including My Lovely Enemy.

This present essay contends that Bakhtin’s perception of the novel does provide a most useful model for evaluating Wiebe’s achievement. There is perhaps no student of fiction more cognizant of its inherent subtleties and complexities than Bakhtin and, at the same time, a writer whose own subtleties and complexities have been more misread as his own
"commentators and interpreters have trimmed him (albeit often unwittingly) to their own presuppositions" (Lock, "Carnival" 68). While his distinction between the dialogic and the monologic is commonly recognized, it is often misrepresented. What is not readily noted, for example, is his point that "[h]owever monological the utterance may be...it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said...The utterance is filled with dialogic overtones" (Bakhtin, Speech 92). Further, as David Lodge states, "the variety of discourses in the novel prevents the novelist from imposing a single (monologic) world-view upon his reader even if he wanted to" (After 22). To which Wayne Booth, in his introduction to Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, adds that the novel is "the one grand literary form that is for Bakhtin capable of a kind of justice to the inherent polyphonies of life [...] of doing justice to voices other than the author's own" (xxii).

But Bakhtin does not suggest that the author is a simple cipher of that polyphony nor is he himself another voice heralding the author's demise. Contrariwise, he asserts that what actually enters a novel is not the polyphony of everyday language but the author's artistic representation, or image, of that polyphony. Wiebe, in a discussion of the polyphony of The Blue Mountains of China in which he speaks of using "every kind of necessary language, from one-stringed lute, if you will, to full orchestra" ("One-Stringed" 142), acknowledges that in translating non-English dialects "into disturbed English word order...my very act of translation gives me control: I and I alone am making the translation" (143). But, in fact, in every representation of another's speech we are engaged in a translation in which we present our "image" of the other's voice. And further, as Bakhtin emphasizes, the author has even greater "say"; he is indeed not voiceless, as some would contend, but exerts control over the novel by speaking "albeit in a refracted way" (Dialogic 314) through the story. Bakhtin argues that "If one fails to sense...the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to
understand the story.”

The “intent” of the story reveals another Bakhtinian emphasis (to the embarrassment of some commentators) which shows definite affinities between Wiebe and Bakhtin. One can hear Wiebe’s concerns in Booth’s argument that “what is at stake, in reading Bakhtin, is far more than a question of how we read, or even how we evaluate, fiction.” Instead, what is paramount is “the entire enterprise of thinking about what life means” (xxiv). In his brief, early article “Art and Answerability,” Bakhtin claims that the artist can not waive his responsibilities to “the fretful cares of everyday life” (1), contending that while “art and life are not one...they must become united in myself - in the unity of my answerability” (2). What matters most “at each moment [is] the touch of the author” in his pursuit of what “might be called the best vertical structure” rather than the creative work’s “literal formal construction” (Booth xxv).

Bakhtin’s identification of authorial “refraction” is reflected in Wiebe’s sense of “indirection” which he gradually refines in his latest novels. While it will be argued, contra van Toorn, that My Lovely Enemy (including, technically, the significant monologic voice assigned to Jesus), is fundamentally dialogic (there is no reason why a dialogic novel should not contain a monologic voice; indeed, are not all spoken voices monologic?), Jesus’s role is personally unsettling as it appears to undermine the indirection he espouses by forcefully imposing the author’s Anabaptist vision. A Discovery of Strangers, on the other hand, by avoiding any semblance of compromise, is technically Wiebe’s best; it is his most successful attempt to eschew monologic closure and yet maintain his “refractive” role as witness to “vertical structure” and critic of monologic “certainties.”

While this latest novel is, on the surface, far less controversial than My Lovely Enemy, together they are his most venturesome novels, and each in its own way exemplifies Wiebe’s
increasing willingness to take risks. At one stage of his career, when he served as editor for *The Mennonite Brethren Herald*, he limited the scope of writing by addressing the Mennonite community expressly, but since then he has greatly expanded his horizons and thereby greatly increased his risks. Now he writes consciously in the context of a broad heterogeneous community with which he is prepared to engage in dialogue. Whereas earlier he tackled issues which would be considered extreme only to the Mennonite community, now, convinced that a novelist is obliged to explore ideas “no one else has broached before” (ACW 47), nothing can be considered outside his pale. This, combined with the recognized dialogic nature of the novel (“its meaning depends upon the interaction between the work and the beholder” [40]), lays the writer open to possible misreadings.

But, for Wiebe, the demands placed upon his readers are, at one and the same time, minimal and great:

> The finest response that can be made to a piece of work that hopes to be artistic is that people who come in contact with it take it seriously and, with all their faculties alert, ponder what it is trying to do or to be. (47)

My intent within this essay is to take up Wiebe’s challenge, to enter into his most recent novels, *My Lovely Enemy* and *A Discovery of Strangers* and, grappling with them, to attempt to determine what they are “trying to do or to be.”

In preparation for that task, I will attend, first, to two contemporary voices that can be seen to play significant formative, but divergent, roles in the creation of Wiebe’s latest novels, those of John Howard Yoder and Robert Kroetsch. These two voices will lead, in the case of the one, to an explorative discovery of the theology implicit in Wiebe’s novels, and, in the
case of the other, to the literary theory pertinent to an explication of his literary *modus operandi*. These two will then jointly direct us to an examination of biblical typology, which it will be argued is fundamental to his hermeneutic. Next, since this essay argues a consistency between his two latest novels and their immediate predecessors, we will examine some of those earlier texts in some detail, and only then focus our attention on the novels of primary interest.

In considering Yoder and Kroetsch, it is instructive to view them initially in the context of Shirley Neuman’s interview with Wiebe and Kroetsch conducted (April 1980) while Wiebe was actively engaged in writing *My Lovely Enemy*. Wiebe affirms that at the time of the interview he had written approximately thirty pages of this novel, but that its form had not yet been determined. I suggest that the ‘play’ of that interview ultimately influenced this novel’s form, that Yoder’s ‘voice’ contributes greatly to the substance of all Wiebe’s writings under consideration, and that both Kroetsch’s supportive and dissenting ‘voices’ are present in the background throughout his mature writings.

Let us begin with Yoder.
CHAPTER 1
THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

In the Neuman interview, Wiebe relates that the time he spent teaching at Goshen College (1963-67) was “the first time and over an extended period [that] I encountered... really literate Christians who saw themselves as Jesus’s followers and at the same time were acquainted with the thoughts of others and brought that kind of understanding to bear on what it means to be a Christian” (UL 242-3). He attributes the movement in The Blue Mountains of China “from a certain kind of fairly narrow understanding of what the Bible was talking about...[to] a wider way of understanding the world-views the Bible presents to us” (242) directly to the influence his Goshen experience had upon him. He adds that the “best thing that ever happened to me” was an ongoing series of meetings - “seven or eight of us, a psychiatrist, a couple of theologians, a couple of literary people” (243). Among the theologians (“There were the best theologians there, I think, the Mennonite Church has ever had”) was John Howard Yoder. While Yoder himself tends to minimize his influence on Wiebe, particularly his own role in the change that Wiebe indicates occurred in his writing, Wiebe singles him out as having “influenced my thought about what it means to be a Christian more than almost anything else.”

Yoder is the product of a revitalization of the Mennonite community in North America heralded by Harold S. Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision” speech to a 1943 meeting of the American Society of Church History in New York City. In his speech, Bender rejected Roland Bainton’s claim that religious liberty was the essence of Anabaptism, asserting instead that the legacy of the sixteenth-century Anabaptists was to give the vision of the reformers
“body and form, and set out to achieve it in actual experience” ("Vision" 18). The essence of Anabaptism, “the culmination of the Reformation,” is presented as threefold: “first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance” (20). The primary emphasis for the Anabaptists was not “faith,” as it was with Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, but “following.” Christianity was neither “a matter of the reception of divine grace through a sacramental-sacerdotal institution” as it was for Catholicism, nor “chiefly enjoyment of the inner experience of the grace of God through faith in Christ” as for many of the Reformers, but “the transformation of life through discipleship” (33).

Earlier in this century the Mennonites in America were focussed on “shoring up the boundaries,” attempting to remain “nonconformed” to the world (guided by Daniel Kauffman’s series of “Restrictions” in his Bible Doctrine - “items such as nonresistance, nonswearing of oaths, regulation dress for men and women, and the avoidance of politics, modern amusements, alcohol, and membership in secret societies” [Keim, “Anabaptist” 251], and concerned to protect the inerrancy of Scripture - “We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God; that it is authentic in its matter, authoritative in its counsels, inerrant in the original writings and the only infallible rule of faith and practise” (in Wenger, The Doctrines of the Mennonites 88-90). Bender’s vision, by contrast, “was an effort to revitalize the center” with “an emphasis on the Lordship of Christ” (Keim 252-254) - “Christ is to be translated in the life expression of the disciple, or in the words of the Apostle Paul, Christ is to be ‘formed’ in him, and He is to be Lord of all his life. This is the Anabaptist answer to Christ, and out of the understanding of the meaning of this answer derive all the major ideas of Anabaptism” (Bender, “Theology” 9).
On the fiftieth anniversary of Bender's speech, Walter Klassen contended that there was “a certain laundering” of Anabaptist history involved in Bender's monogenetic version of the vision:

The Anabaptist sword-bearers, the apocalyptic visionaries, the literalistic sillies, and the mystic contemplatives were all expelled by him from the movement as not being true Anabaptists. Only those whom Bender identified as “evangelical Anabaptists” became the carriers of what he identified as the Anabaptist vision in his 1943 address. Moreover, again like many ethnic histories, there was in Bender's work a certain romanticizing of this evangelical core of the sixteenth-century movement as utterly faithful to its vision, undeterred by opposition, persecution, and martyrdom. This community of steely, single-minded faithfulness was used by God in his providential design for human progress towards modern religious toleration and a more socially responsible society.² ("Giants" 236)

But Bender's recapturing of the vision was “used” to stimulate a reawakening among his Mennonite brethren. In 1944, after having taught at Goshen College since 1924, Bender was appointed Dean of what later became Goshen Biblical Seminary. The seminary was a nurturing ground for a small group of students who in the early 1950s followed their time at Goshen with a study of Anabaptist theology and history at European universities. John Howard Yoder was among those from this group who joined with graduates of Eastern Mennonite College to form what Paul Toews identifies as the Concern Movement.³ Heirs of the creative generation that had preceded them, and all inspired by Bender and the recovery of the Anabaptist vision, those involved in Concern were, as Toews explains, “recipients of a
Mennonite intellectual tradition far more expansive than the one given to their fathers and grandfathers”:

Their studies only expanded their inheritance. Running through their meeting and subsequent early writings were references to and intimations of neo-orthodoxy (Tillich, Barth, Brunner, the Niebuhrs), Anabaptism (Bender, Hershberger, Troeltsch); 20th century literary criticism (T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis); and social theory (Marx, Weber, Tönnies, Durkheim). (“Concern” 110)

Among those involved in Concern, there were some who felt that Bender and his colleagues had not gone far enough. Vision by itself was not sufficient; the decision making process in the Mennonite church was excessively “centralized and pyramidized” (118), and the church itself was too prone to withdrawal from the world. The house church was embraced as a means of promoting empowerment and engagement. Concern, in a call for “a disciplined social ethic” (125), played a formative role in engaging the church in a historical and theological exploration of its Anabaptist traditions.

Yoder, preoccupied with the social and political relevance of the biblical Jesus, has for the past thirty years been perceived as “the leading interpreter of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology both for the Mennonite communion itself and for the larger ecumenical Christian community” (A. James Reimer, “Trinitarian” 131). During that time, “as an ethicist and historical theologian,” he has been responsible (“more than any other person, except perhaps Harold S. Bender”) for shaping the Mennonites’ understanding of themselves and their mission. It can be argued further, though this is not James Reimer’s perception, that Yoder also, better than anyone else, reflects the Mennonite tradition from the sixteenth century to
the present day.

In the Neuman interview, Wiebe cites Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus* as “his best book,” reports that they are even then corresponding on feminism, “the kinds of relationships between men and women” (UL 243), and acknowledges the group’s influence on the ‘jump’ in terms of world view in *The Blue Mountains of China* (242). In that novel, the most concise statement echoing Yoder’s teaching occurs in John Reimer’s explication of the ‘revolution’ Jesus came to lead, that “sets all the old ideas of man living with other men on its head” (215).

In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder challenges the claim that denies Jesus’s social relevance and makes personal ethics the gospel’s sole concern. He insists that Jesus is not only relevant but normative for a contemporary social ethic. In the revolution Jesus effected, his disciples are liberated “from the way things are” into “a whole new order.” They are called upon to “imitate” him, not in “a formal mimicking of his life style” (133-4), but in “the concrete social meaning of the cross in its relation to enmity and power” (134). Following Christ, they accept servanthood rather than dominion, and respond to hostility with forgiveness. They fulfill their role of disciples by becoming agents of social justice “to the poor, to the radically oppressed, to the retarded and the helpless” (215).

Yoder develops a terse summary description linking the disciple to Christ’s life/death (to which he attaches specific Biblical texts):

Sharing the divine nature as the definition of Christian existence...Forgive as God has forgiven you...Love indiscriminately as God does...Being in Christ as the definition of Christian existence...Having died with Christ and sharing his risen life...Loving as Christ loved, giving himself...Serving others as he served...Subordination...Suffering with Christ as the definition of apostolic existence...sharing in divine condescension...Give
your life as he did...Suffering servanthood in place of dominion...Accept innocent suffering without complaint as he did...Suffer with or like Christ the hostility of the world, as bearers of the kingdom come...Death is liberation from the power of sin...Death is the fate of the prophets; Jesus whom we follow was already following them...Death is victory. (118-129)

In *The Blue Mountains of China*, the succinctness of Yoder’s voice resonates through John Reimer’s claims that Jesus was not “talking about people being ‘saved’ or feeling good about it,” but was here “to lead a revolution for social justice... to the poor, to the racially oppressed, to the retarded and the helpless.” In the society of Jesus

you show wisdom, by trusting people;

you handle leadership, by serving;

you handle offenders, by forgiving;

you handle money, by sharing;

you handle enemies, by loving;

and you handle violence, by suffering it. (BMC 215)

The reader, retracing his steps in this polyphonic novel ("it began as individual stories [many...were published separately] that I didn’t at first think had any necessary connection" [Wiebe, UL 228-9]), will identify these counsels as the interpretive clues to ‘Christian’ practice exhibited in the particular stories. For example, in “Over the Red Line,” Helmut Driediger leaves his sophisticated life in Leningrad to participate in a bleak pilgrimage to Paraguay solely to be of service to his fellow Mennonites. The “nameless” man in “The
Cloister of the Lilies” suffers the violence meted out to both his wife and himself, and for her sake does nothing. Finally, in the story “Drink Ye All of It,” a group of Mennonites that includes David Epp and Bernard Rogalski, having escaped from Russia into China, is confronted by a truck driver insistently demanding money for transportation. Penniless, Epp and Rogalski attempt to bargain on behalf of the group with what they have: Bernard surrenders his bearskin coat which has caught the driver’s fancy, and David an extra blanket, shirt and underclothes. But David feels a greater burden of responsibility; leaving his young family, he sacrifices himself by his apparently futile return across the border to save from reprisals those left behind and “to help them get on the road too” (BMC 138).

These fundamental counsels will also be seen to surface in My Lovely Enemy. Jesus, appearing suddenly to James Dyck in a Calgary hotel room where he is in bed with a colleague’s wife, states expressily, “A Christian deals with violence by suffering it” (MLE 137), and in the embedded tale of Maskepetoon, this converted Cree chief radically breaks with the ‘manly’ ways of his people to forgive even the Blackfoot warrior responsible for the death of his father, giving him his horse and his ceremonial suit:

You took my father from me, so now I ask you to be my father. Wear my clothes, ride my horse, and when your people ask you how it is you are still alive, tell them it is because The Young Chief has taken his revenge. (54)

It will be argued that in the main story Liv Dyck supplants James in significance, since it is she who forgives James his offence of adultery, and, in forgiving, manifests love for Gillian her enemy. In A Discovery of Strangers, it is the ‘savage’ Yellowknife Indians who in their treatment of the abusive Whitemud explorers give most evidence of living a ‘Christian’ ethic,
sharing, trusting, suffering, and loving.

While Yoder’s influence through the ideas that found written expression in his *The Politics of Jesus* is unequivocally evident in all these instances, his impact on Wiebe is more fundamental, as can be shown through an examination of another Yoder text, *The Priestly Kingdom*. If Yoder’s first book provides a recognition of basic ethical and political Christian responsibilities, this second book articulates the heart of Yoder’s theological thinking and, I would claim, serves as an interpretive guide to the theology underlying Wiebe’s fiction. Two chapters prove particularly pertinent, “‘But We Do See Jesus,’” and “Anabaptism and History”. In the first, Yoder identifies the particularity of the Incarnation as the sole source of our approach to truth. On our side of what Gotthold Lessing (in his assertion that “[a]ccidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason” [cited in Yoder, “But” 46]) described as “the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across,” Yoder insists that we exist in a position of historical uncertainty:

> We still do not see that the world has been set straight. We still have no proof that right is right. We still have not found a way to leap from historical uncertainty to some other more solid base that would oblige people to believe or make our own believing sure. (61)

But, citing the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:9), Yoder claims, and claims emphatically, that “we do see Jesus, revealing the grace of God by tasting death for everyone” (61). We have no road of our own to truth. Rather than our gaining access across the ditch of uncertainty, the truth, for Yoder, “has come to our side of the ditch” (62) in the person of Jesus. All we can do is witness to him “in his ordinariness as villager, as rabbi, as king on a donkey, and as
liberator on a cross” (62). From this side of the ditch, we do not attempt to escape particularity by engaging in debate with any ‘wider,’ more universal world view which would appear “less particular, more credible, less the product of one’s own social location” (46).

The apologist makes the mistake of thinking that “the wider society is itself the universe” (49), “whose authority to judge one accepts” (48). Yoder argues, in contrast, that the New Testament writers, in their response to the challenge of the surrounding Hellenic world with its “previously formed cosmic vision,” make the “same moves” by using its language in the face of its questions, but, rather than fitting “the Jesus message... into [its] slots,” they place Jesus “above the cosmos, in charge of it” (53). The message is conveyed in the context of messianic Judaism

with all its concentration upon empirical community, particular history, synagogue worship, and particular lifestyle, over against the speculative and skeptical defences of its cultured despisers...[although] now the the Hebrew story had widened out to include everyone. (54)

Yoder stresses that the church’s proclamation of the gospel of liberation has no kinship with coercion. Nor is it interested in proving those of a differing world view to be “bad”; “it simply brings them news” (55).

In its position of historical uncertainty, and its scepticism of existent ideological languages, the church will seek for a language that speaks to its time, constantly “reconstructing God-language”: 
We shall often be tactical allies of some apologetic thrust, when it rejects the results of a previous too-close identification of church and dominion. We may be tactical allies of the pluralist/relativist deconstruction of deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty, without making of relativism itself a new monism. We will share tactical use of liberation language to dismantle the alliance of church with privilege, without letting the promises made by some in the name of revolution become a new opiate...[in] ethics we shall not grant...that to renounce violence is to renounce power.

(61)

This role of "tactical ally" explains much of Yoder's openness to a variety of sources, and can be seen as fundamental to Wiebe's approach, particularly to Indian spirituality. In the van Toorn interview, he indicates the measure of his admiration for that spirituality:

they force no one. They absolutely force no one. Some things about Native spirituality have always attracted me, especially the emphasis on the elder, gentle, indirect teaching and the dignity they have, and the way they speak.... ("Creating" 9)

Yoder, himself, is similarly impressed by Native spirituality suggesting (in a personal interview) that the Indians have much to teach us, particularly about conflict resolution.

In the second chapter, "Anabaptism and History," Yoder attempts to cement Anabaptism solidly within what he terms the "normative state of the church" (Priestly 124), which he identifies as the pre-Constantinian community that existed prior to the "fall" of the church into "church/state liaison, just war, repression of dissent" (126). As a "restitution" of that community, Anabaptism takes history seriously by criticizing its course "using as criterion
a point within history, namely the Incarnation, or the canon”; as a consequence, he argues that “historiography is theologically necessary” (127). The norm for restitution, the basis of re-evaluation, is no “timeless garden of Eden” nor a “speculative utopia,” but the “very particular story of the New Testament” which incorporates the story of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles.

Taking biblical history seriously as the norm and their own time seriously “as one more kairos of choice between fall and renewal” (128), Anabaptists are prepared to challenge rigorously the main-stream defensive claim that “the choices leading to where we are now were right” (130). Echoing the farewell encouragement to the Plymouth dissenters by their pastor, John Robinson - “The Lord has yet more truth to break forth from his Holy Word” - Yoder argues for “a continuing series of new beginnings” (133), rather than a confirmation of a church in its existent state. The community of disciples must be constantly ‘on the road’ in search of ‘restitutions’ “at once unpredictable and recognizable” (133). Under the constancy of the Spirit, this is the way “most able to proclaim the continuing sovereignty of the Word Incarnate over all the words that seek to speak his echo” (134).

Yoder’s articulation of the Anabaptist restitutive position furnishes Wiebe with the solidity of a fixed point of historical departure, while providing him with a freedom to be critical of both church and society generally, a freedom he does not hesitate to employ in both My Lovely Enemy and A Discovery of Strangers. Yoder’s explication of the Christian faith, while serving to define its roots, finds its primary focus not in attempting to make sense of Jesus “far from Galilee,” but in asking “whether - when he meets us in our world, as he does in fact - we want to follow him” (Priestly 62). Wiebe recognizes that ‘to be on the road’ as Jesus’s followers is to participate in his revolution for social justice, constantly acknowledging his lordship.
As Yoder serves as a key to understanding Wiebe, so Karl Barth serves as a key to understanding Yoder. Yoder describes Barth as "the thinker who rediscovered for his day and for ours a way of articulating the gospel of Jesus Christ that makes it again truly good news, a preachable message of salvation for a postliberal world in which before he came along it had seemed there was no longer any credible good news" ("How" 166). Yoder, who completed his doctoral studies under Barth at Basel, strongly resists any claims of a substantive relationship between the two of them - "I did not go to Basel to study with him, and became more clear about what I appreciate in him by disagreeing" (personal letter). On the other hand, suggestions that he and Barth were fundamentally divided over such issues as infant baptism, pacifism, and trinitarian orthodoxy are dismissed as exaggerations:

The characterizations are wrong. Barth rejected Infant baptism already in the 1930s and strengthened that rejection over the years. Barth was not my kind of pacifist but he called himself "practically pacifist" and was closer to my position than anyone else in his world in his generation. As to "trinitarian foundation" there would be more to discuss.

At the same time, Yoder writes: "I think Barth makes basically [the] right move[s]...something of the shape of his theologizing is congenial to me" (personal letter). Rather than one of derivation, he would term his relationship to Barth as one of "resonance or isomorphism," and might be prepared to allow the same description to apply to Wiebe's relationship to himself.

The nature of Yoder's theological heritage would appear to have become of decreasing interest in Mennonite theological circles as Yoder's influence has become less pronounced. If
Harold S. Bender and his colleagues are perceived as the first wave of Mennonite renewal, and Yoder and Concern as the second, there is now a third wave much more diverse than the first two which is quick to point out the alleged shortcomings of its predecessors and to question the monogenetic nature of Bender's Anabaptist history. One segment of that wave (and the wave's diversity must be underlined emphatically since it runs the gamut from narrative theologies with a breadth of encompassing narratives, not just that of the Bible, to a desire for intimate alignment with formal orthodoxies) is represented in Stephen Dintaman's criticism that the "definition of Christianity given in the Anabaptist vision is essentially behavioral" ("Spiritual" 205). Contrary to Gerald Biesecker-Mast's claim that it is "Bender's 'Vision'" that is being criticized ("Towards" 60), Dintaman exonerates Bender himself by claiming that "behind Bender's vision" are "two unstated assumptions":

1. He held firmly to basic evangelical doctrines about the being and work of God in Christ, and
2. He believed that the living out of the vision was only possible through the indwelling presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. ("Spiritual" 205)

The general object of his attack is "the next generation of 'Anabaptist vision' theologians" (205), those of Yoder's generation. While not asserting that Bender's "assumptions" were absent from the teaching of his successors, Dintaman argues that they were underplayed by them:

What they did was to keep the language of behavioral discipleship fresh and green and growing, while little passion or creativity was invested in positive instruction about sin, the work of Christ, and the existential reality of the Spirit. (207)
The same concerns are expressed in James Reimer’s much more extended critique, directed specifically at Yoder and “a younger interpreter of Yoder,” J.Denny Weaver. Reimer, however, complicates the issues by attempting to combine several arguments. He wants to argue that Yoderian theology has departed from “the central conviction of our historical Anabaptist beginnings - a Trinitarian orthodoxy with a heightened ethical consciousness” ("Trinitarian" 130) and from the emphatic Trinitarian Barth. He sees Yoder’s critique of the ‘Constantinian shift’ (the “slow acculturation by the church to the Greco-Roman world” [135] at the time of the Emperor Constantine) as extending beyond the socio-political to the theological, particularly to the theological affirmations espoused in the creed of Nicaea. However, while Reimer is unequivocal in his claim that Weaver, “less nuanced than Yoder” (143), short-circuits the value of Nicaea in his emphasis on primitive church affirmations, his critique of Yoder, like Dintaman’s claims against Yoder’s generation as a whole, is somewhat equivocal, tempered by questions of ‘nuance.’

The problem for Reimer is that Yoder nowhere explicitly rejects the Nicene affirmations. Yoder draws a distinction between biblical revelation and credal intellectual reflection upon that revelation, arguing that the credal statements deviate from the narrative style of the Gospels, leaving out whole sections of the gospel story. For him, the affirmations on the Trinity are “the solution of an intellectual difficulty which arises if we accept the statement of the Bible” but couched in “Hellenistic thoughts forms which are foreign to the way the Bible thinks, which don’t fit with the Hebrew mind” (Preface 140). However, while asserting that the claims of Jesus possess the only authority, Yoder ascribes “validity” to the Nicene Creed “because it reflects the serious struggle of men, within their language and culture, with their commitment to an absolute God and to a normative Jesus.” What Yoder rejects is the
normative claims for the creeds themselves. The bishops assembled at the invitation of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 325 are but representative of the church throughout its history; they too are “on the way,” and equally fallible. For Yoder and the free churchman generally, and he would include Barth as travelling in this direction, “Creeds and compendia are respected but made relative” (Yoder, “How” 169).

A basic issue between Reimer and Yoder is the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem, the metaphysical-ontological and the biblical-historical. Reimer argues that “both are implicit in the Christian experience from the beginning and that both are ineradicable dimensions of human religious experience” (“Nature” 45). He then complicates the issue by identifying the former with the transcendent and the latter with the horizontal, and then claims that both “presupposed an absolutely transcendent spiritual reality” (44).

While not wishing to “disparage Yoder’s thought,” Reimer accuses him of undermining the transcendent through linking “his ‘Hebraic view’ of Biblical Christianity...to modern historicist thought” which Reimer defines as “the modern view that man is captive to and essentially defined by his history [and has no] access to some form of eternal unchanging truth” (33). However, despite his protestations, it would appear that Reimer, rather than Yoder, capitulates to modernism in his claim that it is “absolutely imperative” (53) that the Mennonites develop a systematic theology, one that brings together the insight of the “‘metaphysical’ or ‘transcendent’ sense of God’s reality and presence...historically expressed through creedal and doctrinal formulations...” (45), the “‘eternal verities’ of the Christian faith” (54), with “the critical questions and insights we encounter in the various disciplines and in the cultural matrix of the modern world” (53).

Yoder “would not say that the metaphysical and the biblical are antithetical,” but neither would he claim that they are “coequal components of a happy synthesis” (personal letter):
Athens and Jerusalem are separate. God and history put them at different places. The Gospel got from Jerusalem to Athens by the middle of Acts, and I applaud that. I only want, like Paul then, to bring to Athens a message from Jerusalem, rather than an already reliable "eternal unchanging truth" that needs only to have some "ethical seriousness" tacked on top of it.  

Reimer’s claims are indicative of the diverse debates that are occurring today within the Mennonite theological community. Chaffing under the long domination of Yoder, the new wave of theologians is vigorously attempting to expand the Mennonite vision by writing theology in different ways. In Reimer’s case, his desire to marry the metaphysical-ontological to the biblical-historical, an unconscious but decided break with the Anabaptist heritage, tends to move Mennonite theology toward a systematic theology akin to that of Paul Tillich and away from the historic orthodoxy whose loss is lamented by Dintaman. 

This shift comes at a time when many in the wider church are questioning the implications of a metaphysical or ontological focus. Barth, as Arthur Cochrane points out, “insists at the very outset of his doctrine of God’s reality that we are not asking about being but about God...[and to know] what or who God is, we must look exclusively to God’s act in his revelation” (Existentialists 114). Barth contends further that “ontological speculation has been to a large degree the source of error in the Church’s doctrine” (115). The Roman Catholic philosopher Jean-Luc Marion would concur, arguing that the concern for “being” expressed in the move to the metaphysical-ontological takes theology in the wrong direction:
Does God have anything to gain from being?...And what if God did not have first to be, since he loved us first, when we were not? And what if, to envisage him, we did not have to wait for him within the horizon of Being, but rather to transgress ourselves in risking to love love - bare, raw[?]...God does not fall within the domain of Being, he comes to us in and as gift. (God 2-3)

Reimer's project has a strong apologetical nuance in that it attempts to situate the biblical-historical within what Yoder would call a "wider world view." Barth, in his essay "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century," contends that the theology of that century "worked on the general assumption that relatedness to the world is its primary task and on the specific assumption that there is a possible acceptance of the Christian faith," with the result that the theologians "were more interested in the Christian faith than in the Christian message...were more interested in man's relationship to God than in God's dealings with man" (Humanity 23-24). For him, as for Yoder, the "very existence of [apologetics] means making concessions to unbelief" (Yoder, Priestly 293), and undermines what Reimer presumably wishes to strengthen.

But what are we to make of Reimer's charge that it is Yoder who has affinities with modernism through his espousal of historicism? Here we are aided by a brief examination of Barth's theology, particularly since Yoder is in substantial agreement with the Christological focus of Barth's thought. An understanding of Barth's basic theological position, especially as presented in the relative succinctness of his early The Epistle to the Romans, thus serves to deepen our understanding of both Yoder and Wiebe, and helps reveal the misperceptions of critics of both.
Barth, perceiving man as entirely unrighteous in what he is and does for himself, argues that the God who speaks through St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the "Wholly Other," escapes man's grasp (Begriff). He is not only different from all man knows; He is also elsewhere than where man at the height of his religious search expects to find Him. He is der ganz Andere, beyond everything man is capable of knowing. Historicism is, unwittingly, right: man's knowledge is radically historical and limited. Man does not have access to "a form of eternal unchanging truth." For all his religious striving, all man can claim is that he is unable to speak of Him as other than the "Wholly Other." What is visible to man are but "burnt-out craters" and "dried-out canals" (Epistle 65) that attest to the vestige of God's presence and his overwhelming absence.

Paradoxically, in acknowledging his loss, religious man is responding to God's revelation. The natural man reveals his naturalness by not recognizing what Kierkegaard termed the "infinite qualitative distinction" (10); he does not recognize the difference, "the saving separation," between God and man, but is caught in what Steven Smith labels "our chronic delusion" (Argument 36). For natural man, his God is the no-God of this world with whom he feels comfortable. The "Wholly Other" is the God "whom we do not know," but dialectically, "our ignorance is precisely the problem and source of our knowledge" (Barth, Epistle 45).

The recognition that we have no capacity for the divine (finitum non capax infiniti [Anselm]) is the first stage (the No!) of revelation that comes to us through the law: "The law is the impression of divine revelation left behind in time, in history...a burnt-out crater disclosing the place where God has spoken...a dry canal which in a past generation had been filled with the living water of faith" (65). Those who stand in the midst of a "heap of clinkers" or exist in "this empty canal" are "stamped with the impress of the true and known
God”; while “fruitless the traces of his faithfulness” (79), they have in their midst “the sign-post which points them to God” (65). But even, and particularly at the height of man’s religious quest, at the top of a ladder which goes nowhere, man exists under judgment. There is “no road to the eternal meaning of the created world...save the world of negation” (87).

The otherness of God is a constant. There is no approach from man to God; there is no place for an analogia entis.

Despite this negative pronouncement, it would be a superficial reading of Barth to perceive the otherness of God and our inability to approach the totaliter aliter as the focus of his thought. As Graham Ward states succinctly, “What is being investigated...is not the otherness of God, but a revelation, an unveiling of what remains veiled and hidden” (“Revelation” 176). For Barth, when we speak about God, “there is more than simply dissimilarity, more than ‘something that is exclusively other’” (Berkouwer, Triumph 182).

The horizontal plane of our existence is ruptured by the event of revelation. God does speak to us; the encounter in which our values and perceptions are put into question establishes a relationship with God which is both a judgment and a summons to recognize the other:

The fact that we know Him must mean that, with our views, concepts and words, we do not describe and express something quite different from Himself, but that in and by these means of ours - the only ones we have - we describe and express God Himself.

Otherwise, without this relationship under the presupposition of a simple disparity, there cannot possibly be any question of the veracity of our knowledge of God. (Barth, Church II/1 225)
For Barth, there is only the *analogia fidei*, which is explicitly theological and Christological. It is only in Christ that "sin-controlled flesh becomes a parable or likeness" (*Epistle* 280):

What is human and worldly and historical and 'natural' is shown to be what it veritably is in its relation to God the Creator - only an image, only a sign, only something relative. But that it IS a sign and a parable is surely in no way trivial or unimportant. (280-281)

Further, it is in the revelation of Jesus Christ that "I recognize myself to be confronted paradoxically by the vast pre-eminence of a wholly different man - which I am not" (272). Jesus is "what I am not - my existential I - I - the I which in God, in the freedom of God - I am" (252). This other reveals the self's inauthenticity, provoking a submission to the lordship of the Other who demands *kenosis* or emptying. The emptying of self invokes repentance and discipleship as it reflects Christ's primary kenosis. The kenotic act is "the fundamental operation of the Trinity" (Ward, "Revelation" 168) - it is Christ who uniquely empties himself, and thereby both institutes and constitutes the revelation. As the content of revelation, Jesus presents true human nature; as the Suffering Servant he reveals man's primary ethical disposition - to love his neighbour. When men are "impelled to God...they are turned back again from God in order that they may find themselves in the neighbour" (Barth, *Epistle* 497).

It is in the command to love the neighbour (to see him as other than simply our fellow-man) that the ambiguity of our relationship to others and to God "finally and supremely" (494) confronts us. In the particularity of others, the negativity of our own createdness ("our own lost state, our sin, and our own death") and our place before God boldly challenge us. Is the "impossible possibility of God...a mere phantom of metaphysics?" Has the "Unknown God" actually spoken to us in Jesus Christ, or are we "merely dreaming?"
The answer is contained in our response to the question, “Do we in the complete Otherness of the other...hear the voice of the One?” When we encounter the neighbour ‘who fell among thieves,’ is it solely his voice, in all its suffering, that we hear, or are we simultaneously, and “primarily and supremely” (495), confronted by the Christ who calls us into question and calls us into life? If the voice of Christ is not heard here, then “quite certainly the voice of the One is nowhere to be heard.”

To which Barth himself responds unequivocally that love of the neighbour is always “the disclosing of the One in the other, in this and that and every other...it really does see in every temporal ‘Thou’ the eternal contrasted ‘Thou’ apart from whom there is no ‘I’.” It is in the neighbour, “in his strange, irritating, distinct createdness” (496), that I gain my identity in discovering “the One who is ‘Thou’ and ‘I’ and ‘He’” (495).

The unique position of Christ introduces an embracing level of mediation. Since the Other is always and only Jesus Christ, the believer enters only the form of the Messiah, who is uniquely the Suffering Servant himself. Further, with his focus on the post-resurrection Christ, Barth seeks to maintain the inviolability of the revelation of transcendence. In the vision of the One in the neighbour we are given but a fleeting glimpse of the Godhead who veils Himself in His revelation.

In the ‘Moment’ of revelation, in “that eternal ‘Moment’ which always is, and yet is not” (497), He is Deus revelatus and Deus absconditus. But the final word is always one of command: “grace, as the existential relation between God and man, is bound to move from the indicative of the divine truth concerning men (and God) to the imperative by which the divine reality makes its demand upon them” (222) - “Thou shalt love thy neighbour.”

The resonance between such statements and the basic theological position espoused by Yoder undermines Reimer’s attempt to drive a wedge between Barth and Yoder. In Yoder’s
separation of Athens and Jerusalem (Greek Platonic thought and biblical, historical Christianity - going back to Pascal via Shestov and Matthew Arnold), in his witness to the substance of a Trinitarian faith, and in responsive discipleship, he is definitely aligned with Barth. He is also at one with Barth in his refusal to adopt anything other than the biblical witness as normative. The promises contained in that witness are what guide and sustain their discipleship. Their common focus on the nature of that discipleship resonates in this passage from Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*:

> We are on the way. This certainty indicates the limit, but it also indicates the positive possibility of our cognition. At best out theology is *theologia viatorum*. But it also stands under the promise of this best: that it really can be *theologia viatorum*. It is as such that it can and will be true. This concept was used in older theology to designate the distinction of our present temporal from our future eternal knowledge of God, the distinction between faith and sight. In distinction to the former, the latter was described as *theologia comprehensorum* or *theologia patria*; the knowledge of those who are at home, who, no longer wandering on from one hour to another, from one decision to another, stand once for all at the goal of faith and know God face to face. (II/1 209)

There is an acknowledged goal to “being on the way” which is firmly rooted in the Biblical witness and gives pilgrimage its substance. Thus, while Dintaman may be right that in terms of recent practice in the Mennonite church the primary emphasis has been placed on the present demands of discipleship, demands which can also be seen to dominate the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the evidence would suggest that Yoder, nonetheless, stands with Bender, Bonhoeffer and Barth on a Trinitarian foundation. Discipleship for them all is not
simply adherence to precepts articulated by Jesus but the undertaking of a life-long pilgrimage based on a commitment to a risen, redeeming Christ who reveals the Father’s love in the context of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit.

In substance, this is the theological understanding of the Word, the Incarnated Christ, that attracts Wiebe to Yoder’s articulation of the faith. At the heart of his fiction lies the claim that the Word places upon the believer’s life. The Deus absconditus is the Deus revelatus; the Other has spoken. He has placed a claim upon the believer over which he has no control, which escapes his understanding, but which binds him in discipleship. In the context of a multiplicity of voices, a heteroglossia from which Wiebe, with Yoder, recognizes he has much to learn, and in the context of the limitations of our linguistic capabilities, which constantly undermine any naive realistic assumptions in the process of representation, he believes that, through the Holy Spirit, the Bible directs him to this Word, which he, in concert with his fellow believers, struggles to understand. But he knows that he is constantly sustained by that Word and directed by that Word in service to his neighbour; it is in the neighbour that the Word speaks with power and authority in calling him to service.
CHAPTER II

LITERARY CONTEXT

When we turn to Robert Kroetsch to consider the literary, as distinct from the theological, context, we encounter a writer radically at odds with Yoder, Barth and, in a most important respect, with Wiebe as well. It will be argued in this essay that Wiebe writes My Lovely Enemy in a sense of play with Kroetsch, his good friend and fellow Western Canadian author, and that what unites them and what separates them demand close attention. While their suspicions of historical reporting and the ambiguity in language serve to bind them together, what essentially separates them are their disparate approaches to the question of meaning.

The interplay between Kroetsch and Wiebe, their dialogue (enthusiastic concurrence and baffled disagreement), particularly in the 1980 Neuman interview, is both entertaining and illuminating. The interview begins with Kroetsch’s expression of their mutual disparagement of the bookish novel and their common attraction to the power of voice: “you and I are both sympathetic to that older notion of stories - it’s rather simple” (UL 228). They see themselves as archaeologists rather than historians:

Wiebe: ...that’s how language works, we dig it out....
Kroetsch: ...but the thinking is archaeological, not historical....I think you have a kind of distrust of inherited or given history. Which I happen to have too....
Wiebe: But the point is that you should distrust it...I have to doubt history all the time....I doubt the official given history....You know there is another side to the...
The two respond differently to their distrust of history. While Kroetsch abandons the historical in favour of “the hyperbolic and the mythical,” Wiebe enters into the dynamics of the historical, challenging the bias of historical reporting, often deconstructing the ‘literal historical documents’ through their insertion into a minority telling of story. As a case in point, Wiebe’s recounting of the paternalistic treatment of the Indians by the white government officers in The Temptations of Big Bear leads to absurdities in their attempts to be primitively simplistic. Biases cloaked in purported objectivity are revealed for what they are. The effect in The Temptations of Big Bear or The Scorched-Wood People is to place all historical reporting under the suspicion of privilege and to lay open the relativity of point of view.

Wiebe introduces the problem, which Kroetsch later picks up on, that each tradition has a certain provenance; Kroetsch argues that in the oral tradition, and citing specifically the beer parlour, people talk: “in a very double sense...they both know they’re lying and that they’re telling the truth. They know they’ve stretched it and it’s fun to stretch it but they’ve also said something.” At this point, he attacks the realist who sees language as simple sign or marker, though he is very quick to exonerate Wiebe - “I’m not accusing you of this” (237).

But at other times, notably in Labyrinths of Voice, Kroetsch’s interview with Neuman and Robert Wilson, when speaking of the “real danger in our society” of a “simple belief” in the signifier/signified connection (143), a belief that a word or a sentence literally means “what it affirms on the face of it” (Barfield, Rediscovery 32), he is not as charitable, singling out Wiebe as a misguided believer. The word “simple” is the contestable part of this assertion,
since Wiebe actually is much more suspicious of our usage of words and phrasing than Kroetsch would appear to acknowledge. In a recent interview, Wiebe supports the claim that "particular ways of using language wall perception and understanding in":

Sometimes words are so fixed, they always mean only certain kinds of things. So that hems us in, because we say 'red' and we know what we mean - but we don't...I expect more of the language than some people who want the first and obvious meaning. (van Toorn, "Creating" 11)

While Wiebe claims that "[n]aming is the first act of language," indeed, that it is "in the act of naming things that we discover essentials" (12-13), Kroetsch would respond, in turn, by claiming that this very act is the problem - "[W]e control the world by naming it and lose it by naming it. Because the name starts to replace the whatever else" (Neuman, Labyrinths 144).

But again the issue is not simple. Wiebe is well aware, and his mature novels give ample evidence of his suspicions, of indiscriminate naming - his repeated critique in A Discovery of Strangers of the Franklin expedition's persistent penchant for naming is a case in point.

But the contentious issue between Kroetsch and Wiebe is truly their disparate approaches to language. They both recognize that words have power, but while Kroetsch perceives that power as always illegitimate, Wiebe is more ambivalent. Kroetsch asserts that "language itself is the greatest fiction and it's also the most real thing we have in the sense that it's the most profoundly human thing we have" (Labyrinths 236). Wiebe agrees that language is the distinctively human activity -"If we didn't have language, we wouldn't see the world the way we see it now" and contends - "we don't need any more than words. Words are better almost than anything else, because words...create the realities we live by" (van Toorn,
"Creating" 11). But, while Wiebe claims that "[l]anguage is really our way of looking at the world" (U1 236), Kroetsch would counter, "language is really our way of looking at the world," emphasizing the relativity of that perception.

Another way of approaching the difference between Wiebe and Kroetsch is in terms of what Kroetsch labels "the temptation of meaning" (Neuman, Labyrinths 15) which he interprets as "the temptation to read metaphorically." Kroetsch's own novel What the Crow Said lures the reader into an attempt "to impose on it a total explanation" (15) but thwarts that attempt by its emphasis on metonymy. Where the realist writer perceives language as "picture," he conceives of it as "game," and plays a game with and against the conventions of narrative fiction, drawing the reader into a position of "undecidability...between meaning and meaninglessness" (59).

 Entirely supportive of the deconstructionist project, Kroetsch resists the temptation of meaning because such resistance implicitly means "resisting the linguistic convention of the unity of signifier and (conceptualized) signified in the sign" (143), but he is adamant that Wiebe, like T.S. Eliot, aspires to some larger meaning in the world and "just surrenders to the temptation all the time." Wiebe, for his part, however, is not unaware of the dimensions of the fundamental question. In the introduction to his collection of modern short stories, The Story-Makers, Wiebe cites Alain Robbe-Grillet's rejection of language's claims and traditional realist assertions about character:

The meaning of the world around us can no longer be considered as other than fragmentary, temporary and even contradictory, and is always in dispute. How can a work of art set out to illustrate any sort of meaning which is known in advance?
Kroetsch shares Robbe-Grillet’s conviction that life is but a succession of moments. Character is only what is ever becoming, buffeted by the internal and external stimuli over which the individual has little, if any, control, and which determine what kind of character he is at any given moment. Any sense of meaning is an aberration. It is a fiction imposed on a discordant world by those attempting to escape the chaos that confronts them, a falsification of a world which is essentially ambiguous and fragmentary. All that the artist can do is probe the nature of language and examine the surface of life minutely.

Kroetsch is particularly supportive of Robbe-Grillet’s “attack on the Balzacian notion of depth” (Neuman, Labyrinths 192):

The notion of depth is almost a denial of our responsibility as writers and readers. The great mazes are out in the sunlight. We are not groping in the dark. We can see all the way to the corner. The catch is, we can’t see around the corner. We can’t achieve a god’s-eye view. But to explain that away in terms of depth is to lose the glories of surface and function and act.

What intrigues Kroetsch are the surface words, the words and language in and of themselves. He is fascinated by etymologies, with tracing a word’s “becomingness” (142), quoting approvingly this passage from Bakhtin:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of
complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with a third group... (149)

Of course, Wiebe could claim the same attraction, the same fascination, since he is no less obsessed by language than Kroetsch, nor any less cognizant of its complexities and restrictions, its penchant for ambiguity and dislocation, and our incapacity to penetrate its surface - "surface is all."

Coral Ann Howells interprets Wiebe's position to claim that he is "not a deconstructionist obsessed with the endless flight of meaning, for he does believe in connections between words and meanings" ("If" 96), but I would argue, contra Howells, that he actually has decided sympathies with the deconstructionist project.

Through an articulation of différence, Derrida, the deconstructionist par excellence, argues that a word is not "an open window" (Ward, "Why" 265) upon the object it refers to, since it is in itself a material body "whose power to signify depends upon its relation in a language system and a grammar." Meaning is always deferred since the word means something only in its relation to all from which it differs. All words are written or inscribed in a system of signs, part of a text, such that they face themselves as objects within a particular lexicon and grammar. Language is essentially figural, and as such its assertions are not unequivocal statements of truth, but always open to interpretation and reinterpretation. Différence is the process of play between the presence and absence of meaning, a play that constantly defers meaning and produces a chain of signifiers. Since there is no pure moment of presence, we are caught constantly between that which is in the past and must be both recollected and represented, and that which is in the future and is ever a "not yet".

Echoes of this can be heard in My Lovely Enemy when James, the historian, complains
that in our life we are caught in the present, which he sees as a slit between past and future, the point where we may do, but mostly remember and anticipate, fearfully hope? Philosophers sometimes speak of us as living in a wider ‘fictive’ or specious present in which we continually try to remember past facts so that we can create a sound present understanding of character and world in the light of an expected future, but we still have only our one, particular point of view and we are inevitably subject to the ‘anthropocentric illusion.’ we ourselves are tangled in these memories and expectations, we always are. (MLE 3)

There is a temptation for the critic to retreat from the claims of the deconstructionist project, to dismiss Derrida as an avowed atheist, a nihilist, who “plays with his readers in a way that appears both manipulative and demeaning” (Ward, “Why” 264), and to seek solace in Mikhail Bakhtin’s approach to the complexities, the heteroglossic nature, of language. Bakhtin’s constructive affirmations appear to rescue us from Derrida’s reductive negativities. Yet the argument for the direct intentionality of language is equally undermined by both. Bakhtin, referring with approbation to Rabelais’ disavowal of language’s truth claims, asserts language’s inability to truly describe reality:

Rabelais taunts the deceptive human word by a parodic destruction of syntactic structures, thereby reducing to absurdity some of the logical and expressively accented aspects of words (for example, predication, explanations and so forth). Turning away from language (by means of language, of course), discrediting any direct or unmediated intentionality and expressive excess (any “weighty” seriousness) that might
adhere in ideological discourse, presuming that all our language is conventional and false, maliciously inadequate to reality - all this achieves in Rabelais almost the maximum purity possible in prose. But the truth that might oppose such falsity receives almost no direct intentional and verbal expression in Rabelais, it does not receive its own word - it reverberates only in the parodic and unmasking accents in which the lie is present. Truth is restored by reducing the lie to an absurdity but truth itself does not seek words; she is afraid to entangle herself in the word, to soil herself in verbal pathos. (Dialogic 309)

In the glossary to The Dialogic Imagination, Michael Holquist states that, for Bakhtin, the “only un-preconditioned world was Eden, and since its Fall we have all spoken about the world in someone else’s words. The world of objects and meanings in which we live is therefore highly relativized...” (429). The meaning in any utterance is governed by heteroglossia. 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 at that time will have meaning different from what it would have under any other conditions (428).

The substance of this is implicit in Wiebe. Indeed, Wiebe and Kroetsch can clearly be seen as sharing a recognition of language’s limitations, despite Wiebe’s claim that “I think the truths of things can be gotten at still” (UL 237). What serves to distinguish them is, as Kroetsch rightly discerns, Wiebe’s belief “in that” ‘capital-W’ Word in the beginning was.” Kroetsch’s credo, by contrast is, “I believe In the beginning was. Period” (236). One suspects that by his distinction Kroetsch is simply distorting himself from Wiebe’s realism, but the
sense, role, and implications of this Word require more thorough investigation than might appear at first blush.

The confusion generated by the Word/word distinction leads, in the case of Penny van Toorn, to a judgment that Wiebe believes that the Word enables him to ultimately escape the deconstructionist critique, that Biblical language is somehow exempt from general linguistic contamination. She argues that "to prevent his religious convictions collapsing under the weight of his own logic," he is forced to address "an extra-historical authority...and opens up a gap between Truth and human knowledge...[differentiating] 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" (Historicity 192).

What this "monologic Word" is for van Toorn is unclear, but what is clear for Wiebe is that the word of theological discourse is our word, and Wiebe does not contend that this word escapes the deconstructionist critique. The play of différence which is recognized in everyday language is, as Graham Ward points out, equally true for theological language. While positive theology posits moments of immediate reception of God speaking to his creation directly, without the distortion of the communication being mediated, and would appear in agreement with the way metaphysics has privileged presence and the transparency and immediacy of direct communication, revelation's claim cannot be based on the special character of language and presence - "there can be no pure moment of presence" (Ward, "Why" 266). Kevin Hart contends that "Adam's trespass" was not simply moral: "it was also a trespass of the sign - a desire for unmediated knowledge - and the sign of this disobedience is none other than the mutability of all signs" (Trespass 3). Consequently, the path of theology must separate from metaphysics. There is no way to escape the 'text' - "There is no event that is prior to its
representation. In fact, there is no experience which is not already an interpretation...the end is still an open question and will remain so....It is a question always of being on the way” (Ward, “Why” 266). To which Hart adds: “man is no longer the master of signs but is frequently mastered by them” (Trespass 3). The difference is solely in the manner of reading, and the manner of reading revelation is faith.

Linda Munk, in her discussion of the Shekinah (God’s glory, God himself but “viewed in spatio-temporal terms as a presence” [Trivial 139, quoting the Jewish Encyclopedia 1905]) in Jonathan Edwards, draws attention to God’s “communicative disposition” (160, quoting Edwards) in Creation whereby God reveals himself through the Shekinah - “God expresses himself without himself through the agency of his creating and poetic Word” (162). All things are seen as “signs of God’s Presence because they participate in what the late Edmond Jabes, in a visionary gloss on the Shekinah, named ‘His dazzling absence’” (161-162). Might we not also perceive language itself as one of these “signs,” “burnt-out craters” which testify to God’s presence in his absence?

Louis Mackey, while reminding us that “our whole life in this world is a meanwhile [interim] and a difference - we live by faith,” cautions against any apologetic sleight of hand that attempts “to convert faith into a form of cognition: a cognition with presence, however slight and tenuous” (“Slouching” 270). Faith too deals in figuration and as such its statements are always put into question. There is no revelation which is uncontaminated by representation, no immediate communication without distortion, no transparent word.² Biblical and theological statements are not unequivocal statements of truth.

When we query the special quality of theological statements and attempt to indicate what is meant by the enigmatic Word of Christian theology, Jean-Luc Marion is particularly
helpful in his refreshing elucidation:

Christian theology speaks of Christ. But Christ calls himself the Word. He does not speak words inspired by God concerning God, but he abolishes in himself the gap between the speaker who states (prophet or scribe) and the sign (speech or text); he abolishes this first gap only in abolishing a second, more fundamental gap, in us, men: the gap between the sign and the referent. In short, Christ does not say the word. he says himself the Word... As in him coincide - or rather commune - the sign, the locutor, and the referent that elsewhere the human experience of language irremediably dissociates, he merits, contrary to our shattered, inspiring or devalued words, to be said with a capital, the Word. (God 140)

Marion continues his insightful statement of Christ's revelation by speaking of the verbal implications of the Incarnation:

Thus speaking our words, the Word redoubles his incarnation, or rather accomplishes it absolutely, since language constitutes us more carnally than our flesh. Such an incarnation in our words can be undertaken only by the Word, who comes to us before our words. (141)

Christian theology rests on this Word, on the event of his incarnation, death and resurrection. Only through the New Testament text that witnesses to this event, that left its "trace" of "an unimaginable, unheard of, unforeseeable, and in a sense invisible irruption... as a nuclear explosion leaves burns and shadows on the walls" (147), do we have access to this event. But
the "unthinkable" event itself evades our grasp.

As van Toorn correctly articulates the problem (without comprehending the implicit response), "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'" only in the form of historically contingent, "small-w" human utterances which people apprehend in specific sociohistorical contexts" (Historicity 212). For God's Word to be meaningful to us, it must be grasped by the human being who seeks to make sense of it, and thus that Word becomes subject to the limitations of all human language.

What van Toorn does not perceive is Wiebe's recognition that technically theology always remains an impossibility; statements about God are ever open to question. With Yoder, he recognizes that the church is repeatedly tempted by "the vain effort to find assurance beyond the flux of unendingly meeting new worlds, or to create a metalanguage above the clash, in order to renew for tomorrow the trustworthiness and irresistibility of the answers of the past" (Yoder, Priestly 60), but there is no linguistic safe haven. On our side of the 'ditch' there is only historical and linguistic uncertainty.

What enables words to communicate, and makes the Truth a reality is not inherent in the words themselves. As Marion comments further, "the more men hear [the Word] speak their own words, the less their understanding grasps what the words nevertheless say as clear as day....they do not manage (nor ever will manage) to say him as he says himself" (God 140-141). The Word of God as revelation through words becomes the Word only when the Word "says himself, for nothing else remains to be said outside this saying of the said, saying of the said said par excellence, since it is proffered by the said saying" (140). In other words, the Word must be interpreted "from the point of view of the Word" (149): "Only the Word
can give an authorized interpretation of the words [written or spoken] ‘concerning him’ “
(148). Marion clarifies further:

In short, our language will be able to speak of God only to the degree that God, in his Word, will speak our language and to teach us in the end to speak it as he speaks it - divinely, which means to say in all abandon. In short, it is a question of learning to speak our language with the accents - with the accent of the Word speaking it. For the Word, by speaking our words, which he says word-for-word, without changing anything of them (not an iota Matt. 5:18), takes us at our word, literally: since he speaks what we speak, but with an entirely different accent, he promises us the challenge, and gives us the means to take it up - to speak our word-for-word with his accent, the accent of God. (144)

Marion’s learning to speak “with the accents of God” is the task that Yoder envisages in the expression “being on the way.” Any understanding of what the Word speaks is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The value that is given to it as true is “a commitment of faith.” Any move beyond différences or heteroglossia is a “reading by faith” (Ward, “Why” 267); différences marks the limit of what we can know. In fact, any reading as truth is a reading by faith. Thus any axiological statements we make remain in themselves equivocal. To state, as Wiebe does, that “the truths of things can be gotten at still” is a statement of faith that the word will be interpreted by the living Word, the Gospel, the Christ.

What Marion so imaginatively expresses is echoed by Barth in the proclamation that it is God alone who makes communication possible:
In His revelation God controls His property, elevating our words to their proper use, giving Himself to be their proper object, and therefore giving them truth.

(Church II/1 230)

The deconstructionist critique notwithstanding, for both Marion and Barth communication is realized because words are empowered in the Incarnation.

It is understandable, then, that when Kroetsch, in claiming that a writer is someone who is obsessed by language itself, adds, “instead of what it signifies” (Neuman, Labyrinths 141), or argues that “what language signifies [is] language” (142) and nothing more, we are then at the crossroads, and the two friends abruptly part company. Given Wiebe’s belief in the incarnation in language, he finds Kroetsch’s approach profoundly limited. If verbal and symbolic structures become the artist’s focus, then “the most exquisite artistry expended on the most banal of subjects becomes the greatest artistic achievement” (“Novelist’s” 198). That is a mockery of art, and the artist becomes but “a mechanical functionary.” Wiebe can applaud an “old-fashioned” writer like Frederick Philip Grove for his pursuit of wisdom - “Grove is after a quality of life” - because he is not prepared to choose between an exploration of language and signification, and would applaud Wayne Booth’s identification of the “scandal” that faces those who would claim that “language is all” in the fact that “all works of art are loaded with ideology” (“Introduction,” Bakhtin, Problems x). Wiebe is unabashedly in pursuit of meaning, but meaning for him is founded, ultimately and unequivocally, upon an understanding of biblical history or what is termed ‘strict’ typology.
CHAPTER III
TYPOLOGICAL READING

In the assertion that typology is fundamental to Wiebe’s role as a witnessing novelist, it must be acknowledged that he himself does not speak in those terms. What he does claim is that it is God’s historical revelation culminating in Christ that underlies all meaning. It must be acknowledged, further, that to state specifically what typology entails is most certainly no straight-forward task. As Eleanor Cook observes, “[t]he history of typological interpretation is long, disputed, and fascinating” (“Reading” 694), and for a time it became “a sadly esoteric subject for most literary scholars” (693). Despite Erich Auerbach’s 1944 seminal essay “Figura”, Northrop Frye would lament in his 1957 Anatomy of Criticism that “Biblical typology is so dead a language now that most readers, including scholars, cannot construe the superficial meaning of any poem which employs it” (14).

But if we have recovered some appreciation of typology’s intricacies, it is in no small measure due to both Auerbach and Frye. In his 1944 essay, Auerbach writes that typology or figural interpretation

establishes a connection between two events or persons in such a way that the first signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second involves or fulfills the first. The two poles of a figure are separated in time, but both, being real events or persons, are within temporality. They are both contained in the flowing stream which is historical life, and only the comprehension, the intellectus spiritus, of their interdependence is a spiritual act. (Cited in Auerbach, Mimesis 73)
In *The Great Code*, Frye locates typology more specifically within the Judeo-Christian Bible in his explanation that typology is a two-part figure of speech consisting of a type and antitype:

Everything that happens in the Old Testament is a ‘type’ or adumbration of something that happens in the New Testament, and the whole subject is therefore called typology....What happens in the New Testament constitutes an ‘antitype.’ a realized form, of something foreshadowed in the Old Testament. (79)

Frye’s interest as a literary critic is in typology as “a mode of thought and as a figure of speech” (80). As a figure of speech, it moves in time between the type of the past and the antitype of the future. As a mode of thought, “it both assumes and leads to, a theory of history” that perceives meaning in history, assuming that “sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously” (80-81). For strict Christian typology, the event that gives meaning did occur in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and Christ is the antitype.

The distinction that Frye makes between typological reading and allegorical reading is of crucial significance in understanding the role of typology for Wiebe:

Typology is not allegory: allegory is normally a story-myth that finds its ‘true’ meaning in a conceptual or argumentative translation, and both testaments of the Bible, however oblique their approach to history, deal with real people and real events. (85)

While in allegory one narrative takes temporal precedence over the other, deferring to
concepts in a moralistic system, Frye's visual metaphor for Biblical typology is a "double mirror" with the two testaments "each reflecting the other, but neither the world outside" (78). Similarly, for Auerbach, both the type or figure and the antitype or fulfillment "retain the characteristics of concrete historical reality....An event taken as figure preserves its literal and historical meaning" (73). Both Frye and Auerbach extend typology beyond its biblical reference, such that extra-biblical texts reflect the double mirror of the Old and New Testaments. These texts become types of the Bible, since, as Frye states, "every text is a type of its own reading." The Bible becomes "a key to mythology" (92), and as such a key to secular literature.

Linda Munk has adopted this reasoning in her claim that "the typological method of biblical exegesis is the implicit structural principle" (Trivial 120) of Flannery O'Connor's art. This present essay claims that that typological assessment should also be applied to Rudy Wiebe's writing over the past two decades.

The connection of Wiebe with Flannery O'Connor should not be judged fortuitous: despite their pronounced dissimilarity - she a Southern writer of ardent Roman Catholic persuasion, and he a Western Canadian author committed to his Anabaptist heritage - they are indubitably linked by their witness to Christ through "the labyrinth of indirection" (Munk 124) in their "Scripture-anchored fiction" (Gable, "Ecumenic Core" 129, cited in Munk 120). But while the overwhelming significance of typology for O'Connor has been acknowledged, it has not, with some notable exceptions, been adequately recognized in Wiebe.

In his 1982 doctoral dissertation, however, George H. Hildebrand engages in a determined attempt to set the record straight by identifying typology's role within much of Wiebe's early fiction. He credits D. L. Jeffrey's "brilliant and timely" article on Wiebe and Margaret Laurence for opening the way to a perception of the pervasive typological structure
of Wiebe’s writing, citing Jeffrey’s depiction of Wiebe’s “fictional strategy” (“Theological” 12):

[The] lost Old Testament world - and New Testament informed typology which grows out of it - do not provide Wiebe merely with allusion, or even plot (although there are numerous examples of both). More significantly, the Bible provides him with a design - a hermeneutical model which yields up both the deep structure of his creations and the methodology in terms of which he ‘translates’ the histories he writes. An absent text upon which Wiebe’s writing is a kind of present gloss, the Bible is not obtrusively present as allegory or superficial allusion, but is always working just under the surface, as though history itself were really, as in typological homiletics, an ongoing fulfillment of the story begun in the Bible. (Jeffrey, “Biblical” 100)

In his essay, Jeffrey investigates Wiebe’s use of typology particularly in terms of The Blue Mountains of China, looking within it for “the structure and interpretive signals of an absent text” (91).

Perceiving this novel as a Mennonite family pilgrimage, Jeffrey pursues the themes of estrangement and exile as the individual pilgrims make their way from Siberia to Paraguay and Canada, “laden with Biblical analogues germane to their interpretation” (101): Frieda Friesen (“Wiebe’s simple mother of promise, ‘free’, with heart and name [‘peace’] set on ‘that Jerusalem which is above’ - a Sarah to set beside Laurence’s Hagar” [100]); Anna Friesen (a naive reflection of the Biblical Rachel comes to a moment of “self-identity” at a “Jacob’s well”[101] that is to be found in Paraguay); David Epp (his self-sacrifice “replays against the
semi-conscious whispering of the liturgy of the Eucharist” (101)). Jeffrey perceives the concluding sections of the novel as an exploration of “the interpersonal and historical consequences of sacrificial action” that in its structure “reproduces the elemental shape of the larger ‘anthology’ from Genesis to the Sermon on the Mount” (101), and hears, in the voices (representative of those many pilgrims who make their way from page to page) party to the “makeshift meal” at the Alberta highway’s edge, “another voice, as ancient, but still being heard in conversation along the road” (102), which “draws each of them toward interpretive encounter” (102-103).

Jeffrey recognizes that, as the novel’s chapters ultimately elude integration, its characters similarly escape understanding. The novel, “grasped in the shadow of another book,” presents no “irrefragable answer”; the encounter with that absent ancient voice leaves the final debaters with choices which “involve the risk of response.” The old man Jakob Friesen IV complains that Jesus “never gives you a thing to hold in your hand,” while the young John Reimer chooses to remain on the road “knowing that he doesn’t fully know but determined to keep on moving” (102).

Whereas Jeffrey is sensitive to the typology implicit in The Blue Mountains of China, others, including Penny van Toorn in her recent study Rudy Wiebe and the Historicity of the Word, are quick to perceive that novel’s use of allusion but slow to hear the typological voices. In her insightful discussion of the chapter “Sons and Heirs” of The Blue Mountains of China, for example, in which she describes biblical allusion as “a fourth authorial language” that challenges “Jakob Friesen’s boast of the family’s successes” (87), she effectively relates the three main characters to the Genesis story in which Jacob bribes his brother Esau out of his birthright. Claiming that the allusion “activates the reader’s Biblical knowledge,” she suggests that this “offers an alternative perspective of events in the Friesens’hoff” (88). While
Wiebe recasts Esau as Escha, a Russian peasant, who toils on Jakob Friesen’s farm, van Toorn correctly perceives that the Genesis story informs the fictional account. There are textual suggestions that Escha is actually the illegitimate brother of Jascha (Jakob V) (a claim supported by the plural in the chapter’s title), which would serve to legitimate Escha’s particular claim to the farm and lend credence to the broader judgment that the Friesen family is too concerned with material possessions, ‘dispossessing’ the Russian peasants generally. (Actually, as Wiebe presents the story, the biblical model is inverted - in Jeffrey’s words “the ancestral hof is wrested away from a Mennonite son of the ostensible promise” [“Biblical” 100].)

The grandmother, Muttachi, reminiscent of Penelope in the Odyssey in “spin[ning] wool she had already spun a dozen or perhaps three thousand times” BMC 35), is presented as a ‘scavenger’ figure, unlike the faithful Greek heroine in that she ceaselessly and uselessly “mak[es] her yarn again and again, destroying the products of her labour solely to keep them out of others’ hands” (van Toorn, Historicity 87). As van Toorn notes further, the Biblical verse on the “lilies of the field [that] toil not neither do they spin,” introduced in a later chapter, “invites reflection on the extent to which Muttachi’s manifest attachment to material wealth in “Sons and Heirs” contravenes Jesus’ teaching” (88).

Revealing as van Toom’s insight into the allusive character of the text may be, by not moving beyond that her understanding of the density of Wiebe’s writing is severely limited. Her inability to entertain typology as the deep structure in Wiebe flaws an otherwise perceptive work, but it is a fundamental flaw which invalidates much of her critique, since it is only in perceiving biblical allusion in the context of typology that the historicity of the Word can be appropriately recognized.
The title *Historicity of the Word* promises much, but delivers little because, at root, the argument operates from a Kantian perception of Jesus, the great teacher who proclaims an alien, monologic Word: “The supremely authoritative Word emanates not from the sociohistorical plane of human struggle but from a higher, transcendent plane, above and outside history” (15). The word which van Toorn celebrates in the “historicity of the word” is the “dialogized Word-under-construction, as human beings can know it” (192), the human word, engaged in a temporal/spatial “struggle to discover the Truth” (177). While she perceives Wiebe as caught between this “historicity of truth” and “the existence of an absolute, authoritative Truth which exists irrespective of the state of human knowledge” (202), to her mind, despite the credence he gives to the dialogic word, “[a]t a certain moment near the end of each novel, the divine Word or Sign enters the text to reorder both the consciousness of the protagonist and the internal political dynamic of the text” (15). For her, this is a weakness in Wiebe which “pulls all his novels back from the brink of full polyphony” (198).

The strength of van Toorn’s work is the use she makes of Bakhtin in deciphering the implications of the polyphony within Wiebe’s mature writing. But its weakness is her inability to perceive that, whatever importance Wiebe ascribes to the teaching of Jesus, for him it is Jesus the Christ himself who is the Word and it is his historicity in person, word and deed that gives meaning to this world. The Truth is found in the deep structure of typology of which the historical Incarnation is the focal point. While faith is the means of affirmation, a hermeneutical struggle exists for the believer in understanding the Incarnation’s significance. As van Toorn herself relates (despite her misperception), that struggle occurs “in ‘the space between’ believers who strive to discover its meaning dialogically throughout history” (190). For the Mennonite Anabaptist, life itself is a hermeneutical pilgrimage, in which the believing
disciple is always 'on the way.'

Perhaps the fact that van Toorn cannot perceive the Incarnate Word as the Word for Wiebe should come as no surprise. In the conclusion to her study, she claims: "Bakhtin and Volosinov would probably number Wiebe amongst the many who, throughout human history, have invoked the power of an imaginary superhuman being to supplement their own values and objectives" (203). The import of this statement says more about van Toorn than about Bakhtin, Volosinov, or Wiebe, as it reveals a Neo-Kantian denial of the reality of the Other, a denial which the other three, despite van Toorn's assumptions about the first two, do not share.

If van Toorn cannot appreciate the fundamental role of typology in Wiebe's art, Hildebrand's own essay goes a long way to furthering an understanding of its significance. But, unfortunately, Hildebrand's dissertation has been largely ignored (van Toorn cites his work, while making no mention of its typological thrust), perhaps because it often degenerates into a distorted polemic against Wiebe himself, whom he describes as a "cunning" ("Theological" 5) but "careful" (3) artist, aligned with a fundamentalist rigidity (3), anti-intellectualism (33), prudery (51), and benevolent arrogance (1), and what it perceives as Wiebe's proselytizing practice. To say, as Hildebrand does, that for Wiebe "the aspect of history that interests him is its providential function in soul-saving" (13), or "the purpose of art is to teach Christian doctrine" (17), or that "he chooses to present a moral system...to which he demands his reader's assent" (17) is simply wrong-headed and contradicted by the textual evidence. While he has an abiding interest in souls, Wiebe is no simplistic fundamentalist; he explicitly rejects the role of preacher, or of theologian, and pursues a method of indirection that chooses to engage his reader in dialogue rather than make any
demands' of assent.

Hildebrand’s polemic is partly explained by his admission that his "own prejudice can best be put in materialist terms" and his recourse to terms borrowed from Fredric Jameson for his assessment of Wiebe’s belief and art - "[they] are examples of historical thinking arrested halfway, a thought which, on the road to concrete history, takes fright and attempts to convert its insights into eternal essences, into attributes between which the human spirit oscillates" (27, citing Jameson 93-94). He also reveals his ‘colours’ by his approving citation of Louis Dudek’s virulent attack on Christianity and “other forms of ‘excessive idealism’” (30). Further, at the essay’s conclusion, Hildebrand reveals his affinity to van Toorn as he bemoans the fact that Wiebe “will never come to conceive of belief as metaphorical nor will he ever accept that ‘all deities reside in the human breast’” (389).

Such lack of sympathy for Wiebe severely undermines the balance of Hildebrand’s project, but it should not blind the reader to the essay’s merits. Hildebrand may consider typological thinking naive, archaic, and irrational (citing Ziolkowski’s claim that “any modern work that used typology seriously and naively would remain, almost by definition, sub-literary” [90, from Ziolkowski 350]) and would have Wiebe ‘see’ differently, but it is perhaps the lack of sympathy in his analysis that most effectively forces the reader to recognize the fundamental significance of typology in Wiebe’s art. As distasteful as typology may be for Hildebrand, he cannot but recognize that it forms the backbone of Wiebe’s writing.

However, basic to Hildebrand’s judgment of Wiebe lies a perception that Christianity (particularly “a certain kind of Protestantism” [“Theological” 1]) is traditionally contemptuous of the world, degrading “appetites and pleasures” and recoiling “from what is actual and necessary” (30). For him, the concern for “any Christian aesthetic theory” is to “retain history, experience, and the body in all their concreteness while giving aesthetic (pedagogical)
power to the essential doctrine” (30). He believes, utilizing Auerbach’s statement that the “revisional interpretation” (31) by St. Paul and the Church fathers “forced [the reader] to turn his attention away from the sensory occurrence and toward its meaning” (citing Auerbach, Mimesis 46), that this resulted in a gap between the material and the transcendental which the Incarnation was intended to bridge. Its failure to do so, in Hildebrand’s estimation, “suggests that the split may be innate to the paradoxical mystery of the Incarnation” and, in terms of literature, results in a “tendency to allegory.”

This slippage toward allegory is a recurring and plaguing problem in any discussion and treatment of typology. For example, Eleanor Cook’s admonition that “although there is an overlap in allegorism and typology, ignoring the differences can be misleading” (“Reading” 696), is itself both misleading and particularly pertinent. The two methods of interpretation are actually fundamentally at odds. As John Breck points out, for the allegorist, “the ultimate meaning of an event is given by an anabatic or ascending movement...[with the event]...so to speak, elevated to the celestial plane” (Power 81). For the typologist, on the other hand, “the heavenly reality descends (katabasis) to the plane of human history as the universal which dwells within, shapes and gives meaning to the event.” In practice, however, they have been confused, as is the case with Hildebrand who himself seems to slide from one to the other without distinction. While he can, on the one hand, assert that “the interpretive and narrative process of ‘typological historiography’ is central to Wiebe’s vision and fiction, he can, on the other, describe Wiebe’s early novels as “allowing a fictional re-enactment of the incarnation” (“Theological,” Abstract) and view him as an allegorist with the consequent denigration of the historical and material.

To perceive Wiebe in this way is to distort his practice. In as early a work as his Peace
Shall Destroy Many, Wiebe, committed to a typological reading of the Bible which sees the culmination of the Old Testament in the New, but resistant to any attempt to stabilize the day-to-day unfolding of history, challenges a Mennonite community’s perception of itself as in a special covenant with God through the creation of a new Israel. His treatment of Peter Block’s community suggests parallels with Hawthorne’s representation of the Puritans of New England, as analysed by E. Miller Budick:

The literalistic antitypological interpretation of scripture was essentially an ahistoricising of the biblical text which would dispossess their existence of history altogether....[The Puritans] eclipsed the historicity that historical typology intended. Rendering the biblical text in their own image, they converted the history of scripture into the history of the self [and] considered themselves visible saints. (Fiction 37)

For Wiebe, a similar corruption of the historical sense which places the Mennonite community at the centre of the interpretation of history engenders, in Budick’s words, a “profoundly anti-Christian moral absolutism and excentricism” (Budick 92). In historicizing allegory, by insisting on the historical reality of the Incarnation, Wiebe, with Hawthorne, “breaks the self-sufficiency and self-referentiality of the allegorical structure turning it back toward the historical reality from which it has broken away” (108).

Peter Block’s community goes against the grain of its theological heritage. As John Howard Yoder contends, the Incarnation is of “normative significance” ontologically for those like himself who would consider themselves “ecclesial Anabaptists” (Priestly 125). For them, there can be no “re-enactment of the incarnation”; it is a unique historical event, unique both in its occurrence and soteriological effect.
Wiebe is also resistant to attempts to make a new certainty out of our understanding of the inner workings of typology, apparent, for example, in the rigidity that impedes David L. Jeffrey's appreciation of My Lovely Enemy. Insight into the rootedness of his fiction in a dynamic rather than static treatment of the Biblical metanarrative is provided through a short excursus into Graham Ward's "Mimesis: The Measure of Mark's Christology." In that article, Ward argues that the author of St. Mark's Gospel (generally considered the earliest of the Gospels), far from being a "clumsy editor" (9), is engaged in a "highly sophisticated" (10) mimetic operation in which "the narrative as a whole not only imitates the character and teaching of Christ within it, but provokes and engages our imitation of the character and teaching of Christ (our discipleship) beyond it" (4). Recognising that mimesis "has the body of an eel," Ward recalls Aristotle's recognition that art "does not strictly imitate what is, but what should be" and that, consequently, it "moves beyond what it represents to the presentation of an ideal form that is otherwise absent," and that the form of mimesis is "always of an action and, therefore, a narrative" (3). Ward contends that mimesis is always engaged in measuring, indeed that "'measuring' is the act of engagement itself" (2), and what Mark is constantly measuring is the Christology surrounding Jesus of Nazareth.

Ward perceives a crisis of representation in the Gospel, a "semiosis" - "where an object, incident or statement is imbued with the possibility of many meanings, or none at all" (9) - because neither the beginning nor the end is clearly defined. While the narrative may be said to possess as many as five beginnings, there is a sense in which it has no beginning at all; it is simply in medias res. Further, because there is no representation of the resurrection ("The resurrection can have its prefigurements, but its fulfillment is as unrepresentable as the Hebrew God" [7]) which would complete the narrative process, he suggests that any final
‘ending’ is thus “deferred and doubled” (8) and we are caught in the challenging “ambiguities and ephemeralities of the in-between” (10), and that the meaning embodied in the text that the “carpenter from Nazareth” is the Christ is then put in doubt. The crisis exists because we are left with no one “unambivalent presentation” of him. It is the confrontation of this crisis that forms the character of Mark’s mimesis and also that of the reader who is compelled “to interpret, to engage with the text, to participate in its telling.”

As there is no ending to the text so there is no ending to this engagement. As Mark struggles with his Christology, so the reader struggles with the narrative text. Both Jesus and the text exhort “follow me,” but if we follow the text we are caught between faith and paranoia (or perhaps merely indifference). But if we are truly moved by the text, we read the representations, and then, because of the “highly suggestive weave of questions that riddle the Gospel” (9) are compelled to re-read and reinterpret it once again, “to represent it anew in our own lives and so generate further acts of signification” (10). For Ward, this process of representation is the process of discipleship in which we repeatedly attempt “to represent aright” while recognizing that the mystery of Christ will never be resolved. As the disciples “are woven into God’s meta-text, a story of Trinitarian inscription where God is author, Christ is performer and the Holy Spirit is the performance” (11), we too as readers are inscribed into the same text, and with them are “caught in the mirroring of time and representation, in a land between, in a process that is always ‘on the way’” (17).

What is particularly striking and pertinent about Ward’s article to this present essay, over and above the obvious echoes of Yoder, are the parallels that can be found with Wiebe’s practice as a writer. His fiction can be seen as an extension of this process of representation. He too is engaged in mimesis, and in concurrence with Aristotle’s understanding of art, sets out to move “beyond what it represents to the presentation of an ideal form that is otherwise
absent” (Ward, “Mimesis” 3): “In order to write a novel the novelist will have to see man not only as he is, but as he may be” (Wiebe, ACW 45). As an avowed follower of Christ, when he writes of contemporary Mennonite struggles or the history of Canada’s northwest, he writes over against the biblical metanarrative. He attempts to find meaning in history in that soteriological story. Writing as a Christian disciple, he with the first disciples is caught up in the “nets of narrative” (Ward, “Mimesis” 11). While they were fishermen and he a writer, together “in the narrative of their occupation they issue into the narrative of Jesus Christ” (10). Bound in the community of common discipleship, each in his age attempts to represent yet again the mystery of the Christ, to explore the contemporaneous meaning of the Incarnation. As I shall attempt to show, particularly in terms of Wiebe’s two most recent novels, his fiction becomes the measure of his Christology as he attempts to speak the Bible’s echo.
CHAPTER IV

"WHERE IS THE VOICE COMING FROM?" (1971)

At this point, rather than moving directly to a consideration of Wiebe’s novels written after *The Blue Mountains of China*, it will be helpful to pause and examine his short story “Where is the Voice Coming From?”, perhaps Wiebe’s most insightful early attempt to exercise his method of indirection. A year before its publication, in a discussion of “point of view” in the introduction to his *The Story-Makers*, seemingly in anticipation of that story, he acknowledges that while “[i]n an obvious sense the authority which leads us into a story is the maker himself” (xxiii), the desire in realist fiction is for the story to appear “to reach the audience through no maker at all” (xxiv). The problem then is to decide on “a means of perception. “ Quoting from Gordon and Tate’s *The House of Fiction*, he asks:

What ‘eye’ or what ‘mind’ placed in a certain position, or so established as to make it possible for it to be shifted from one position to another, is best suited to the task of revealing the totality of the subject? (437)

What is the Voice that gives the story meaning? What is the relation between the story and the narrative presentation? Is it the presence of the narrator, or the reaction of the listener/reader, or the unfolding of the story itself - all of which can be subsumed under “Voice” - which is most significant?

Penny van Toorn picks up on this, phrasing the question simply as “Who said that?”, and postulates that the “cry” of The Almighty Voice “might issue from the creative imagination of the historian-narrator” or “the narrator might have momentarily 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" (Historicity 196). She suggests that the question asked broadly by “evangelical Christian” Wiebe is “highly rhetorical...a way of making readers contemplate the question of the ultimate provenance of voice” (197). Clearly, for her, Wiebe centres on the voice of Jesus, “Wiebe’s sovereign Other,” but, while this may be “Wiebe’s intention.” and “while Christian readers may accept Wiebe’s claim to be capitulating to God-the-Author-of-All,” she suggests that those not sharing Wiebe’s faith “might say that Wiebe is the author of God” (199). Her response may not surprise us, but her own bias undermines her comprehension of where Wiebe himself is coming from.

In this short story, which focusses on “the storyteller’s activity of rewriting history” (Howells, “Reliable” 101), Rudy Wiebe dramatically deviates from accepted fictional practice by inserting two ‘epigraphs’ directly within the text. This enables him, later, to deal with the first, an assertion by Teilhard de Chardin on our disposition to adopt a spectator’s role toward the world around us, within the text itself. The second, Arnold Toynbee’s hazarding that “Reality is the undifferentiated unity of the mystical experience,” is introduced only to be summarily dismissed - “but that need not here be considered” (WVCF 78). But is this reference to be so easily set aside? Why does Wiebe bother to mention it?

In “Passage By Land,” Wiebe relates that it was a chance contact - “my hand going up to pull out the one book in the library’s million that my eyes might have focussed upon: Toynbee’s A Study of History, volume 12, Reconsiderations” (260) - that finally occasioned the writing of this story. Was it a chance vision of the title, a “study of history,” that influenced the writing? Or was it the assertion that the “study” or the “history” was being “reconsidered”? That would connect with Wiebe’s claim that history needs to be
re-considered from various perspectives. But, more, it appears that Wiebe must have probed beyond the book’s cover in order to quote from it. Clearly, it was something the book said that influenced him. Of no small interest, the quotation from de Chardin appears, in fact, as a footnote to the Toynbee text at the point where Toynbee claims that our means of apprehending reality require that we misrepresent it. It would appear that the Toynbee text should perhaps be given not only consideration but, indeed, primacy. Might it not be (to adopt Wiebe’s speculative tone throughout this short work) that Toynbee’s approach to the articulation of reality is under fundamental re-consideration throughout this story? Might it not be that this apparent dismissal of Toynbee’s assertion is indicative of Wiebe’s modus operandi of “indirection,” and should alert the reader to the care required in entering his texts?

But let us return, initially, to the implications of de Chardin’s claims as Wiebe develops them. The fragmentary and often contradictory historical evidence of the confrontation of the young Cree brave, Almighty Voice, with white authority at the end of the last century thwarts the historian’s attempt to write the story. It would seem, despite Wiebe’s disavowal, that following Chardin’s lead, and cognizant of Aristotle’s distinction between the alleged impersonal facticity of the historian and the involved speculation of the poet, an imaginative retelling of Almighty Voice’s story does succeed in bringing the events of the Cree’s death to life.

If the story had ended with the magnificent penultimate still of the forces amassed at the Minnechinnass Hills and the subsequent “incredible...unending wordless cry” that arose from among the young poplars at the moment of the young brave’s death, those critics who in this “hear living voices...[imaginatively] disinterred from the rubble of history” (Howells 97) might have considered the story a dramatic success. Wiebe himself in an interview with Eli Mandel would seem to support a straightforward understanding:
I think [Almighty Voice] becomes great...in a kind of terrible last desperate moment...because for an instant he regains the greatness that was his people...in his defiance of the police...and that’s one of the reasons why he’s remembered so much, because for 20 years before Almighty Voice did that, his people had been voiceless.... But a name like Almighty Voice, which in the Cree means “the voice of the great spirit”....And that’s the reason [the prophets] had such great voices, right? Because they felt they spoke directly from God. They didn’t speak out of the smallness of man but out of the greatness of all that man can comprehend...and not only in connection with themselves but also with the spirit that made them...and that I think is important.

For me as a writer anyway. (Mandel, “Where” 154-5)

But Wiebe most emphatically does not end there; in what he adds he appears to undermine both the story and the critics.

For the speech-less story-maker, the cry is “wordless” because he lacks a reliable interpreter. For the critics, for whom the final cry is that of the Indian, Almighty Voice, this very failure to articulate the cry, by avoiding banal rhetoric, now becomes the story’s success; “Wiebe’s art...is to make such silence speak” (Davidson, “Provenance” 193). But this interpretation fails to consider that the final voice is explicitly identified as that of “Gitchie-Manitou Wayo...the Great Spirit...The Almighty Voice” (WVCF 86). The capitalized definite article effectively distinguishes this voice from that of the young Indian. At the very least, or should we say at the very most, it is The Almighty Voice ¹ who is speaking through him. Somehow the Voice speaks through the brave (or through the story?); the voice is unearthly, “incredible in its Beauty [and] its Happiness.” The embattled brave has
already spoken (to his two comrades), and we were enabled to understand his Cree:

We have fought well
You have died like braves
I have worked hard and am hungry
Give me food

But the final voice, that in its soaring and uplifting magnitude exults and transforms that scene on the Minnechinass Hills, simply by its intrusion, has become integral to the story, and its meaning requires interpretation and for that "a reliable interpreter," since as the narrator admits - "I do not, of course, understand the Cree myself" (87).

In the Neuman interview, Wiebe remarks that this short story was a first experiment, "a kind of try-out" (UL 241), with things that he developed further in The Temptations of Big Bear, and clearly the exploration of voice is magnificently present in that novel, as are strong typological indications of the presence of The Almighty Voice himself. But to see God’s voice as integral to the short story directs the reader back to the internal Toynbee ‘epigraph.’ The "undifferentiated unity of the mystical experience" thwart any attempt at articulation. Indeed, Toynbee in his Reconsiderations recognizes that we are compelled to "dissect" that unity in order to articulate the universe, and that in so doing we "misrepresent" reality "in order to be able to act and live in the light of the truth as far as we can discern it" (10). For him, however, religion enables man to reduce the measure of misrepresentation, offering him "the greatest opportunity of gaining insight into Reality, and of entering into contact with It, that is open to him in this life" (72).
While Wiebe is generally appreciative of the overall thrust of Toynbee's "intimation of the existence of a spiritual presence higher than his" (69), the latter's accommodating "trans-rationalist" stance which mediates among the higher religions of the "Judaic group" is inimical to Wiebe's own radical Christianity. Wiebe believes that "the truths of things can be gotten at still," but is convinced that the "misrepresentation" which is the inherent fallibility of human discourse can be corrected only by the Holy Spirit, who alone provides the "reliable interpretation."

The question of interpretation also lies at the root of the significant debate that has focussed on the title of the story. Howells notes that the title is "not Who is Speaking? nor To Whom is the Voice Speaking?" arguing that Wiebe's interest is in "break[ing] through the structures of language to determine what language conceals i.e. where the voice comes from ("If" 96). For Hildebrand, Wiebe "undoubtedly lifted" (196) the title from Denis de Rougemont. Tim Struthers finds its source in an earlier story of the same title written by Eudora Welty ("Living" 25).

In response to this last claim, Wiebe asserts that it was only "years later" that he came across the Welty story, but then muddies the waters by admitting:

I may have read it earlier - I don't know....As far as I consciously remember, I didn't read it beforehand. I may have gone through an anthology and seen the title, right? Who knows? Who knows where these things come from? (Struthers 25)

The Welty story concerning the murder of a black man in Thermopylae, Tennessee, at the height of the civil rights movement, speaks precisely to that point, and is especially significant.
because of its heteroglossic base. The first-person narrator, clearly ‘white,’ the perpetrator of
the crime, begins ambiguously:

I says to my wife, “You can reach and turn [the television] off. You don’t have to set
and look at a black nigger face no longer than you want to, or listen to what you don’t
want to hear. It’s still a free country.” (“Where” 481)

But it is precisely the contrary to this affirmation in our lives generally that would appear to be
the point of the story. One may be able to turn off a television set, but one cannot escape the
polyphony of our day-to-day existence. The protagonist recognizes some of the voices that
surround him personally:

“The Branch Bank sign tells you in lights, all night long even, what time it is and how
hot....I’ve heard what you’ve heard about Goat Dykeman...[who] got word to the
Governor’s Mansion he’d go up yonder and shoot that nigger Meridith....My
wife...said, “Well, they been asking that - why somebody didn’t trouble to load a rifle
and get some of these agitators out of Thermopylae. Didn’t the fella keep drumming it
in, what a good idea? The one that writes a column ever’ day?” (484)

But in detailing the ‘voices’ that constantly confront him the narrator seems not to hear what
he himself is saying, naively supposing that he gave himself “the idea,” although it is
abundantly clear to the reader that the instigation for the killing is much more complicated. Its
roots are to be found in the multiplicity of voices in that southern community that, day and
night, bombard its citizens.
Similarly, in Wiebe’s story, one could claim that it is the multiplicity of voices, voices that are often racist and inhumane, that are culpable in the killing of Almighty Voice- “hey injun” (WVCF 85). But in Wiebe’s story there is also the other voice, that of The Almighty Voice, which would appear to be absent in Welty’s recounting of Southern violence.

It is in search of this other voice as the source of the title that Hildebrand directs the reader to de Rougemont’s article “Religion and the Mission of the Artist,” quoting extensively to explain the context. While Hildebrand edits the text, the passage in full, particularly in terms of its alleged role, is more elucidating:

The inspiration, whether it operates at each moment or whether it intervenes only at the start and in a single instant, is an undeniable fact of experience. But from whence does it come? What Paul Valéry calls “the gods,” without compromising himself, 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.

The problem, let us observe, torments not only the artist, but also, and more consciously still, the physicist of today. Do I invent, he says to himself, 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? And the man who receives a call sometimes subsists in this doubt to the point of anguish. Do I surrender to some obscure determination of my desire, or is it rather that I really respond to a summons from somewhere else? 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 man. (71-72)

Hildebrand, presuming that “Wiebe has been thinking, in fact, about de Rougemont’s essay in relation to the problem of reconstructing Almighty Voice” (197), traces “the humility and doubts about historical meaning expressed in ‘Where Is The Voice Coming From?’” to the influence of this essay. It is seen as effecting a humanizing of Wiebe, by calling ‘certainties’ into question, and by “telling him to find not only Christ in the past but also real people in real situations.” Convinced that the voice comes from the human breast since he essentially denies the reality of the Other, Hildebrand perceives this as a positive change in a writer who at times simply “generates Christian meanings...with the arrogant brashness of a zealous convert. “But, in this assessment, his anti-Christian bias again colours his work to the detriment of an otherwise insightful study, and blinds him to the significance of de Rougemont’s statement and its possible effect on Wiebe.

For de Rougemont, as for Wiebe, the reality of the Holy Spirit and the positive nature of its influence are not taken for granted, but are fundamental to their thinking. The thrust of de Rougemont’s essay is to acknowledge the artist as ‘composing,’ with all the technical artistry at his disposal, “a calculated trap for meditation” (63), to “brib[e]” (62) the reader’s attention, to orient him towards something “true” that transcends the artistry itself, and to signify something “which would not be perceptible otherwise” (70), rendering the reality “intelligible, legible, audible, by physical means.”

Graham Ward, in his article on mimesis and Mark’s Christology referred to earlier, throws light on this discussion in his assertion that, in “the crisis of representation,” when we ascribe meaning to an enigmatic event “there is always the possibility of eisegesis” and
paranoia” ("Mimesis" 9). In De Rougemont’s words, “Do I surrender to some obscure determination of my desire, or is it rather that I really respond to a summons from somewhere else?” (71-72). Ward, in his response, speaks of the “chain of representation” (12) that begins with Jesus Christ as both “a representative (as God’s agent, God’s performer) and the author of the representational,” and continues on through a series of “substitutions” - “from God to Christ, from Christ to the Twelve, from the Twelve to the Church. “ In the representation of God through Jesus Christ and the Gospel’s representation of Jesus Christ, and all down the chain, “the problematic is this: who or what authorizes or legitimizes that representative status?” (18). Where is the Voice coming from? To which Ward answers:

What I am suggesting throughout this essay is that one authorizes and legitimizes the other. Just as God legitimizes Jesus’s representation function (at his baptism and at his transfiguration), so Jesus legitimizes the Gospel’s representational function “for my sake and the gospel’s.” (18)

In the linking between the Gospel and the writing of someone such as Wiebe, the legitimation is the same. As Ward says later, “It is the holy Spirit, then, who promotes the telling and the retelling, of the Christ-event” (19).

The reception of the message of signification is, in turn, equally problematic. The artist, even if he knows “all the rules of the game” (de Rougemont 67), is never sure that his message will be truly received. The paradoxical nature of the artistry is such that “that which reveals is at the same time that which conceals” (71). It is possible to recognize all the artistic effects and miss the message. The means of representation are both necessary to the
conveyance of the message and "heterogeneous" to it.

While the Spirit provides the legitimation, the writer is aware that not only do the words conceal/reveal, but the Word itself conceals/reveals, and this is the real issue articulated in the lengthy de Rougemont quotation above. He is claiming, contrary to any Romantically-influenced assumptions, that we can make no unequivocal claims about inspiration. Our desire for certainty is thwarted by the divine source of the inspiration. In Karl Barth’s formulation, “He unveils himself as the One He is by veiling Himself in a form which He Himself is not” (Church II/1 52). We must emphasize again, contra Hildebrand and other of Wiebe’s critics, that this in no way questions the reality of God or the primacy of his revelation in Christ. What it does question is our perception, our certainty: “The Spirit moves where it will.” To refer back to Yoder once more, we can never presume to be anywhere but in the ditch of uncertainty, and we can never make claims beyond our station. While firmly bonding us to God’s grace, the Holy Spirit is constantly unsettling any sense of arrival or possession. The Inspirer escapes, always escapes, our grasp. Our assessment or articulation of a situation is always open to reinterpretation by the Holy Spirit.

Howells adds to an understanding of Wiebe in her claim that he is concerned with “how we find the codes that enable us to make sense of what we see and hear” (“Reliable” 96). Language does “tease” with its promises of meaning, while at the same time effecting dislocation and incomprehension. Wiebe does believe in a connection between the signifier and the signified, between words and meanings, but that connection is not static. There is no convenient array of codes, only what Northrop Frye, following Blake, refers to as the Great Code, namely the typological structure of the Old and New Testaments, but even that code must be constantly read through the interpretive guidance of the Holy Spirit.
The Temptations of Big Bear (1973)

The critical response to The Temptations of Big Bear, while generally sensitive to the Biblical influence embedded within it, fails by and large to accurately identify the fundamental typological structure. To this, however, Glenn Meeter’s assessment is a striking exception. Meeter is clearly on the right track to an understanding of Big Bear when he directs us to Auerbach’s explanation of the ‘figural’ image of reality:

In his specific application of this perception to Big Bear himself, Meeter speaks with careful discernment. Objecting to the “indiscriminate” description of Big Bear as a “Christ-figure,” he argues, with typological correctness, that at most Big Bear can be described as a “Christlike Man”:

If Big Bear is such a figure - the Christlike Man, the Disciple - it must be a still more purely inner and essential matter, since he has not even the accent of a Christian terminology and tradition. His Christlike qualities must derive from his conscious
following of his own tradition, one for which Wiebe finds Scriptural authorization in the book’s epigraph from Acts 17. (“Spatial” 57)

While Big Bear is a spiritual leader of a people who claim to “worship the Only One” (57), it is primarily in his role as a political leader that Meeter perceives Big Bear’s typological function.

The temptations of the title are seen in relationship to the temptations of Christ related in St. Luke’s Gospel (4:1-13): Big Bear is enticed to sacrifice his principles for the ‘bread’ proffered by the government officers; he is pressured by other Indian chiefs to resort to arms to defend his people’s rights; he is subjected to the religious indoctrination of the “black robes” to convert to a conception of God that he finds oppressive and alienating. Unwilling, and without the internal strength to resist capitulation, Big Bear ultimately feels “forsaken” and becomes a scapegoat for his convictions:

On Maunday Thursday (2 April 1885) he is betrayed; that is his leadership is ignored by his “followers” (p.258). On Good Friday he is told by James Simpson, referring to the rebellion, “You will carry it all on your own back” (p.267) - a remark repeated and augmented during his trial (p.385). He tells stories, teaches, and gains at least one “Gentile” convert, the white captive Kitty McLean who confesses, “I want to be more like you. A Person” (p.313). He gives himself up voluntarily to the police (pp.351,396). He is tried, convicted, and sentenced; at his trial there is at least one dubious, if not false, witness (p.367). Imprisoned, “Big Bear is learning to be a carpenter” (p.400). When ready “to finish the long prayer to The Only One that was his life,” he dies and joins the “everlasting, unchanging, rock” (pp.414-15). His only
defence will be the printing of his words and the scattering of them among white
people (p.400). ("Spatial" 58)

Meeter concludes his study by presenting Big Bear in terms of the teaching of The Blue
Mountains of China's John Reimer:

Big Bear really does show wisdom by trusting people; he really does handle leadership
by serving, offenders by forgiving, money by sharing, enemies by loving, and violence
by suffering.

Wiebe's association of Big Bear with rock clarifies both the similarities and differences
identified between Big Bear as a "Christlike Man" and Jesus as the Christ. W.J. Keith has
attended to the metaphorical significance of this symbolism throughout the novel, drawing
together the instances of its use. Big Bear and his people generally are identified with rock:
"rock was the oldest, eternal grandfather of all things who stayed in his place and you could
be certain of him. Whites were only certain in changing..." (TBB, 101). In the myth of Bitter
Spirit that Big Bear relates to Kitty McLean, Bitter Spirit has his wish to live for ever granted
by the divine spirit by being transformed into rock. Wiebe gathers up this symbolism in the
concluding paragraph "in which Big Bear becomes in death the rocky land over which he has
lived, hunted, and ruled" (Keith, Epic 75):

He felt the granular sand joined by snow running together, against and over him
in delicate streams. It sifted over the crevices of his lips and eyes, between the folds of
his face and hair and hands, legs; gradually rounded him over until there was a tiny mound on the sand hill almost imperceptible on the level horizon. Slowly, slowly, all changed continually into indistinguishable, as it seemed, and everlasting, unchanging, rock. (TBB 415)

Stressing that Big Bear's religion is "in no way transcendental" (Epic 74), Keith draws the connections, "the ever-present but not necessarily stated parallels" (75), to the Biblical text, citing, as allusions, Psalm 18:2 ("The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer") and Matthew 16:18 ("upon this rock I will build my church"), Jesus's citation of Peter.

An examination of the role of rock in Christian typological thinking is crucial to an understanding of what is occurring in Wiebe's novel. In The Power of the Word, John Breck carefully delineates the "double movement" (39) that typology entails ("past towards the future, but also from the future towards the past" [39]), and cites St. Paul's reference to the rock (Exodus 17.6) in 1 Corinthians 10 where the Israelites are represented as drinking "from the spiritual rock that followed them, and this rock was Christ" (3). Noting that the image of a spiritual rock following the Israelites is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, Breck stresses that "The crucial point is that to the apostle's mind, Christ was present to the people of Israel in pre-incarnate form" (40). The rock serves as "the locus at which the antitype [Christ] reveals himself" (40). Christ thereby becomes the source of living water to the people in the desert, as the rock, as typos, "points forward...to the incarnate life and historical ministry of Jesus Christ, from whose side flowed life-giving water and blood, themselves typological images of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist" (40). The rock "as a prototype" is also the place where "the future saving work of Christ is proleptically realized in Israel's history: the people's thirst is actually assuaged by the living water that flows from the
It is the ability of the scriptural rock and Christ to assuage the people’s thirst that ultimately distinguishes them from Big Bear and negates his typological status. As Hildebrand insists, Wiebe may shape Big Bear’s story “so that it conforms to one of the important Old Testament types of Jesus, the suffering servant described by Isaiah” (“Theological” 281), but for all the identifications he “remains a pagan to the end” (292). He does finally succumb to the demands for Christian baptism - “Yes, you can do that to me if you want....The bell rang immediately and water was sprinkling upon his head” (TBB 408) - but here is no thirst-assuaging water, but an “ironic baptism by the antichrist” (Hildebrand 288), the priest’s face and voice grotesquely contorted into those of the trickster figure, coyote - “a long snout of laughter dripping between tiers of teeth. Black fur lifted laughter” (TBB 408).

Life-giving water is neither his to receive nor his to give. The fountain of his early vision (130) is an unredemptive fountain of blood; one that speaks of death, not life. His final arid vision of his land “drove like nails into the sockets of himself and his place was gone” (409). He provides no source of life-giving water. Instead, in a passage that invokes an echo, vaguely of Eliot’s “Waste Land,” or, with the presence of Coyote, more specifically of Watson’s The Double Hook, the inheritance of his people is depicted as a wasteland - “no more rain, the land dead with no Thunderbird to revive it, only the wolfish wind to lick dry and hound endlessly until there was none of it left...”(409). The absent text with its typological structure permeates and illuminates the narrative. Big Bear’s “paganism” is, as Keith remarks, “basically far closer to the message of Christ than the perfunctory pieties of the white characters” (Epic 76), but all fall under typological judgment. What become visible are, in Barth’s words, but “burnt-out craters” and “dried-out canals” that attest to the vestige of
God’s presence and his overwhelming absence.

**The Scorched-Wood People (1977)**

When Wiebe turns his attention to Louis Riel in the writing of *The Scorched-Wood People*, Hildebrand claims he finds a historical figure whose “actual life and faith as given by history and Riel’s own claims, correspond so obviously to the [typological] pattern Wiebe seeks that he must create some sort of ‘distance’ in order to maintain the credibility of the pattern” ("Theological" 298), which he does through the use of diaries and the narration of Pierre Falcon. He argues that Wiebe “identifies very closely with Riel, even while ironically narrating Riel’s progress away from his grandiose delusions about earthly success and domination, moving him toward his proper function as humble servant and martyr” (300).

Through a narrative stance, which Percy Lubbock identifies as “extended first-person” ("Craft" 267), Falcon, “the voice of the Métis people that write that book” (Twigg, “Moral” 4), is “obtrusively” there to present a convincing account of the Métis’ trials in their struggle for nationhood, but there are “two brains” present - the eye, ear, and voice of Falcon which “embod[y] the omniscient and imaginative historical knowledge...that formed the solid factual base of the novel” (Hildebrand, “Theological” 305), and also that of the author “who adopts and shares the position of his creature, and at the same time supplements his wit” (Lubbock, “Craft” 267). In this way, Falcon serves Wiebe’s method of indirection, protecting him “from any charges of presumption and sermonizing” (Hildebrand 306).

Falcon, unwittingly, testifies to the truth of what occurs, reporting Riel’s assumption of the role of the suffering servant against a providential background that perceives history as redemptive, but personally steps back from his own witness “because he is a profane narrator”
The 'extension' allows Wiebe particularly in the most intimate moments to dispense with Falcon's presence and to slide into a third-person narration which dominates much of the novel.

As Hildebrand interprets this text (in what I would consider his most balanced and insightful critique), Wiebe's writing of Riel's story is, to that point, his most typologically developed work that in its portrayal of Riel's conversion "from an 'old' to a 'new' understanding" (300) reflects the Christian perception of Jesus in the context of the relationship of the Old Testament to the New. The point does need to be made, of course, that Riel's story virtually has to be typological in that he came to see himself in those terms.

Stylistically, the typology inherent in the narrative is reflected in the form of the narrative itself. In the opening sentence, "Sixteen years later Louis Riel would be dressing himself again" (10), which echoes the beginning of Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years Of Solitude (1970), ("Years later..."), Wiebe embarks upon a story that incessantly rebounds upon itself, leaping back and forth in point of view from the inception of the rebellion to Riel's representative execution, in a manner that imprints the fundamental movement of Biblical typology, between the 'Old' and the 'New,' upon the present text.

While Wiebe's account is basically sympathetic to the historical plight of the Métis in their doomed struggle for nationhood against "the technical-imperialism of Ottawa" (Hildebrand 304), for him, they "remain in their Old Testament state of 'marred and tangled innocence,' victims of their sexual drive, their urge for power and domination, and the provocation...of the Canadian state" (326). Pierre Falcon attests to their conflicting heritages in his description of their desperate response to a drought-ending downpour:
We caught the rain in hides, drank it running in mud, not caring whether the holy St. Joseph or the Thunderbird had heard our desperation. That's just how it is. A people with two heritages so rich that often one is more than you want, when you feel one of them move in you like a living beast and the other whispers, sings between your ears with a beauty you would gladly sell your soul to hear until you die. Such doubleness, such sometimes half-and-half richness of nothing. (SWP 112)

Wiebe recognizes the mixed complexity of Métis' aspirations and identifies their dream of establishing God's kingdom on earth not only with Israel's Old Testament aspirations but also with the vision of the "so-called Anabaptists John of Leiden and Jan Matthies" (UL 230) who resorted to violence in a vain attempt to establish an earthly Kingdom of Zion.

Riel's own perception of a "new nation" is also clouded by flawed ambivalence. At times, he sees that "the empire" (SWP 182) God has given him lies simply in the education of poor Métis children in Montana. At times, he grasps the immaturity of the Métis vision of an earthly prairie kingdom:

The spirit of God showed me the Métis Nation in the likeness of Genevieve Arcand coming to me on the street of Batoche. Her body revealed her pleasure in the flesh, her face the certain marks of carnality. O my Métis Nation, how your lust disfigures you! You are not worthy, not worthy. And yet you long for the right. (258)

But he is also tragically complicit with Métis political aspirations, a complicity revealed in his fatal attraction to the 'natural' Gabriel Dumont, "the prince" of the Métis, in whom Madelaine sees "savagery beyond her worst experience of any man" (308), and who is repeatedly viewed
animalistically - “strong as a buffalo” (42)...
bellowed, like a wounded buffalo” (17)..."his
sheared head growing in over his wound like a buffalo bull’s forehead, power and rage that
could move the world” (273). Riel’s fascination with Dumont exhibits the allure of nature
within Riel’s split personality and the temptation to seek earthly justice by resorting to violent
means.

It is largely through Dumont’s influence that Riel is seduced away from his proper
calling to the worldly concerns of the Métis people. But the bond between them also leads to
a vision (suggestive of that of Big Bear and Almighty Voice) in the Fort Benton church:

they saw that hill again and in a glance knew that they had both seen that revelation: a
gallows there and a man swinging from that gallows. Vision and certainty. Though it
might have been no more than a heat mirage bending a dead or stunted cottonwood up
near the edge of the river, the wavering blackness a momentary crow perhaps
struggling in a downdraft against the open sky struggling upward. When you see that
you know. (188)

As Hildebrand notes, “[t]wo pages earlier the hill had been associated with Golgotha” (336):
the hill stood before him like a vision forming out of his prayer to be kept from hatred,
somehow” (SWP 185). The compact with Dumont had transformed the hill into a gallows.

The association of Golgotha with gallows sharpens the focus of Riel’s typological
relationship with Jesus, the crucified one. Yoder argues that subsequent to all the temptations
to show his concrete power in the desert, in Jesus’s plea in the Garden of Gethsemane (“Let
this cup pass from me”) he was “drawn at this very last moment of temptation, to think once
again of the messianic violence with which he had been tempted since the beginning...[and]...[o]nce more he rejects it" (Politics 55-57). In this rejection, Jesus assumes the role of the Suffering Servant and, thereby, inaugurates the kingdom.

For Riel, clarification of his own calling comes slowly. Early in the novel, and in the Métis quest for freedom, Ritchot, their “parish priest” (SWP 24) and Riel’s mentor, depicts the plight of the people in terms of Israel’s exilic sojourn in the desert:

Wanderers ready to perish were our fathers, and our mothers dwellers in darkness, but the Lord heard our cries; he gave us food in the wilderness and with his mighty arm destroyed our enemies. (24)

Any association of Riel with a Mosaic role, however, gives way to an explicit and overwhelming retrospective typological identification with the Old Testament David. Riel vacillates between his role in history as a Davidic prophet-king and the spiritual David, the type of his antitype, the New Testament Jesus. Particularly in the early stages, he is identified with the “mad” King David pursuing domination of his earthly kingdom. Persecuted, this man whom his sister Sara insightfully names “David” (129), seeks revenge and thereby compromises himself and dooms his people’s cause.

But it is in the asylum, after the first rebellion, to which, for security reasons, he is ironically and prophetically admitted as “Mr. David” (155), that the complex associations with King David, and through him to David’s antitype Jesus, are most thoroughly developed. Reciting the words of Psalm 69 - “The zeal for Thy House has consumed me! And the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me!” - Riel emulates Jesus’s cleansing of the temple (and recalls the disciples’ recitation of the same Davidic words [John 2:17]) with his own
cleansing of the asylum chapel, tearing the filthy altar-cloth aside and crashing the candelabra and other paraphernalia to the floor. Later, ripping the confining strait-jacket from off his naked body, and clad only in a make-shift scapular, he extends Sara’s identification of him as “our singer-king” (SWP 129), as he queries, “Is it not written of the singer King David that he danced and sang before the ark of God girded only in a linen ephod?” (163), and, desiring wine and milk, echoes Jesus’s words (St. Matthew 2:3-4) “Have you never read that David ate the shewbread of the tabernacle...when he was hungry and fleeing from Saul?” (163). During his trial, the Davidic connection is reinforced in his claim:

I have been hunted like an elk for fifteen years. David was hunted seventeen, so I think I may also have two years. (SWP 324)

But it is in the chapel that Riel, invoking “the holy King David as the patron of statesmen” (161), hears a divine voice that proclaims him as “the David of Christian times, for whom the ancient David is the perfect pattern, the spiritual and temporal king of all nations....” (161-162), and submits to a calling to pursue “the path of obedience” (164) and suffer on his people’s behalf.

While Big Bear is represented as pagan to the end, and thereby denied redemptive significance, Riel, despite being judged for his complicity in Thomas Scott’s death, and the recognition that he, in concert with Big Bear, would be accounted a scapegoat for his people’s recourse to violence (“You are the leader here, and you alone will be remembered for this” [85]), emerges in Wiebe’s complex ambiguous portrait as finally attaining retrospective typological status. In his surrender to Middleton, Riel abandons the violence he earlier
condoned ("we will be bullet men when necessary" [65]) and assumes the mantle of a suffering servant, a disciple of Christ who accepts his calling as a contemporary scapegoat for a suffering people, and "a prophet of the new world" (314).

The Mad Trapper (1980)

"You can never really ‘understand’ about someone, anyone, even yourself. It is best to believe in them as human; feel that they are alive like you and need warmth, concern."

(BMC 225)

With the exception of a few perceptive reviews such as those of Howells and Keith, The Mad Trapper, Wiebe’s fictional version of the pursuit of a stranger called Albert Johnson across the Canadian arctic’s frozen tundra in the early 1930s, has received undeservedly short shrift, ranging from R.P. Bilan’s dismissal of it as a minor work - despite his concession that it is “a skilfully told narrative with the power totally to engross and engage the reader” (“Letters in Canada” 15) - to William French’s failure to see why Wiebe bothered to write it at all (“Review” 12). Jeffrey judges it as simply “disappointing” (“Lost” 114). Dennis Duffy appears to play on ambiguity in his passing reference to it as “a slight novel” (Sounding 74) - does he mean “of a small slender form,” or “lacking in solid or substantial qualities” (O.E.D.), or perhaps both? Hildebrand, attributing its existence to the “collapse of Wiebe’s film venture” (“Theological” 380), and judging it a trivialization of his short story, “The Naming of Albert Johnson,” devotes but three pages to it, while van Toorn mentions it not at all.

This treatment is undeserved since there is much more occurring in this novel than has been acknowledged. What makes the novel particularly significant for this essay, demanding
extended treatment seemingly disproportionate to its brevity, are its parallels with, and its role as precursor to, *A Discovery of Strangers* in the development of Wiebe's method of indirection. In promoting a typological reading of an historical event, both novels challenge assumptions about understanding the other in a meeting of strangers. Both novels counter repeated efforts to wrest sameness out of strangeness or, in Levinasian terms, to reduce the other to the same, and in the process reinforce the typological focus on the Other. In this present text, the misnaming of a stranger as Johnson in an attempt to 'know' him is undermined by the revelation of his strangeness. Later, attempts to reduce this strangeness to sameness lead to a recognition of mutual strangeness in Johnson and Corporal Millen, the hunted and the hunter, who, without recognition of the Other, remain unredeemed and estranged to the end.

Despite his minimal interest in *The Mad Trapper*, it is Hildebrand who instigates this attempt to understand what is occurring in this novel in his assertion that it is "Wiebe’s conscious attempt to write a biblical ‘western,’"

an adventure story and anabaptist homily that negatively illustrate the values of personalism and non-violence and that delineate the horrible inadequacies of the technocratic state and its impersonal violence. (383)

It was perhaps reading the February 13, 1932 article in *The Edmonton Bulletin*, the daily which, Wiebe judged, "outdid itself in headlines and editorializing 'news' stories" ("Death" 222), that led Wiebe to give a 'western' slant to the structure of this novel. In the *Bulletin* article under the leader, ‘A Crimson Battle Looms,’ the writer refers to the men pursuing
Albert Johnson, a stranger who had sprung a native’s traps, seriously injured one investigating RCMP officer and killed another, as the “posse...travelling on their nerve now, animated by a grim spirit of revenge” (224). Wiebe interjects this reference into his text, when Hersey, the signal man sent to aid the search, “grimly” jokes, “We’re just the ‘posse,’ like Snardon (the fictional reporter) says, ye olde wild west” (MT 174).

It is Constable Millen, the main protagonist in the fictional drama, who claims, “It’s stupid...to walk straight up against a rifle that was, as Bill Nersyoo said, just part of him like his arm or his eye...Like a stupid Zane Grey western, all guts and no brain and heart” (132). Earlier, when his fellow officer was shot by Johnson, Millen, in true ‘western’ form, angrily promises him, “I’ll get you for this!” (70) and, near the story’s end, Inspector Eames challenges his frustrated constable with the claim, “You want an old-time shoot-out. eh, man to man?” (110), and a ‘shoot-out’ is where the novel from the beginning is structured to lead.

Wiebe takes Millen, a minor player in the historical event, the officer (Paul Thompson in the fictional account) who was killed by Johnson on the slopes of the Richardson Mountains, and creates for him a primary role, Corporal King’s superior in the initial confrontation with the mad trapper, the primary pursuer through all the months of the chase. He then rewrites the story to climax in an apparent ‘High Noon’ confrontation between the ‘good guy,’ Millen, and the ‘villain,’ Johnson, on the ice of the Eagle River.

Significantly, it is in the role assigned Millen that Wiebe makes his only major deviation from “everything factual known about Johnson” (220) which he records in an 1978 article. (He also changes the dates of the first visits to Johnson’s cabin by a couple of days, seemingly in order to get Millen back to Aklavik for the New Year’s Eve celebrations.) In that article, “The Death and Life of Albert Johnson: Collected notes on a possible legend,” Wiebe argues that “facts are never more than a beginning; more important is, what has the imagination made
of the man known as Albert Johnson?” (226), and then proceeds to itemize eleven imaginative attempts, including his own short story, “The Naming of Albert Johnson,” to explore this historical figure.

What Wiebe makes of Millen becomes crucial to what he makes of Johnson. Initially a dramatic contrast to Johnson who would admirably serve as the fugitive’s adversary if this were a true ‘western,’ the rational, socially-gifted representative of law and order in this northern community is forced by circumstances to defend himself and the community against a socially-warped, and (judging by the description of the photographs Johnson carries with him and finally destroys) misanthrope killer, betrayed by both man and woman. At a certain level, Wiebe’s story fits generic expectations, as Millen hurries at the story’s close to his necessary, final, deadly encounter with Johnson:

As if he were rushing towards a destiny, as if he felt it might evade him if he hesitated. if he so much as paused for one thought about what he was doing. (MT 182)

Into the instantaneous freeze of their two bodies came recognition: the sunlight coming streakily through the lifting overcast revealed them to each other. At last. 

(183)

There was no way a word, a gesture from Millen though his hand was still up, his mouth still frozen open, would ever stop what was going to happen here. Had to happen. (184)
So the apparent hero and villain meet. Their rifles swing up, the shots ring out, and both fall to the ground. Millen appears to die instantly, while Johnson in a brief reprieve also shoots sharp-shooter Hersey, and completes his role in the historical script, before he, too, is killed, in a barrage of bullets.

But the raised hand reminds us that something else is awry. Millen throughout his pursuit realizes that the story of Albert Johnson need not end this way. He knows that his own mistakes have hardened Johnson’s position, and that to “hound” him with a posse was absolutely the wrong thing to do. Assuming that man is basically reasonable and that whatever problems he might have can be resolved through compassionate discourse, Millen repeatedly seeks to impose a rational, humanistic reading. When he and Corporal King first approach Johnson’s cabin, he tells his partner, “I just feel I should go up there, alone” (67), and preaches his humanistic sermon to Johnson:

“‘You have to talk a little bit...You can’t just refuse...that’s what makes people human - they talk to each other. It makes us different from the animals....The Eskimos told me that long ago, when I first got here. ‘If we couldn’t talk and dance and sing,’ they said one winter when we’d been dancing four days straight, ‘we wouldn’t be people any more’....And they’re right, you know, they’re right.” (64)

Even close to the story’s end, with all present evidence to the contrary, Millen still appears obsessed with his liberal convictions:

They all looked at Millen. He seemed to be thinking of something else...as if he was thinking of following along [the tracks they were following] and camping the darkness
away with the man who had made them...as if...his unspoken words would finally, slowly, steadily unthaw and tonight they would hear Johnson speak at last, his personal words tell them how, tell them why, why. (167)

Millen’s obsession is easily misread by his colleagues as he appears to become more and more like the object of the pursuit. Eames’s best officer, “a man once known as the best talker and pie baker and dancer along the two thousand miles of the MacKenzie River” (163), has become generally silent, expressionless - “In the yellow light, his face was haggard, almost like a gouged skull” (162). The description of Johnson, after a burst of outrage, early in the story - “His expression was steady again, implacably neutral; as if he had laid out all the parts of his face and body in a deliberate order” (37) - is matched by the later picture of Millen: “there was no satisfaction or relief in his face. No emotion whatever. There had not been since Thompson was shot, simply this blank inwardness” (154). Millen also begins to rival Johnson in his capacity for anger: “Millen was livid, so furious he seemed about to lunge forward and assault May [the Bellanca’s pilot] right there” (158).

There is ironical anticipation in Millen’s question, when the two branches of pursuit stumble upon one another and he is mistaken for Johnson, “Do I look that much like Johnson?” (115), since the text slowly fuzzes the line between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ guy in this adventure. ‘Hero’ and ‘villain’ are not that dissimilar. Keith points out that Wiebe has Millen take on “some of Johnson’s distinguishing characteristics...by subtly repeating a word or phrase originally used of one man when describing the other” (“Review” 102-103). Both become caught in a rage that causes them to be labelled as “mad”: “If Johnson is the ‘mad trapper,’ Millen is ‘arctic crazy,’ half mad himself from chasing that devil.” Both have
escaped the south: Johnson for whatever reason but the photographs he carries are intriguingly suggestive; Millen because he disliked “smiling for the camera... all the rich tourists etc... writing reports (64)”; both are equally repelled by an “unequivocal” law, “so automatic in its application” (3). When Johnson makes his trip up the Rat River, we are given a picture of a man who again like Millen is sensitive to the plight of his fellow creatures (46). The photographs of the older man and the younger woman that Johnson carries in his pocket are matched by the memories carried by Millen: the woman “tight along him, long smooth and grainy [texture of a photograph?] under his finger tips” (60) - “one terrific girl in Edmonton but she’s not waiting” (113), and his otherwise anonymous father “bumping a wide broom down a school corridor” (60).

But there is another aspect of Johnson that is more problematic, one that issues a challenge to Millen’s own reasonableness and the implicit White confident certainty of the world’s rationality, and finds its focus in the Indians’ perception of wendigo. Millen wishes to deny the reality of this spirit which the Indians claim “takes people over... turn[ing] them into cannibals, or mak[ing] them unkillable” (106). In his attempt to convince Nersyoo that Johnson is not possessed, he appeals to the Indian’s recognition of his humanity - “you saw Johnson first, coming in on the raft on the Peel River. You talked to him at his cabin. He’s a human being” (109). The argument that Johnson’s humanity is evident in the tracks he makes fails to convince Nersyoo, who responds, “When he wants to... You blew him up and he isn’t dead, he walks through here and these fifty dogs don’t smell him” (109).

As he does in several novels, Wiebe extends this challenge to White certainty through the introduction of the puzzling and haunting spectre of Coyote. Millen “chuckled” and makes light of the pursuit party’s frustration at the elusive tactics of that “real devil” (115) Johnson - “He’s just a joker. He’s sitting on the cliff up there right now, watching us and
laughing" (116) - recalling Coyote’s laughter in the closing scene of *The Blue Mountains of China* (226). This image of Coyote is raised again at the end of the novel in the description of the dead Johnson’s face:

the gouged concrete face wiped clean now of everything but snarl. Frozen snarl and teeth. As if the long-clenched jaws had tightened down beyond some ultimate cog and locked their teeth into their own torn lips in one final wordlessly silent scream.

(MT 189)

At the end, Millen also appears possessed. The wonder that Johnson inspires in his uncanny ability to persevere, to survive the explosive destruction of his cabin, and to cross the Richardson Mountains, which the Indians say “no human being has ever crossed...in a blizzard” (157), is also directed to Millen for his “awesome strength (and) amazing quietness” (182), but especially for his precise discovery of Johnson’s tracks: “so unerringly through white wilderness to this exact spot....As if he were reading Johnson out of the very air they were breathing” (166). What is it that separates these two men of resolve, who once appeared so different but now equally obsessed, these two who will ultimately face one another on the snow-swept Eagle River?

The narratorial stance adds to the fuzziness of the picture. Consistently limited by an inability to penetrate outward appearances, it is forced into speculation, particularly in interpreting Johnson’s actions. The opening pages quickly establish that perspective: Johnson is viewed as “bent forward in exhaustion, perhaps sleep” (11); “his head lifted a little, as if he were listening. Though he might merely have been looking at (his) small pack” (13-14);
“After a moment he straightened up. Heavily as if lifting a burden” (14) [emphasis added in each case].

This narratorial stance reinforces the boundless supposition surrounding this stranger from the south. As Millen candidly admits, “We know nothing except he calls himself Albert Johnson” (86), and even that is ironic, since he never claims as much, confirming only what Constable King’s seems intent on forcing upon him: “‘Are you Albert Johnson?’... ‘Yeah,’ he said abruptly, the word clipped and furious” (23). With nothing known, everything becomes assumption; most signs are ambiguous and open to interpretation, as in Millen’s observance of Johnson’s passing glance, “livid as flame,” at Nersyoo’s wife:

Millen did not look at Nersyoo; he knew the Indian had seen the glance, but he did not, somehow could not, admit that he had seen it too. (34)

Johnson remains a stranger throughout the story, not only to the other characters and the narrator, but to the reader as well. Even the description of photographs that Wiebe introduces into his fictional account fail to help. Endlessly provocative, and presented without any explanation, only hints of supposition, they serve to heighten rather than resolve the mystery. Moreover, for all we are told, Millen is ultimately as much a stranger as well. Particularly as the end of the story approaches, the supposition that attends Johnson’s action is reflected in the hesitant description of Millen:

As if he were rushing towards a destiny, as if he felt it might evade him if he hesitated, if he so much as paused for one thought about what he was doing [emphases added].

(182)
These two strangers have their final meeting on the ice of the Eagle River, with the need for communication even more pronounced than before:

So Albert Johnson and Spike Millen stood face to face again....And this time they both had rifles in their hands so it was more important than ever that they speak, that they say such words to each other that would hold them in their humanity.... (183)

Who it is that recognizes the need, whether narrator or Millen, is unclear, but it is Millen’s hand that is raised, perhaps to speak, to finally hear Johnson tell his story, when the drone of the airplane intervenes, and they are too distanced “to really see what those opposite eyes could have told them” (183). While the story need not have ended this way, Millen’s efforts at communication have failed - their shots as one ring out, and the drama is over, but the questions do not end.

The questions do not end because ordering borders have been challenged, even those of literary genres. Appearances to the contrary, and contra Hildebrand, this is not a ‘western’ but a parody of that genre. Twice in the first twenty-two pages the river water is reported to have “chuckled” between the logs of the raft, alerting the reader not to take matters at face value. An attempt to understand what is occurring returns us to David L. Jeffrey’s claim that in Wiebe’s early novels “the Bible...is always working just under the surface” (“Biblical” 100). A search for “the structure and interpretive signals” of that “absent text” (91), and an acknowledgement of Wiebe’s method of indirection lead us to a controlling image at the beginning of the third section:
The rim of the thirty-minute winter sun emerged on the south horizon sometimes
inside an enormous halo of smudged, flaming light; sometimes a cross stretched
through and across the entire circle, or, like today, two brilliant repetitions of the sun
itself stood one either side of the bands of the cross with the air so cold it seemed to
hang in silver crystals. (MT 75)

The image of the cross with the sun “inside an enormous halo of smudged, flaming light”
flanked “by two brilliant repetitions of the sun itself” suggests allusion to Calvary - “where
they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (Luke
23:33). The cross is a signal of the underlying paradigm for the novel as a whole; it is the
measure of human action. In what Yoder refers to as “the concrete social meaning of the
cross” (Politics 134), humanity is called to an imitation of Christ in “suffering servanthood”
(126).

To object that too much is being claimed for what could be perceived as merely an
incidental description fails to recognize the careful density of Wiebe’s craft and the pivotal
role of the cross in his thinking. The Blue Mountains of China in its account of the wanderings
of the Mennonite people leads finally to the figure of John Reimer, a descendent of the early
immigrants, who, compelled to Christian witness, walks along the ditch (recalling Yoder’s
“ditch of uncertainty”) beside an Alberta highway carrying a plain wooden cross in a “kind of
walk of repentance” (BMC 194).

The sun’s recurrence in the closing scene between Millen and Johnson on the Eagle
River carries with it the possible implications of that cross:
Into the instantaneous freeze of their two bodies came recognition: the sunlight coming streakily through the lifting overcast revealed them to each other. At last.

(183)

The revealing cross ultimately forces the issue. For the Biblical malefactors that involves a confession of faith by one and the railings of the other (Luke 23:39-42), but both Millen and Johnson, who, while indeed rendered visible to one another, are also rendered speechless, burdened by what they carry with them onto that river scene, and rendered impotent by what they lack.

Whatever else Johnson is accustomed to carry with him besides his rifle, which was "just part of him like his arm or his eye" (132), and his Dodd’s Kidney Pills, which have nothing to do with kidneys but much to say about naming and misnaming, he carries in that life-denying song he is constantly singing, a song which is equally as much a part of him:

Never smile at a woman...Call no man your friend. If you trust anybody, you’ll be sorry...you’ll be sorry...you’ll be sorry, in the end. (48)

The emphasis on “trust” in his song and its repetitive echoing throughout the novel, including King’s outburst against Johnson, “You trust that - “ (67), causes, in turn, another echoing of John Reimer in his counsels regarding the society of Jesus:

you show wisdom, by trusting people;
you handle leadership, by serving;
you handle offenders, by forgiving;
you handle money, by sharing;
you handle enemies, by loving;
and you handle violence, by suffering it.

(BMC 215)

Given, as has been argued, the measure of Yoder’s influence on Wiebe, it should not be surprising that these directives become pivotal in interpreting the thrust of this novel.

In this parody of a Western, Edgar ‘Spike’ Millen, the’good guy’ in the anticipated clash between good and evil, pictured as “lean[ing] against the cemetery fence in front of the Anglican church” (MT 30), seems so close to understanding and practicing Reimer’s counsel. He does trust, serve, forgive, suffer, and, perhaps, love. While Hildebrand’s labelling of his struggle as ‘secular’ (“Theological” 381) seems inappropriate, ‘religious’ appears equally so. Millen does challenge Thompson with the need for spiritual health:

don’t you know Sunday is for pondering your spiritual condition?...To live alone you must have a clean spirit. That’s the whole situation, a clean spirit...Today you just rest your nice clean spirit. (MT 112-113)

But one suspects him of lighthearted facetiousness or a mocking of religious talk.

Certainly Millen gives no expression of Christian faith, and yet he repeatedly senses what is required of him. He knows that in approaching Johnson what is needed is not King’s angry aggression, certainly not a posse, and not even a gun (Johnson has shown no desire to shoot
him), but simple concern and trust. Regrettably, however, when Millen faces him, for a brief moment of possibility, in that beautiful, pathetic still, alone, on Eagle River, there is no recognition of the Other, the Stranger who invites a loving discipleship that refrains from meeting violence with even the appearance of violence. Millen stands gun in hand, perhaps unaware of the sunlight “coming streakily through the lifting overcast [that] revealed them to each other” (183). The moment passes, swallowed up by approaching voices and the droning Bellanca, and Millen is measured by the cross “stretched through and across the entire circle” (75), and found wanting.
CHAPTER VI

MY LOVELY ENEMY (1983)

It has long been recognized that many voices inhabit Wiebe’s fiction, and that polyphony is a characteristic trait of his mature novels. Indeed, so many voices in The Blue Mountains of China compete for attention that simply differentiating among the speakers is a challenge in itself. But if polyphony creates an initial sense of confusion for the reader in that novel, the problems are immeasurably compounded in the complexity of My Lovely Enemy. More than in any other of his novels, voices proliferate. The primary players in the principal story are not many, but they are augmented by the Cree and white participants and their particular legacies in the embedded story of the Cree chief, Maskepetoon. But what complicates this narrative most specifically is the multiplicity of voices that speak from the breadth of western literary history, a diversity that stretches from Plutarch, Plato, and Origen to Birney, Cohen and Dickinson. Often these voices fracture the discourse for only a brief moment, and then are quiet. Often they challenge easy identification, but they always tantalize with the promise of meaning; their intrusion provokes an exploration of their significance in the developing narrative.

These voices also beget voices; the complexity of the novel baffles but also intrigues, particularly those predisposed to exploring labyrinths. As we have seen, Wiebe, as artist, believes that “the meaning of the work depends on the interaction between the work and the beholder.” and actively enlists the reader’s attempt to figure out what the novel is “trying to do or to be.” Further, in Wiebe’s Christian witness to the Word, he claims no hermeneutic position of certainty but actively solicits dialogue within a heteroglossic community. For our
exploration of these imaginative creations we must attend then not only to the polyphony within the text, but to those external voices that engage the text in their hermeneutic pursuits.

There is, however, a particular voice in this novel that calls for special attention. Woven within My Lovely Enemy is the story of Maskepetoon that provides salient clues to the novel’s interpretation and to its importance. At the heart of this story, which was published independently as “The Broken Arm” in 1982 (and part of it in 1978 as “In the Beaver Hills”), there are echoes of the closing of “Where is the Voice Coming From?”. Wiebe seems specifically to re-cover old ground in the treatment of Maskepetoon. We are struck by a sense of *deja vu*, when James, in response to Gillian’s question, “Why are you interested in Broken Arm?”, responds, “The...problem is, writing Indian prairie history” (MLE 43).

With that, some of the same problems of the short story resurface - shortness of tribal memory, paucity of records, and the fact that these records consist of a variety of biased white documents. The major problem, however, remains one of language: “how can a white man find any fact beyond the story memory of a language he doesn’t talk” (43) unless he resorts to those records? James admits to not being “the purest possible scholar (I really don’t speak Cree).” God who speaks through the pages of the Bible speaks to Maskepetoon because the latter learns to read, but James remains a fallible and distant historian because he fails to master his subject’s language. How can he truly hear Maskepetoon’s voice if he is incapable of speaking his language? The correlation between novel and story would be the clear message that, as we shall see, James is not “a reliable interpreter,” neither of Maskepetoon nor, by implication, of the novel’s story itself.

In one of his classic stills, Wiebe describes a meeting of the Crees and their arch-enemies the Blackfeet to celebrate an intermittent peace. The sound of the celebratory drums and singing has died away, and an initial silence has come and gone. In a second silence, “that
other silence," a song breaks forth

whether from the fire or the ground or the poles and skins of the lodge or the rifle or Chief Child’s hand we could not say; perhaps it was Maskepetoon’s Book itself talking to each of us in words none of us had ever until then been ready to hear. (164)

Until this point Maskepetoon’s Book, the Bible, has remained closed, but now it begins to speak, to witness to the Word, the divine voice:

The wind at dawn
Gives me the words
To teach the stones to speak.

The knives of the wind
Open my eyes to see
The hills cry yes, yes. (164-165)

That voice which speaks through the Bible may constantly elude our grasp, remaining unheard. For those desirous of entering into the structure of its language to determine its meaning, there is power in the silence that “moved words beyond the power of sign or declaration into mystery” (159). As Maskepetoon declares, “The mystery of words and the world is revealed in the Book for those who truly want to know.” His story provides a touchstone in this challenging, often seemingly convoluted, text revealing the ‘deep-structure’ that supports the unfolding narrative that on the surface appears to be but another banal story.
The Banal Affair

James and Gillian’s ‘May to September’ affair, with its nursery rhyme echoes, recounts the ‘ups and downs’ of its key protagonists ‘Jack’ and ‘Jill’ (“[u]p dry and hard, around a curved hillock” [109] to consummation “on the highest hill for many miles around” [107]) in a ludic Kroetschian world that parodies a trivial twentieth-century illicit love story. It has all the markers that we have learned to expect - “one of the implications of our move into whatever comes after Realism is a recognition of how little of the story we have to hear to hear the story” (Neuman, Labyrinths 183). This is the tale of a forty-two year old male, “silly middle-aged professor” (MLE 42) in “fair shape for forty-two, one sixty-six and five eleven” (43). After many years of marriage with Liv (“I do and will love her” [17]) - “life together so settled and placidly complete” - he has fallen into “a certain routine” which “will soon fill [his] entire day.” He rebels against his life of sameness, “everything’s the same...like always...as familiar” (19).

Into this world of sameness and resultant dissatisfaction “materializes” a twenty-two year old graduate student of classic beauty:

Her head tilts, her brilliant eyes catch me from under her brows. No plucking thin and painting in, one glance and you understand she is a person with ineffable class, the body a mirror of the character, the sharp, precise quality of marble. (42)

With her long black hair, Egyptian face, porcelain skin, tight-fitting jeans, in the idiom of the “muscular bumpkin,” a frisbee-playing student - “she’s sure a body worth picking up” (41,42).
After an initial exploration in the micro-materials reading room of the university library, there follows a clandestine meeting at the Palliser Hotel in Calgary, a furtive visit to his family home in Vulcan, a mind expanding spiritual/physical union at a medicine wheel, and, at the close of the May section, an electrifying sexual engulfment ("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" [176]) on the floor of her apartment.

James, the erstwhile ulcer-prone vice-principal of a junior highschool, the dedicated employee of the IBS corporation, now escaped from the living to the dead records of history, knows from the start that this affair should not even begin - "I am ludicrous, God in Heaven, mindlessly middleagedly ludicrous to let this settle in my lap" (42). He should know better - "if I tell her five words she’ll go" (43). But he doesn’t, and she doesn’t.

Gillian, the wife of one of James’s history department colleagues, attempts to put an acceptable face on the affair. Twice she affirms that "it’s not the sex" (105, 176). She too affirms her love for her spouse and his ability to satisfy her sexually. But for her, marriage and everyday relationships are too burdened with pretence:

I want to know someone truly, not as friend - fraternal - not as daughter or student or customer or for god’s sake not wife or pickup or good lay....(151)

With her desire for ‘carnal knowledge’ - “knowledge through the flesh. I want to know someone, you, though your flesh” (153) - she shocks and challenges James to alter his limited vision:
Who is this man? And you told me, you showed me [at that incredible stone wheel], and when the spirit of that place gathered, wrapped us up into one with itself, what did you think we were doing, eh? Fucking?” (153)

This echoes Wiebe’s question in a note from 1969 - “Themes for a novel/setting Edmonton....People: modern business man? triangle? just fucking around?” (“Trail” 46). But van Toorn, with Gillian, refuses to read the story that way. Recognizing that the mortician’s disapproving phrase “‘[i]ndiscriminate casual mating’ [MLE 261] “sounds suspiciously like a polite euphemism for ‘fucking’” (Historicity 172) which reflects his “monologically imposed” (173) moral values, she accuses Wiebe of “a sudden reversal” (172). She contends that in the quotation above Gillian has already “pre-empted and parried” that word, and that a contradictory truth of male/female relationships is independently and “dialogically discovered [?] in imaginative collaboration with his two main characters” (172). But is that not to distort the text? Has a “contradictory truth” actually been discovered independent of Jesus? In his role as novelist, Wiebe is concerned with “considering and showing life as it is...in [man’s] best moments as well as in his worst” (ACW 45). James and Gillian are certainly entwined in an imaginative collaboration, and their repudiation of neo-platonism’s denigration of the body is to be applauded, but the recognized “lying” inherent in their relationship suggests that this is not one of man’s “best moments” and, in and of itself, is not as van Toorn suggests a promising avenue to “truth and moral value.” To follow van Toorn’s vain attempt to deny the affair’s triviality and attribute to it great epistemological benefit is to succumb to Gillian’s self-deception in her claims for ‘carnal knowledge.’ Even James eventually realizes that Gillian’s alleged goal - “to know someone truly” - for all its purported intent is “impossible” - “I am still alone, alone” (MLE 233) and, for all her bravado, recognizes her basic fear at being
found out (148).

But, if Gillian strives to defend the affair epistemologically, James does not even attempt the argument. To put it in her vernacular, what he was doing was just that, "fucking." When she recalls the magnitude of the experience at the wheel - "remembering that personality of cosmos" (154) and reflects that "the act then, it seems rather...small," he is clearly affronted. When she informs him that Harold, despite his possibly programmed erections or perhaps because of them, is actually sexually satisfying, and for the first time asserts that "it's not the sex," he is "stupidly destroyed" (105). The next time she denigrates the importance of the sex - "No," she says then. "That's never it" (176) - he exclaims, but only to himself, "why don't, can't I tell her that sexuality is suddenly a much larger terrain in a world I long ago thought I had completely explored, forever, stupidly thought so?" (177). His response to her direct question - "'what did you think we were doing, eh? Fucking?' - is a weak, "'No...no...' I can mutter at last, 'loving'" (153).

James is totally unconvincing. Other than an awareness that he has an "uncontrollable penis," he does not know why he is involved in this affair, and specifically with her. He cannot tell her that he loves her; indeed he confesses to not knowing what love is (152). He weakly suggests that he is not depriving anyone of anything, but avoids a possible confrontation with his wife - "There are answers wives and husbands should not offer each other until after they are no longer important" (71) - and is faintly aware that he is afflicted with 'whitemud sickness' - "man's implacable longing for change and discovery." Like the dog Tolstoi who gobbles up the meat that falls from the plate, James always wants more - "it is impossible that he ever have enough" (58).

Throughout the text there are indications that James has been frustrated by a pressing, indiscriminate sexual desire: "all the desire I forced away from the vivid femaleness I knew
lurked in my older sisters who could never wear a short-sleeved dress much less a bra” (122);

“[Olena’s] breasts that once appeared in my nightmares like the unattainable Big Rock Candy Mountains...a heat washes over me, the boy breathing hollow in that mystery hidden there, that thick opening of desire no simple lifetime I know now will never satisfy” (120-121); “one night I lay in the aisle [of a bus]...and the foot of a girl seated above me in my hand...I cupped the heel...finally the toes...one by one they searched me out as if I had been slit top to bottom and spread open while I lay rigid” (59). He admits that when he saw Harold “whose academic record is better,” he knew then and there that “if he had a wife or mistress I could take her away from him” (103), and in the lift with Rikki he feels “all orientation gone in this equidistant unfathomable richness between his arms and hands and legs along his body. his face pressed into this one metamorphosis of inevitable woman he was seeing with his tongue...he could control nothing while he wanted everything” (193).

He is critical of the ironists, like Joy Lemming, “Irony seems the fundamental attitude of slaves...who react to their world but who are not strong enough to determine or create for themselves” (167), but suffers himself from the illusion that he operates from strength:

I am no longer helpless like the young. I am not leaving. Anything. Anyone. I will not....I want to have both rather than either, I want to encompass the entire duality spreading itself before me.” (167)

Despite their avowals of self-justification (that love is not “a matter of guilt” [175], and that this affair does not do damage to their spouses, that no one is being deprived of anything), they both are specifically affected by guilt. When Gillian asserts that she needs “more protection” (145), and James naively claims ignorance, he cannot cope with all the possibilities
and responsibilities of life: “I have a sudden longing for, one long gut-ache of longing for the irresponsible transparent impersonality of the dead...One black-haired woman and the world breaks” (146). He admits, “that’s what I’ve thought several times in a very small part of myself: the simple modern adventure - but that’s just plain truckdriver stupid!” (147) He realizes that this adventure is insane and he has so much to lose. They confess that they cannot be friends; they are ‘adult’ adulterers, caught up in a distasteful world of lying. But the script for this banal story rolls on: these two ‘lovely enemies’ assess their financial capacity for escape, fantasize about a haven in Rio or Singapore, and catch glimmers of the frailty of their love.

Much of this is shocking to many readers who have followed Wiebe’s creative output; for them it is inconceivable that he could write such a trite and repugnant story. Is this the Rudy Wiebe who gave us Rachel’s ironic indictment of Leonard Cohen’s Beautiful Losers in the Blue Mountains of China - “It’s still the great Canadian novel even with just the priests and the Indian toes. It’s got everything: race, sex, Freud, religion, and inhibited Canadians: the frustrated priests working off their childish oral-oriented perversions to the pure-beautiful-twinkling- sexy toes of the sexless Indian maiden. Whoopee!” [BMC 184]), and personally denounced the SSF (“Suck, Shit and Fuck” 244) school of Canadian literature generally, and who actually claims to have burnt D.H. Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley’s Lover because “what seems to be happening there is the woman worshipping the man, the woman worshipping the cock...to me ultimate blasphemy” (UL 245)? How could he so reduce himself to serve up his own sexually explicit and comprehensive ‘obscenities,’ paralleling even Cohen’s offending adlingulation?

Pierre Spriet illustrates how closely this novel appearsto mirror those Wiebe derides:
the hero is easily seduced by the luscious wife of a university colleague and they have an affair. The betrayed husband and the hero’s wife are soon [?] informed, and the two couples go through an eerie experience which soon brings the love affair to an end, but the problem remains unsolved or solves itself in a kind of dreamland.

("Structure" 53)

Further, Arnold Davidson notes that, in addition to “the D.H. Lawrence celebrations of sex in the novel,” there are “explicit references” (“Circling” 159) to Lawrence, and he asks rhetorically whether the reader already knows only too well “where the predominant voice in this author’s latest novel is coming from.”

While such a question, on the surface, appears legitimate, it would betray a failure to read carefully and critically a work that clearly requires close attention. Undoubtedly, the story outlined above is, as D.L. Jeffrey judged the novel as a whole, “cliché-ridden, hackneyed, and trite,” but that is not, whatever Jeffrey contends, “its ultimate statement.” Davidson argues convincingly that the ties to previous works in terms of Mennonite pilgrimage history, the questioning of Riel’s hanging, and the religious symbolism of the medicine wheel are “clear signs that My Lovely Enemy is not just another standard love story” (160).

In finding fault with this novel, its “slippages of voice,” Jeffrey questions Wiebe’s focus on James Dyck, claiming that Wiebe “seems most successful with a strong voice, one which is used to the powers of ‘absolute word’” and recalls his treatment of “Grandmother Friesen, Maskepetoon, or Big Bear” (“Lost” 114). Clearly, Dr. Dyck is not one of those strong characters who have dominated Wiebe’s earlier novels. At the same time, while praising the
story of Maskepetoon embedded within this text - “one of the best that Wiebe has written...a worthy example of the storyteller’s art” and claiming that “from every point of view [it is] superior writing, more convincing both in dialogue and narrative....the Maskepetoon sections stick out like two lilies in a garbage heap” - Jeffrey argues that it “in no way fits properly” into the surrounding narrative.

Surely Jeffrey has underestimated Wiebe’s art. Rather than assuming a “slippage[] of voice” and questioning “the author’s controlling perspective” (114), the critic, accepting the text for what it is, should then seek to understand rather than to castigate it. Might it not be the case that the Maskepetoon sections, both in style and content, are embedded in the text precisely to evoke a contrast, to emphasize the banality of the illicit affair and the weakness of the prime protagonist? James at his best moments knows that he is no Maskepetoon, or Big Bear, or Grandmother Friesen. This Jacob “who changed his name to Canadian James” (MLE 237) - just like the Willms of The Blue Mountains of China who became Williams - has “been quite helpless for a long time” (215). In a perverted adaptation of Jehovah’s declaration from out of the burning bush, James, having bemoaned his fate, “I’m forty-two and what have I done?”, adds plaintively, “I’m all I am!” (208). The very strength of Maskepetoon’s faith haunts him:

the sudden tragic drama of a ride to my enemies as far beyond me as clean, total hatred. What enemies? I have none. (169)

In his pursuit of the Cree chief, he is also looking for himself: “Ahhh I am looking for a shadow, straining for a parallel. Even in mirrors I wouldn’t see it” (168). In an allusion to T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” whose protagonist James, in his
indecision and vacillations, does mirror, he laments, “I will drip and measure out my life into some intravenous tubing” (169). It is the recognition of the power of the Word in Maskepetoon’s suffering for his people that trivializes James’s own existence.

But beyond that, in the early scene in the micro-materials reading room, there are abundant hints that the love story itself is somehow suspect, that it should not be taken at face value. The “materialization” of Gillian serves to undermine the story’s ‘intended’ realism, provoking an aura of irreality that is suggestive of a Kroetschian playfulness. As we question whether Riel was ever hanged, we also query the corporality of this beautiful spectre and ‘their’ intertwined story. She appears at the party almost as a mirage, or a figment of James’s imagination, an object of wish fulfillment. Wanting desperately to escape from Joy Lemming’s interrogation, searching in vain for Liv to rescue him, he complains, “there was never a single idiot standing about, listening, who would help me destroy this conversation with one good joke” (7-8), and then he discovers Gillian, “a girl with long hair so dark it appeared black, so long it seemed momentarily she was wearing nothing else” (8), who not only listens but speaks (though seemingly unnoticed by Joy) and then disappears.

When she reappears the next day in the midst of his Indian history research, her face so much like that of an ideal Cree “materializes out of greyness, long hair and narrow Egyptian nose and wide black eyes” (12). He cannot see but only feel her hair; her face blurs, and in an echo of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-tale Heart,” “somewhere something is pounding, rapidly, rapidly” (12). Since the heart is his own, is he only imagining the other? He admits the next day that he “would not recognize her” (35) beyond the fleeting vision at the party. All he retains is a recollected sense of smell and touch.

At times, despite their strong dissimilarity, he mistakes her for Liv (“this tension of sudden, possible doubleness” [105]), at other times he has difficulty separating her from
himself - this “ineffable revelation” (15)...like stepping through a mirror (if not a physical Döppelganger, then someone seemingly “known forever” [13], who anticipates his thoughts and feelings: “ris[ing] just as I am aware my leg numb” [15]). Both seemingly lose discernment between dreams and life. She tells him “I dreamt you in the library stacks” (145), and he confesses his confusion, his inability to distinguish between them: “It is neither she nor her body, it is both and neither, it is myself and it is not either, o wretched man that I am, who will deliver me out of this” (143-4).

As if to convince himself of the reality of this vision, James ventures curiously, “someone should be sitting at the next reader so he would never know we are saying anything” (13). But throughout the May episodes there is no earthly witness; he remarks that “no one but the archivist has ever seen me before [Gillian would make two] in this indecipherable room” (35), and no one ever sees them together. This is possibly his vision and his alone.

How much this is his own vision is revealed in his recitation of the “o wretched man” statement which is essentially a quotation of a passage from Romans 7:24 in which the writer is, to quote Barth, “broken in two by the law” (Epistle 270):

One half is the spirit of the inward man, which delights in the law of God - Am I to identify myself with this spirit? Am I merely inward? But no one dares to make this claim. The other half is the natural world of my members; a world swayed by a wholly different law, by a quite different vitality and possibility. This latter wars against the law of my mind, and denies what it affirms. (268)
Barth adds that “[t]he more thou dost madly endeavour to synthesize things which are directly opposed to one another, the more surely do they break apart and become manifestly antithetic” (269). James’s vision is perhaps simply one of his own duality.

The thrice-used description of the reading room as “ashen” (11, 43 & 45) in its “depthlessness” (11 & 45) leads by a circuitous route to our next interpretive clue, Jorge Luis Borges’s short story “Tlôn, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius” which is introduced into the text by Gillian in an attempt to expand James’s vision of reality, and is then immediately distorted. The distortion itself provides clues to the possible unravelling of the riddling story in which it is itself embedded.

The first-person narrator of the Borges story recounts that the expansion of his vision to include the planet Uqbar arose from dinner-time conversation, actually a “vast polemic” (7) with Biy Casares, “concerning the composition of a novel in the first person, whose narrator would omit or disfigure the facts and indulge in various contradictions which would permit a few readers - very few readers - to perceive an atrocious or banal reality.” With this, Wiebe’s game is in full play. The labyrinthine world the reader has entered is itself a first-person novel whose narrator begins his omissions and disfigurements by providing, through the “materialized” Gillian, a false report of the discovery of the planet Tlôn. Where Borges’s narrator recounts that his discovery of Uqbar occurred through the simple “conjunction” (7) of a mirror and a defective encyclopedia - the one serves to recall a declaration of the other - Gillian “thinks” that the Borges’ narrator discovered the planet Tlôn through reading the encyclopedia (“Backwards?” [MLE 14]) in a mirror. The declaration, which could be found in only one errant copy of volume XLVI of the Anglo-American Cyclopaedia, affirmed that “Mirrors and fatherhood are abominable [to the gnostic for whom ‘the visible universe was an illusion or (more precisely) a sophism’] because they multiply and disseminate the universe”
("Tlēn" 8), and claimed that "the literature of Uqbar was one of fantasy and that its epics and legends never referred to reality but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlēn" (9).

According to James and Gillian, Tlēn was invented by a group of brilliant men who described it completely in a forty-eight volume encyclopedia - "whatever they thought they were inventing actually existed. In mirrors" (MLE 15). But Borges's story does not support this contention. True, some memory of an engineer who "suffered from unreality" ("Tlēn" 10), Herbert Ashe (and here we pick up our earlier clue in the repeated mention of ashes), through whose aegis access was gained to the separate forty-volume encyclopedia on the total culture of Tlēn, "persists in the illusory depths the mirrors" ("Tlēn" 9) in a hotel in Adrogue, but mirrors play no other role.

While James speculates that his 'male and female fathers' (73) existed in the planet Uqbar (he has the mirror [speculum] but no encyclopedia), references to Borges disappear from the text, but James's longings for discovery continue. But reflections on Tlēn are also of continuing substantial (ontological) interest because of its "congenital" idealistic presuppositions. Of particular note in light of James's debate with Joy Lemming, the doctrines of Tlēn allow for "the interrogation and even the modification of the past, which is now no less plastic and docile than the future" ("Tlēn" 18). (This will become of increasing interest in terms of the discussion centering on docetism. While God could conceivably change the past, because of the ontological significance of the Incarnation, He would not.)

Finally, toward the story's conclusion, Tlēn is specifically compared to a labyrinth, but "a labyrinth devised by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men" (22).

This intrusion of Borges's story into Wiebe's text should alert the reader that the present "banal" story of Jack and Jill's "tumble" from a world "just over the brow of the hill" (MLE 15) with its own omissions, disfigurements, and contradictions, is also a labyrinth requiring
decipherment. As the soon-to-be adulterers step, or are about to step, through the mirror, we are advised, however, that “Surface is not all, nor ashes” (15).

As part of that admonition, we are instructed that “the use of a mirror is not to be painted upon” (15). The world we are entering in this novel is, in an oft-used image, a “mirrored world” in which, as W.J. Keith notes, Wiebe is insisting that “there can be no boundaries or limits beyond which the questing novelist may not go” (“Sex” 29). To paint upon the mirror’s surface would destroy its use, which is, in an adaptation of the Borges’s story, to “trouble” our perceptions, and to “disseminate the universe” (“Tlön “ 8). When James steps into the mirror, he enters a realm of “possible doubleness” (MLE 105) that paradoxically conjoins the two lovers of his life. In the Palliser Hotel in Calgary, the site of his tryst with Gillian, the greyness of the room is shattered by Jesus’s sombre eyes “as if I saw them in a sunlit mirror” (78) that convince him of the ‘reality’ of the event - “this is no dream, I am not sleeping” (78). However, while mirrors can expand one’s world, if caught between them, they serve to restrict, as happens to James in the Mine - “two parallel mirrors infinitely repeating each other’s images...here is my country inside glass...reduced to the size of two walls (197). In this instance, all one perceives is more of the same, which challenges no entrenched patterns, opens no vistas, but simply hems one in.

As images of mirrors trouble the text, constantly reforming its surface, so do recurring ashes. Their repeated mention begins to resonate with an echo of Thomas Browne’s “Urne-Buriall” which arises from the discovery of “sepulchral urnes” in Norfolk. While there is no specific reference to Browne in My Lovely Enemy - Gillian does ask if the medicine wheel was a place for “cairn burial” (113) - Borges’s story with its seemingly endless discoveries concludes with the narrator’s intriguing admission that although Tlön appears to be taking over the world
I pay no attention to all this and go on revising, in the still days at the Androguine hotel, an uncertain Quevedian translation (which I do not intend to publish) of Browne’s “Urn Burial.” (“Tlön” 22)

The highly speculative Borgesian tale receives its intertextual balance in Browne’s earthy discussion of the wide-spread practice of burning the deceased and preserving the ashes in urns, that leads him to condemn this over-attention to our fleshly remains as both an exaggeration of the continuing importance of our bodies and the denigration of the actual living of our earthly existence. Christians, “though they stickt not to give their bodies to be burnt in their lives...affect[] rather...to return not unto ashes but unto dust againe” (“Urne” 92-93). While they live, their bodies are “acknowledged...to be the lodging of Christ” (112), and they attempt to live life to the full, not preoccupied with thoughts of preserving what little they have. For them, the preservation of their bodies or their names “is nothing in the Metaphysics of true belief” (125) which is convicted of “hopes of another life, and hints of a Resurrection” (112). The thrust of this for My Lovely Enemy calls for a reassessment of one’s vision. The “ashen depthlessness” of James’s life as an historian concerned to escape the complexity of life to the ‘simplicity’ of working with the dead, is indicative of, or provocative of, a skewed perception of reality. There is also an embedded admonition to the reader to examine more closely what is actually occurring in this text.

The reference to “ashes” may, however, also be another reminder of Herbert Ashe and the planet Tlön, but surely “surface is not all” has a broader reference as a direct disavowal of the novel theory of Robbe-Grillet and other anti-novelists (as summarized by Wiebe in the introduction to his collection of modern short stories, The Story-Makers [xxviii]), and
consequently that of Kroetsch.

Arnold Davidson also espies “a certain ‘en-Kroetschment’” (“Circling” 159) in this novel, viewing it as a “kind of Mennonite version” of Kroetsch’s Gone Indian. He founds this perception on the similarity of that novel’s R. Mark Madham to James Dyck, also “a former countryboy now an urban professor undergoing a male middle-age identity crisis that takes on a distinctly sexual cast,” the “obvious Kroetschian flavor” in the names “Dyck” and “Lemming,” the role of Alberta in providing “a real and mythical setting” for both novels, and the corresponding role played by the Blackfeet and Cree Indians.

For my part, I would draw connections with Kroetsch’s What the Crow Said (1978), insisting that the ghost of Liebhaber, Kroetsch’s sometime prescient type-setter, seems to haunt Wiebe’s text. Early in Kroetsch’s novel, Liebhaber (Love-haver), standing in the newspaper office “dreaming a woman for himself” (15), is in the process of setting the type for the Big Indian Signal, when for the first time (“Time was something of a mystery to Liebhaber...he remembered the future” [15]) he begins, physically moving the type, watching his fingers “as if, abruptly they were not his own” (15-16), to write the anticipated story of Martin Lang’s death, and to enter into his pursuit of Tiddy, Lang’s soon-to-be widow.

The parallels with My Lovely Enemy are striking. James (an insatiable love-haver), sitting in the university Reading Room, examining a microfilm copy of the Saskatchewan Herald, “every single letter of each word with every punctuation mark...set individually by the hands of P.G. Laurie, Editor and Proprietor” (MLE 11), attentively aware that the letters he sees “are nothing more than slightly transparent shadows of his original ink, not actually the imprint of the letters themselves, leave alone the letters, leave alone the hand of the wordmaker,” becomes conscious of his own hands, over which P.G. Laurie’s words pass and which “appear to be without substance or dimension, transparent....” Like Liebhaber, James
will also be in pursuit of a woman, his rival's wife, and will speculate whether "the longing subconscious [can] anticipate, actually remember the unhappened future" (103). Gillian, the pursued woman, will inform him that she "dreamt [him] in the library stacks" (145) and will insist: "You have to dream [all that is happening] too" (146).

Wiebe, obsessed as much with words as his friend, plays the Kroetschian game, creating a complex, imaginative labyrinth, playing with rules and conventions, inviting the reader to enter a heteroglossic process that demands his undivided attention and investigative participation, in an attempt to discern between the meaningful and the meaningless. Where the emphasis for Kroetsch shifts from the signified to the signifier, to the language itself, for Wiebe it is necessary to correlate the language and the story. The entrance of a dog called "Tolstoi" into My Lovely Enemy is another pertinent clue that the banal story is not "its ultimate statement," since, for Wiebe, Tolstoy is representative of a belief in "a larger meaning of life, a larger meaning of the universe, which all the universe is going towards" (UL 234).

**Larger Meanings**

To identify the "larger meanings" embedded within this text, to probe its complexity, requires reading the novel closely in the context of typology. What we discover in the May section is an almost unmitigated celebration of physical love grounded on the fact of the Incarnation. James, who seeks safe, uninvolving refuge with the "dead" and the "completed facts" of nineteenth-century western Canada, discovers that the "bird's eye" view he claims to have as a historian is undermined by the subjectivity of the historical record, and he himself is caught up into the Indian story he would pursue dispassionately.
At a certain point (MLE 45), through the sliding reference of a third-person pronoun, the story takes a radical shift as James is abruptly perceived as belonging to Maskepetoon's band, and he, in turn, in a love story within the love story, perceives Gillian in the person of an Indian maid and later describes her as "a Cree woman in a clearing among the small poplars...singing in the wind a story....you come...to me, there...." (MLE 86). At the same time, Gillian forces him out into contemporary life "where we can't really understand who is doing what, or why...."(3), and pushes him to a radically different viewing and re-viewing of both the present and the past. He enters, willingly or unwillingly, into an extended exploration that sweeps beyond the two of them, encompassing a breadth of areas but focussing ultimately on an understanding of love.

To explore the concept of love, Wiebe, echoing the distinctions made by Yoder on the separation of Athens and Jerusalem, builds on the differences between Greek and Judeo-Christian thinking, and traces the intrusion of Platonism into the Western church. As Jesus says to James in their library 'encounter,' "reading Plato got early Christians hung up, so to speak ...I suppose they were trying to make what I said sound acceptably intelligent and got hold of what sounded closest...." (139). Charles Lock echoes these sentiments: "In the West, from Augustine to Aquinas and beyond, classical philosophy [Greek] offered the sole intellectual model and provided the conceptual system without which Christianity would have had no philosophical respectability" ("Carnival" 70). He adds that, as a result, the "Neoplatonic divisions and dichotomies - matter/spirit, body/mind, time/eternity, form/image, figure/ground, etc. (in each pair the privilege belonging to the immaterial and transcendent) - are perpetuated within the Western church." For Wiebe, as for Yoder, this intrusion threatens the very heart of the Christian Gospel.
James’s debate with Joy Lemming on whether God could change history such that Riel would not now be hanged, for all its playful, cocktail-party abstraction, probes important issues. The reader must recognize that James claims no Christian belief. His ‘defence’ of God is provoked by Joy’s consuming atheism: “such persistence always makes me intemperate in the opposite direction” (MLE 4). Further, the position he espouses is abstractly philosophical rather than Christian. (D.L. Jeffrey identifies him as “a residual Christian defending nominal Christianity against the deprecations of a cocktail party atheist” [“Lost” 111].) His successful, debate-ending retort - “God’s ‘consciousness’ has no sequence. All is now” (10) - is preceded by his claim, “time is nothing to him” (9). But what would that imply about the Incarnation, and the biblical assertion that “God so loved the world....”?

Gillian’s interjected query, “For your prayer to be answered, would you have to know he was never hanged?” (9), by association, provides interesting echoes of questions surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. Consider the implications of James’s response:

Wha...no, no, I guess not, what would it matter? Maybe they did fake all the records, I mean everybody knows the sheriff refused to officiate at the hanging, he sent his deputy, and the body was shipped in an unmarked boxcar to St. Boniface, there were a million chances to...actually it’s more than possible he never was hanged.... (10)

The Platonic intrusion into the early church made such considerations about Jesus pertinent to an attempt to comprehend his resurrection - his only appearing to die with its docetic implications obviates lengthy explications.

But the “awesome gulf between spirit and matter” (135) that ‘Jesus’ identifies, threatens belief in the Incarnation itself, since a truly human Jesus with a shameful human body was an
embarrassment; it would have undermined an acceptable understanding of his divinity. By extension, Jesus explains how this gulf "fit so well with that other notion...that anything really physically lovely must somehow be wrong....that sexuality is now connected to all the worst possible sins" (139).

It is in this context that Wiebe sets out to celebrate the flesh, mocking Greek mythology's way of talking about God and his relationship with humanity - "There's no simple divine body appearing out of thin air, no magical busting out of anyone's head, plop, there's your wisdom or salvation or whatever" (61) - challenging Mennonite prudery by querying parental sexuality, standing Platonism on its head by envisaging a person's body as his "closest image" (151), and extolling the tenderness and warmth of physical intimacy. But 'Jesus' supplies the concluding, ambiguous, admonishing caveat, "To love genitally is a beginning, also an end" (81).

To reach this "ultimate statement," Wiebe submerges the reader in an exceedingly complex heteroglossic exploration of the nature of love and sexuality in which all the novel's participants contribute. Further, the narrative incorporates a wealth of external voices through poems (some of whose authors are identified, many are not), songs, passages from Scripture, and the earlier published story of Maskepetoon, (Canadian Forum, March 1982), all of which are embedded in stream-of-consciousness monologue, autobiographical narrative, and extensive realistic and fabulous dialogues. More than in any earlier novel, Wiebe allows an abundance of perspectives to converge in a discourse that demands the reader's close attention.

My Lovely Enemy is a brilliantly conceived work that exults in what Kroetsch would consider the play of the novel, but, for all its apparent playfulness, this novel constantly probes the enigmatic surface. Who or what, for example, is 'my lovely enemy'? Van Toorn suggests
that the text itself is the enemy - “This synthesis of strange and familiar elements [structural, compositional, and thematic] at once alienates readers from the text and stimulates a desire to know it more intimately” (Historicity 165). But other possibilities also come to mind. Gillian is my lovely enemy both to James because he is tempted by her, but also to Liv who forgives and loves her. Harold (“Graduate of Queen’s and Toronto and Oxford: absolutely brilliant” [MLE 16]) is cited as James’s enemy from their childhood days in Vulcan, and James suggests that his involvement with Gillian is a direct result of their rivalry: “The first time I saw Harold Lemming enter our History Seminar Room, the perfectly groomed candidate, I knew out of nowhere, it was just a crazy flash out of nowhere, I knew if that man had a wife or a girl-friend or a mistress I could take her away from him if I wanted to...” (103). But a most compelling reading of this text, particularly in light of James’s quotation from Romans 7:24 (“o wretched man that I am”), perceives the enemy as the flesh (“unqualified, and finally unqualifiable, worldliness; a worldliness perceived by men, and especially by religious men; relativity, nothingness, nonsense” [Barth, Epistle 263]). Again, if we equate the flesh specifically with the human body, particularly human sexuality, that would put James in the august company of the youthful St. Augustine:

But I was an unhappy young man, wretched as at the beginning of my adolescence when I prayed you for chastity and said: ‘Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.’ I was afraid that you might hear my prayer quickly, and that you might too rapidly heal me of the disease of lust which I preferred to satisfy rather than suppress.

(Confessions, VIII,vii,18)
James appears equally helpless in response to his own urges.

Through Gillian, the question of sex which he thought he had dealt with once and for all earlier in life, has become a new issue. He apparently has no control over his ‘cock.’ How can he love Liv, whom he loves more at this moment than ever before, and also love Gillian, this perfectly lovely apparition? What about Becca, his very young daughter, whose sexuality he recognizes, and which, because of the closeness of her age to Gillian, a closeness greater than Gillian’s to his, disturbs him greatly? In recognizing her sexuality, he acknowledges the potential harm he and other males can do to her.

But this novel, in its attempt to deal with ‘my lovely enemy,’ transports us back to the Incarnation, and to the platonistic corruption of an early Gospel. It seeks, in Yoder’s words, “restitution.” How can we reclaim an approach to the flesh, which has been platonistically denigrated, such that anything physically lovely must be somehow soiled? But how can the flesh be ultimately soiled when God chose to reveal himself and redeem his people through the flesh, through the Incarnation?

When we seriously entertain the idea of the Word made flesh, we begin to move in another direction, and begin to see differently - “like standing on your head in order to see the world clearer” (MLE 44-45). We are thrust into Christian linguistics, which is not Christian accidentally, but substantially.

In what Charles Lock terms “a quite brilliant explication of the opening of John’s Gospel” (“Against” 378-379), Jean- Luc Marion finds the substance of the Incarnation in the word rather than in the flesh: “language constitutes us more carnally than our flesh” (God 141). This subversion of our customary understanding of language’s role disturbs deeply because it radically challenges what we have been taught to think. Where we are inclined to perceive words as descriptive, Marion judges them as formative, as the foundation of things
themselves. In Lock's words - "Matter rests on words: Creation rests on the Word"
(“Against” 378).

Is this not what Wiebe is groping toward in this novel? In an interview, he admits that all we have are words:

But at the same time, we don’t need any more than words. Words are better, almost, than anything else, because words, as far as I’m concerned create the realities we live by....Memory itself and preconception are a function of language. So I think we’re determined more often by words we use than by the things that literally happen.

(van Toorn, “Creating” 11)

Is not another valid reading of My Lovely Enemy to see words as James’s lovely enemy? In the closing scene, James hears

a corner of that silence that was before the world began, called out by the living voice of his mother and he was empty of all his ravaging words, his pre-inspired words were quite gone, he wanted to listen his loved ones into life.... (MLE 261)

All the hateful memories of his father which he had spewed forth in words from the age of fourteen, all the words which his prodigious memory had served up to fill the gap of daily speech - “There is/my fear/ of no words of/falling with words/over and over of/mouthing the silence” (Ondaatje, “White Dwarfs,” quoted in MLE 58.)¹ - often poetic words of great insight, were served up by him without discernment. As James declares,"I have this crazy
memory, clumps of words stay stuck in it, I can read them off at inappropriate moments” (MLE 129).

*My Lovely Enemy* expresses a fascination with both the spoken and written word. In the story of Maskepetoon, his tribesmen are awed by the Whitemuds’ ability to “fix words on a piece of wood or leather...which always say exactly the same thing and can make you say the same thing” (159). But in the Micro-materials Reading Room, for the contemporary scholar, their physicality is far less overwhelming - “they appear now to be without substance or dimension transparent; if I turn them on edge they might not even make a line” (11). The spoken words also have their own limitations: “Every language is its own personal logic. Our language makes us think in one personal way and we cannot see another” (227). Language generally is further limited: “Words alone cannot answer a question only words can conceive” (79). For the nineteenth-century Indians, the writing of words moved them “beyond the power of sign or declaration into mystery” (159), but for James words have clearly lost their mystery; they are simply something he remembers and can recite.

The story of Maskepetoon also recounts how his Book (his Bible) reveals that mystery of words and the world: “it was Maskepetoon’s Book itself talking to us in words none of us had ever until then been ready to hear” (165). James, always so busy talking, is often unprepared to listen, particularly to something he had closed off many years before.

James at the Mine comes to learn that “silence was the foil that gives words their brilliance, the container that contains their power” (223). He regrets “all the words he had scattered, those great words his mind gathered and piled within him like rocks to fence in the enormous, o endless field of his longing and ignorance” (223), and recognizes “all the words that still must speak to make words possible” (223), for it is words that constitute our world,
but words illuminated by the silence, “the opening silence that would continue after he was dead” (223).²

For Maskepetoon, “the story of Jesus who finally died hammered up high on a tree was worse than anything he had ever heard but the story of creation and fall stung him with happiness” (52). As for James, who has been careless with his words, Gillian has tempted him:

She has pushed me, perhaps I have fallen into that perfect white between what few words I have found into another world (45).

In Michael Ondaatje’s poem “The White Dwarfs,” alluded to in these lines, the speaker expresses his fear “of falling without words...of mouthing the silence,” but there is a glimpse of the salutary effect of that silence, for those “who sail to that perfect edge/where there is no social fuel,” or of that whiteness, like an egg, “most beautiful when unbroken.”

For James, the silence enables him to hear other words than his own, words of power and grace. His memory casts back, and “words rise like air through drab water of stilled forgetfulness and longing” (MLE 64), and he tells Becca that Genesis story of creation, reciting the words, “solid, solid good like the fundamental rocks, nothing to trip and fall between” (64), recounting how when “[God] breathed...man became a living soul” (64). Later, Jesus tells him the same thing: “You are 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” (142). And again, James calls on Becca to recognize that “[t]he world is just God talk...what he’s making is talk, so he’s either talking to himself or to his talk” (218).
In the interview with Neuman, Wiebe asserts:

I do not think that language is something that humanity developed just because we somehow developed vocal cords. Language begins far before that to imagize, to make one thing stand for another. I think language is an actual way of looking at the world.... (UL 236)

He criticizes Kroetsch’s use of language - “You’re always horsing around with language...at a certain point one gets confused and language is no longer useful in looking at the world” - but argues that what ultimately makes language “useful” adheres not within the words themselves, but in the Word. In the Barthian use of Aufhebung, the Word dissolves or ruptures our discourse and at the same time establishes meaning. By “rupturing...the logos from within the logos...[it effects] the separation of significance from signs, [but] also constitutes their relation” (Ward, “Revelation” 162). Fundamental to this perception is the recognition of the wholly otherness of the Word. It is not inherent within us but challenges us from beyond.

That this is problematic for us today is reflected in the critiques by van Toorn and Hildebrand. We have become conditioned to an implicit neo-Kantianism that abandons the other and traps human subjects within their own subjectivity. Van Toorn, for all her commitment to the other in Bakhtin’s sense of heteroglossia and the dialogic, slides into the very neo-Kantianism that Bakhtin repudiated in Hermann Cohen, and fails to acknowledge Holquist’s claim that Bakhtin was “a very complicated sort of Christian” (Introduction to Bakhtin’s Art and Answerability, xxxix).

In Bakhtin’s Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, the image of Christ is perceived as the authentic Other who represents for Dostoevsky and for him “the resolution of ideological
quests” (97). No longer should we be looking for impersonal disembodied truth; Christ’s truth is found not in abstract propositions but in relationship. For Dostoevsky and himself, it is “not as his own true thought” that provides “the most authoritative orientation” (97) but beyond him in the voice of Christ himself. Likewise for Karl Barth, revelation is “the giving of signs...the self-witness of God...in a form which is adapted to our creaturely knowledge” (Church II/1 52):

If God gives Himself to man to be known in the revelation of His Word through the Holy Spirit, it means that He enters into the relationship of object to man the subject. In his revelation He is considered and conceived by men. Man knows God in that he stands before God. But this always means: in that God becomes, is and remains to him Another, One who is distinct from himself, One who meets him. (9)

In My Lovely Enemy, James, confronted in the “grey darkness of the sleeping Palliser [Hotel]” (79), intuitively recognizes the physicality of communication and revelation. While he later claims his “profane ear longs for repeatable logic, clear balance, a graspable sensible unity and completeness” (133), he here recognizes the limitation of words - “Words alone cannot answer a question only words can conceive” (79) - and comprehends, “His face must be half the meaning of whatever will be said” (79). Much later, Gillian instructs him in what he perceives as “reverse Platonism” (151):

Your body...the body is the closest image of the human being, who you actually are. A human is ungraspable without her body, ungraspable by another human...your body is the very best image I can get of you. (151)
There is an echo of Emmanuel Levinas, via Buber and Heidegger, in James’s insight about Jesus’s face, which he would direct to the ethical demands imposed by the human face. For Levinas, it is in the face, in the physical confrontation of the other, that the other reveals himself, speaks to us, constitutes us, and places us in a state of responsibility. Further, for him, as Robert Bernasconi reminds us, “It is not the beautiful face...but the wrinkled face of someone forsaken” (“Face” 227). But James’s recognition here as he confronts Jesus’s face “gaunt, long” (MLE 78), or even Gillian’s classic Egyptian face, would appear to be a first step, a correction to the platonic denigration of the physical and an emphasis on our fundamental corporality. The next step for him is the recognition of the physical confrontation and revelation of God in the Incarnation, and the attendant ethical demands.

In large measure, Wiebe chooses to speak to that revelation and its implicit demands through the ancient voice of the poet John Donne, a voice without specific prominence until the concluding “May” sections, but which echoes throughout the discussion of love and sexuality. For Coral Ann Howells, reading this novel “is very much like reading an immensely extended John Donne poem in prose” (“Review” 306), which she relates to the “passionate intensity” (307) associated with his poems. But the similarity between this novel and Donne’s poetry is even more fundamental. When Gillian claims (in an extended discussion between the lovers concerning Donne’s “Holy Sonnets”) that “He’s building a careful structure out of oxymorons” (MLE 200), she could also be describing Wiebe’s own craft within the novel itself. Clearly, My Lovely Enemy, from the title on through the text, is a careful conjunction of contradictory terms, seemingly designed to unsettle the reader’s complacent vision of reality.
Within the novel text, Gillian disrupts James’s world with her appearance, her challenge to his vision of the world, and her desire, in a kind of “reverse Platonism” (151), for “carnal knowledge” (153). Claiming that “your body...is the closest image of...who you actually are” (151), she affirms her interest in him is “to know someone, you, through your flesh” (153). It is this interest in the body that provides a common focus for Donne in his poetry and Wiebe in this novel.

Terry Sherwood, in his stimulating discussion of Donne, focusses on Donne’s preoccupation with Creation (a preoccupation shared by Wiebe, surfacing in this novel in James’s quotation of the Genesis account to Becca, and the suggestion that it contained Maskepetoon’s favourite Biblical words) and his claim that for him

all created likenesses and correspondences refer finally to man as the goal of Creation, with pointed emphasis upon the relationship between the human composite of body and soul, and the rest of creation.  (Fulfilling 63)

The body side of the human composite, in all its sweat, tears, illness and decay, is “fulfilled as the servant of the soul” (65) - “in the state of my body...thou dost effigate my Soule to me” (Donne, “Expostulation” 119) - and needs to be “incorporated into the body of the world” (Donne, “Letter to Severall Persons of Honour” 44), the breath and depth of the human community. In Sherwood’s analysis, Donne’s resultant conception of the body is “both simple and profound” (Fulfilling 68). Its simplicity consists in identifying bodily experience as epistemologically central; the mind is constantly aware of its “natural residence in a physical body.” Its profundity lies in extending that knowledge to both the soul and the social body, in a move from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic.
While Donne pronounces the validity of physical experience, including "catalogu[ing] the features of woman's body with a microscopic explicitness" (71), he avoids "libertine naturalism" by using the bodily experience as the "emblematic book" (72) for understanding the soul and the social community:

Close attention to the relationship between sexuality and community, between body and Body, blends psychological analysis into social satire, discovering causes of communal abuses in the individual's denial of spirit and the pattern for the denial in the social body. (72)

His celebration of physical desire is consonant with his belief in the fundamental goodness of the body, but he satirizes a naturalistic mentality that perceives the body solely as an object of pleasure, and denies or obscures the broader connections.

Donne's theology proclaims conformity to the incarnate Christ, who is born in the flesh to restore the purpose of Creation, "'to people Heaven with human bodies'" (64):

The participating likenesses between the believer and Christ, both in body and spirit, assure that man will be resurrected in the pattern of Christ. (94)

Resurrection begins on earth through incorporation in Christ, the microcosm with the macrocosm, the individual with the community, as members of his Body, the Church. The centrality of the body at all levels of Donne's vision, as Sherwood emphasizes, "is not to make the case for the body, for its legitimacy is assumed, but to know the myriad ways that bodily experience incorporates the principles of being or violates those principles" (101). The body
is both part of the "essential" man but also "the essential physical medium of God's earthly influence."

That same understanding of the body permeates Wiebe's text. In James's extended discussion with Jesus, the common concern of both is to challenge and lay bare the errant influence of Platonism on Christian thinking, and to reinforce the essential goodness of the body itself. The sexual descriptions throughout the text, even those that would be considered adulterous, promote an exaltation of the physical relationship. Challenging those who would argue "that anything really physically lovely must somehow be wrong," Jesus contends that "God is other all right, beyond humanity certainly but not incapable of anything mankind can do, I mean why should God deny himself any of humanity's greatest blessings?" (MLE 139).

In the imaginative exchange between James and Jesus, Jesus has the ultimate word, as he asks rhetorically, "Do you think [God] would make bodies and not have some himself?" (85) and "Do you think God gave you passion without having any himself?"

But, as with Donne, sexuality is not to be seen as an end in itself. Jesus instructs James further against "libertine naturalism" in which people "are always copulating and with it pretending they're God, and then they begin to worship Nature where birth takes place all the time, and that's idolatry, worshipping the thing made rather than the maker of it" (141). He compels James to see further, to go beyond the level at which love is perceived as two bodies engaged in "acts of ownership and physical giving" (142), encouraging him to recognize a conjunction between spirit and body: "to love spiritually you have to love bodily" (84); "there is no body without spirit"; "The truth of the spirit is your body"; "at the very centre of physical union there burns something else, like thought burns at the heart of all human life" (142).
There are also pertinent connections to be made with Bakhtin’s celebration of the body, seen not in a “private” but in a “public” sense. As Charles Lock notes, Bakhtin distinguishes “between the individual for whom the body is a property of the ego, and the person whose singularity [the mode of personal responsibility] is constituted by the body which mediates, separates and combines inner and outer” (“Carnival” 77). Perceived individualistically, bodies in their self-sufficiency are regarded as “petty and homely and become the immovable parts of private life, the goal of egotistic lust and possession” (Bakhtin, Rabelais 23). What he celebrates is “something universal, representing all the people”:

the bodily element is deeply positive....it makes no pretense to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth....the body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people’s character. (19)

There is no renunciation of the vertical axis; the higher is not negated, but fully involved in the lower. The person is extended downward into the rest of matter, a debasement in which there is no claim to superior or authoritative voice, since what binds all persons is their common materiality. What is promoted is a dialogue in the context of egalitarian heteroglossia and an ethic of personal responsibility conjoined in material, bodily being.

Wiebe also renounces petty and egotistical individuality in deference to responsible singularity. In this, he follows Donne’s path by introducing two of his poems, “Batter my heart, three-personed God” and “Show me dear Christ,” into the text, and into the midst of the physical love affair. As Donne in the cited poems employs human sexual imagery of intense personal desire to address the relationship between Christ and his church, so Wiebe’s exploration of a tempestuous affair, at another level, implicitly witnesses to the consuming,
encompassing love in which God envelops his people. The introduction of the Song of Songs and the writings of the prophet Hosea, with their own array of extreme incongruities and a host of tantalizing allegorical interpretations, reinforces the multilevelled nature of this text. But the connection with Donne’s poems is more immediate in the oxymoronic specifics of the poems themselves. In “Batter my heart” the speaker “betrothed unto your enemy” recognizes the need for God to “break” him—“break that knot again.” Paradoxically, it will only be in enslavement (“enthral me”) that he will be free, and only in being violated (“ravish me”) that he will be chaste. Similarly, it is in the violation of James and his marriage that he breaks out of his complacent and life-denying sameness to a possible vision, not only of the richness of his union with Liv (“his trusty rock in a weary land” [MLE 195]), but also a possible return to a biblical faith that has sustained his parents and their Mennonite community.

For Gillian, it is the other poem which most serves her purposes. In “Show me dear Christ,” Christ is petitioned to “betray” his bride, the church errant (the “painted” church of Rome) or ravished (the “robbed and tore” protestant denominations) in its divisive earthly forms, to human need and desire, when it will, “open to most men” (tainted with the vestige of the harlot), “then,” be accounted “most true and pleasing” to Christ himself. In response to James’s identification of the husband with “pimp” and the bride with “public whore,” Gillian seizes upon the word “then” which, when applied to their own relationship, would seem to justify their adultery. Indeed, some critics judge or praise Wiebe (according to their bias) as, if not promoting, at least condoning such relationships as a means of grace. As such, as W.J. Keith notes, the novel would be “both praised and attacked for the wrong reasons” since Wiebe “abhors” both “sexually-explicit trendiness” and blasphemy (“Sex” 29).

Certainly, if Donne’s poem were perceived in a parallel sense, it would be, as Gillian suggests, “too full of sting and sensuality to be properly spiritual too” (MLE 199). But for
Donne, it is not the divisions of the church which are to be praised but the accessibility to God provided even in its divisiveness. As Robert S. Jackson comments in his John Donne’s Christian Vocation, “Unless Christ were willing to reveal his bride in her multiplicity and resulting individuality, how could anyone other than his own specific self ever join her?” (172). Despite the poem’s radical imagery, there is no promotion of harlotry; what is celebrated is the recognition of the sacrifice God is prepared to make on his people’s behalf. Again in Jackson’s words, “The betrayal of the bride by her true lover is an act of grace, a gift from God to fallen men” (172). Similarly, while it is the “temptation of Gillian” that paradoxically paves the way for the “temptation of the personal Jesus” (MLE 169), what is celebrated is not the adultery but the grace implicit in the possible reawakening of James’s spiritual longing.

“The Black Bridge”

The brief “Black Bridge” section, typographically stretched to two pages but whose word count would normally barely fill more than one, is clearly intended to serve as a bridge between “May” and “September.” It is judged “horrific” by Redekop because it “deliberately fails to bridge” (“Love” 11). For Davidson, the focus is on falling rather than on passage (“the typology of pilgrimage...is here graphically both laid down and blown up” [“Circling” 163]), while Spriet views the section as linking and separating - it is “built” of two isotopies which are “made to clash” with one another. Its “fusing versimilitude and fantasy is an obvious variant of the structure of incompatibilities which informs the whole novel” (“Structure” 56-57).
It should come as no surprise to readers conversant with Wiebe’s symbolism that something black and straight, made of cold hard steel, would never serve a connective function for anything that truly mattered. (Gillian’s assertion, “You don’t like straight black lines,” and James’s immediate response, “Nothing natural is straight” [MLE 172], recalls Big Bear’s experience of the railway and his prophetic vision of his people’s fate - “the world was slit open with unending lines, squares, rectangles, of bone and between the strange trees gleamed straight lines of...white [an appropriate inversion for a non-white speaker] buildings” [TBB 409]). The bridge, a technological achievement measured in terms of rivets, dollars and lives lost, is emblematic of a fallen (falling? sagging?) world. Is it to be wondered that days recalling the Incarnation and Resurrection are, on the bridge, days recalled of “crunched fender” and “plunging-naked-girl.” There is a clash of incompatible perceptions carried on the bridge’s “incredible terrifying song” (MLE 183), and, in that song, there is an echo of a voice heard, also in the midst of violent death, in the Minnechinnass Hills. Where is that song coming from?

Another song is also embedded within this text, the song heard by Maskepetoon’s ancestors, a song of premonition:

They taught us we must rise before dawn and listen very carefully for the voice of the wind; it sounds like two people singing the same song together. As they sing they come nearer and nearer and they have picked up a leaf, a stone, a bone and they are passing these three back and forth so that each holds one and the third is moving between them, as in their song, which is the fourth thing they pass. We listen and we hear in their endless dreamlike song of those who have been and will be carried ashore by the tides, who are white as a peeled log with iron axes and knives stuck in their
belts and who will make dreadful songs which no one has ever heard before....No one doubts what he hears in the dawn songs of the wind: the world is too amazing for anyone to doubt any possibility. (158)

There is also a strong resonance between the bridge’s song and the singing tower of William Golding’s *The Spire* (1964), and a marked similarity in the authors’ recognition of human limitation. In that novel, the spire of Salisbury Cathedra, designed ostensibly for the glory of God, the vision of the Venerable Dean Jocelin, serves but to destroy the cathedral community and is itself destroyed. In its very building, lives are lost, the community is in the process of disintegration, and the spire intermittently raises its song:

as the winter moved towards spring, and the crocuses towards the surface of the earth,
and the tower towards the sky, the stones sang more frequently. (114)

the great pillars sang - eeeeee - as if the strain had become intolerable. (124)

the whole tower was talking, groaning, creaking, protesting, and every now and then uttering a bang to stop the heart. (131)

Both the bridge and the spire, products of human vision and technological skill, speak to the limitations of human perception and achievement, and the span, and cost, of our earthly fallibility:
out of the white mist one can hear the bridge, singing. It sings with the voices of all those who have fallen from its high, cold steel, fallen down into treetops, into water, onto inexorable ice. (MLE 182)

Within My Lovely Enemy, there is an echo, too, of the song that swirled around Maskepetoon and his Book. Hearing of the promises of the Epistle to the Romans that “the universe itself will be freed from the chains of mortality and enter the glorious liberty of the Sons of God” (8:21), Maskepetoon prophesies his own crossing of the valley:

I will be set free...free from thegroanings of my heart in the day, the cry of my heart at night. And I will walk across the river and up the cliff and over the buffalo prairie to the Blackfeet and give them my two empty hands and we will sit down together and make words of peace forever. (MLE 160)

In the lifetime of this narrator or Maskepetoon himself that peace was never attained, but the inspired Maskepetoon “brought us as close to it as we ever were” (164).

A short story by another Canadian writer, Hugh Hood, that anticipates Wiebe’s novel by ten years, features another bridge that does not provide safe passage; in fact, it now provides no passage at all. In “The Governor’s Bridge is Closed” (1973), the narrator recalls putting his “brooding remembrance of the everlasting bridges of Toronto” into a much earlier story “The End of It” in which a film-maker is “trying to change his memories into art” (9):

...what I’m heading for now is the bridge, ah, divine
bridge, this is where we open out the picture, we come to the bridge and we show them the length and span of it, the few afternoon cars wheeling idly across, we get that sense of open space and sunny air and distance.

Then.

We don’t cross the bridge.

But, while he mentions traffic upon the bridges - he met his wife by walking across one of them - the predominant impression is that they are now unsafe. The Glen Road bridge has been “unsafe for vehicular traffic for years and was closed to automobiles long ago.” The bridge in the title, the “crazy, narrow, rickety” (18) Governor’s Bridge which is now actually closed, “has been about to close, has been on the point of closing, so to speak, ever since I can remember” (15):

The closing of the Governor’s Bridge is a permanent happening in Toronto. In my imagination at least, perhaps in the imagination of thousands of people, the Governor’s Bridge has been in the act of closing ever since it opened.

With all the information provided on these bridges, the focus of this story, as it was of the camera in the earlier story, is, strangely, not on the bridges themselves but on the ravines below.

The predominant concern throughout the story is about falling - “the primordial fears of falling and of being entombed, and the human triumph over these fears” (19). The narrator describes the inadequacy of the bridge - “Even for pedestrians the misshapen cant and pitch of the sidewalk and roadway made the structure seem to sway when there was no breeze. It has
always been so” (18-19) - and reports being in one of the bridge supports, standing on one of the rungs which “went down into a peculiarly menacing darkness” (19):

I stopped and began to consider where I was: inside the concrete upright of a virtually-condemned bridge, utterly alone, with nothing whatsoever to indicate where I’d gone. I hung there in the darkness listening for a moment. Then a car must have crossed the bridge because a weird sound filled the darkness, as if the whole bridge was sighing.

The bridge’s misshapenness and its sighing suggest a connection between this story and Wiebe’s novel. The possible influence of Hood’s story on Wiebe is heightened by several parallels between the two works: Hood’s description of the fear evoked at the clay breaking under the young boy’s feet at the cliff’s edge (17-18) and James and Becca’s comparable experience on the cliffs above Whitemud Creek (MLE 21); Hood’s narrator’s acknowledgement of “a secret, a mystery, about the ravine that darkened my imagination then and has left its mark on it ever since” (“Governor’s” 12) and Wiebe’s representation of the mystery of the mine; the common perilous descent by car (“This road was nothing but a scar, it jerked almost at right angles around a sliding coal-streaked bank” [MLE 185]) which Hood describes in terms of extreme apprehension and fear:

You approached the ravine hill along Whitehall Road [compare “Whitemud”], say, took a sharp roundabout turn to your left, and began a steep icy drop on unpaved cindery track barely wide enough for cars to pass, with another sharp curve at the bottom. (“Governor’s” 13)
What is most compelling, however, in establishing the connection between these works by two Canadian writers who share a commitment to a Christian world-view (and have been jointly described by Patricia Morley as “the comedians”), is the common but dissimilar usage of the word “brood.” For Hood, it is the narrator who speaks of his “brooding remembrances of the everlasting bridges” (“Governor’s” 9) (and, we suspect, the ravines as well since they are together “the most important imaginative properties on the Toronto scene” [10]), while for Wiebe, it is “the log church that broods over [the valley and the bridge]” (MLE 183).

Significantly, having described the bridges as “everlasting,” attributing to them a sense of the divine (perhaps because of “the subtle and delicate design of these graceful spans...and their slender and lovely upward thrust [“Governor’s” 11]), Hood then proceeds to emphasize their increasing decay. Perhaps this recognition of the bridges’ impermanence is partially responsible for Wiebe adding his log church to the Edmonton bridge site.

While the critics have offered valuable insights relating to levels of perception and the predominance of fall - “the black hole at the heart of the novel” (Redekop, “Love” 11), significantly, no one has drawn attention to that simple (in contrast to the planned ostentation of Dean Jocelin’s creation) log church on the north bank. Wiebe, in a recent interview, suggests that the “materialization” of the church poses a problem for the unimaginative Edmontonian (van Toorn, “Creating” 10), but for the critics this vision seems to have posed no problem at all; it has gone virtually unnoticed. But in a method of indirection it may well be of most significance.

Spriet is right to claim that this section “disconcerts” the reader and “requires another consciousness and a different response to the strange fictionality of the last chapters” (“Structure” 57), but what gives the concluding section its meaning is embodied in that
"brooding" church, which "may materialize once in any person's lifetime." In her challenging essay on Flannery O'Connor's "The Displaced Person," Linda Munk draws attention to the fact that "[i]n Christian iconography the dove is often shown perched on top of Noah's ark" (Trivial 126), and relates the dove of the Holy Spirit as "absurdly represented" by the "crate of chickens" on top of Mrs. Shortley's automobile, her ark of salvation. Similarly in "The Black Bridge," the "brooding" church serves a soteriological role for those who seek passage across the valley. Under the wing of the Holy Spirit, the "unseen church" makes the bridge "unnecessary;" "a human being could cross the wide valley on the mist, on the final amazement of that incredible, terrifying song" of the bridge that "sings with the voices of all those who have fallen...." (MLE 182).

Michael Ondaatje's description of the building of another bridge, Toronto's Bloor Street Viaduct, in The Skin of a Lion (1987) presents a significant contrast. While he also takes cognizance of the fog that "fills the valley" and the "Many [that] have already died" (39) during its building, this bridge is not enveloped in song nor is there a brooding church perched at its edge. The singing belongs to the solitary Nicholas Temelcoff, the Macedonian immigrant who experiments with his new language while suspended beneath the bridge's skeleton. He it is that "links everyone":

He meets them as they cling - braced by wind against the metal they are rivetting or the wood sheeting they hammer into - but he has none of their fear. (34-35)

What falls is "a black-garbed bird" (32), a nun, swept from the bridge. What saves is not the representative of the church, but a very human Temelcoff, perched below the structure, who catches her as she falls, and the same Temelcoff, not the fallen nun, who screams as his arm is
wrenched from its socket.

Neither the Bloor Street Viaduct nor Wiebe’s black bridge, both technological marvels, is perceived as providing safe passage. But where Ondaatje directs us to the fallible figure, a common link of humanity, suspended below who in his aerial acrobatics is able to clutch and save, Wiebe focusses attention on what is above and beyond. It is in this glance upwards that the Black Bridge section, despite its brevity, provides a solid link of anticipation in directing us to the wonders to come. The role of the simple church is also suggestively emblematic of Wiebe’s method of indirection in using the seemingly insignificant and peripheral to convey the text’s “larger meanings.”

Indirection and the Parable

Identifying the novel’s focus is obviously crucial to understanding what Wiebe is attempting to do within it, but most reviewers seem led astray, since their discussions about My Lovely Enemy invariably focus on James. Not surprisingly, primarily by virtue of the predominant first-person singular narration in the May sections of this novel, it is his “trail” that we are compelled to follow. Further, by sheer dint of the material devoted to him, he is the protagonist who demands and generally receives the readers’ attention.

Van Toorn, for example, while viewing James as “a different species of Christian” (Historicity 173) - a contestable point, since he is actually an unbeliever with a memory “sodden” (like Robert Hood in A Discovery of Strangers) with Biblical texts - focusses on his role, not as a staunch “teacher-figure” such as John Reimer in The Blue Mountains of China or Joseph Dueck in Peace Shall Destroy Many, but as a fallible “reader-figure.” She perceives him as striving, through dialogic encounter, “toward spiritual truth,” and serving, for most of
the novel, as “free and equal co-author in the dialogue between writer and characters.” And yet I would argue that the transition from “teacher” to “reader” is significant, and the weight of the evidence should lead us in our search for “larger meanings” away from James.

While, with minor exceptions, the narrative in the May section is channelled through James’s first-person point of view, in the move to “September” of this ‘May to September’ romance, which we have been forewarned demands a radical change of perception (a “standing on our head”), we are immediately struck by a narratorial switch from first to third person. Wiebe comments elsewhere (The Story-Makers xxvi) that the move to the third person immeasurably broadens the point of view overcoming the strictures and bias that accompany first person narration. In My Lovely Enemy, the change affords distancing from James’s self-obsession and serves to de-privilege him and his narcissism, and in a Levinasian manner, to effect confrontation by the other.

Despite his prodigious memory (suggestive of Borges and mirrored appropriately by Gillian), James now in no way controls the narrative, any more than he controls his own wants and desires. This reflects a practice in Wiebe’s earlier novels where he showed a willingness to subvert novelistic conventions by using characters seemingly confined to a supporting role to exemplify the “larger meaning” of the text, promoting “indirection” through heteroglossia, and thereby providing precedents which serve as hermeneutic aids in unravelling the sense of My Lovely Enemy.

An exemplary instance of Wiebe’s focussing use of a supporting character is the intrusion of the “nameless” man into Jakob Friesen’s story in The Blue Mountains of China. In the chapter “The Cloister of the Lilies,” purportedly about the trials of Jakob Friesen at the ruins of a cloister where he and other prisoners are temporally resting from a forced trek through parts of Russia, the action is interrupted by the appearance of a “faceless immobile
man whose name and place he never knew” (114-115). This man not only interrupts the narrative, but dominates the chapter and in the process challenges Friesen’s values.

What is so challenging is the man’s response both in deed and word to the torture of his sick wife and himself. In an affront to his “manliness,” he is compelled to see his wife sexually abused by the guards, “tortured down to her very life” (113), and yet he does nothing. He explains to Friesen that for her, with at most a month to live, she but wants to see her children once more, “the rest is nothing” (113). Since she “has to take it,” he “takes it,” and lies down “as if stretched out and nailed down on his back” (113).

The challenging words are the man’s enigmatic assertion: “Survive as God is good....To live, it is the most necessary possibility” (114). Friesen was “never sure to what question the man gave this answer”:

sometimes he thought the man meant that to live was the essential; sometimes that to live a good life was the essential; sometimes that to live, to survive and to suffer was the essential; sometimes that any one of them could be the most essential. Any one a possibility. And sometimes the possibility was all of these things essential at the same time, any one impossible without any one other, and after one spasm of thought it did not mean any of them at all. Whatever the man had said had been some kind of stupidity, some punch-deadened prisoner’s immovable madness that sometimes, just as thought touched it, seemed for an instant to blaze with a kind of holy wisdom that was; that could be known, but never said. If he remembered it correctly; later he could not be quite sure about that either. (115)
The man’s effect on Friesen does not become manifest until the novel’s close when Friesen feels compelled to join John Reimer on his highway pilgrimage.

Another instance of this type of “indirection” in The Blue Mountains of China occurs in the chapter “Over the Red Line” which recounts the experiences of an exilic Mennonite community embarked on its typological crossing of the “red sea,” enroute from the old world of deprivation and harassment in Europe to the new world of Paraguay with its possibilities of bountiful freedom. A series of boundaries is explored - life to death, exile to promised land, dour Mennonite existence to the chic modern world represented by the ship’s first class - all of which are in the course of the chapter being crossed. The person of epistemological importance would appear to be the main protagonist, Liesel, a child of nine, who, rebelling at the community’s joyless, flesh-denying legalism, darts hither and yon, particularly to the glitzy, world-wise, first-class section of the S.S. Hindenburg, in search of a satisfying alternative to the apparently dour existence of the steerage-bound Mennonite community.

It is only at the story’s close that it becomes clear that the figure of primary significance is not Liesel but her father. While the reader is constantly beguiled throughout the story by Liesel’s comings and goings, Helmut Driediger is patiently on the border, present but in the shadows. Gradually, though, the light shines more strongly upon him, revealing one of those “scapegoat” figures who inhabit so many of Wiebe’s novels. As the focus shifts from daughter to father, the reader senses that the burdens she bears must be a greater deprivation for her cultured father. Our appreciation is mediated through her perceptions. He himself does not “have to go” on this pilgrimage, but he is there, and “[w]ho didn’t wail on his shoulder” (BMC 77).

Wiebe’s handling of this story provides exemplary evidence (see “Appendix 2”) of his use of what Roy Pascal (following Charles Bally) identifies as “free indirect speech.” Pascal,
who acknowledges Bakhtin’s work (he was “introduced to modern linguistics” [Pascal, Dual 148] by Mikhail’s brother Nicholas who taught with Pascal at the University of Birmingham), focusses his attention on this one aspect of heteroglossia, which Volosinov (a friend of Bakhtin’s) identifies as “quasi-direct discourse” (Marxism 141-159). Known in France as style indirect libre and in Germany as erlebte Rede, free indirect speech is described by Pascal as a stylistic device that “fuses the narratorial and subjective modes” (Dual 21), employing the basic form of indirect speech while preserving within it some of the elements of the subjective perspective of the characters. A peculiar mix of both direct and indirect speech, it may contain sentence form, personal vocabulary, exclamations and questions of the former, while grammatically appearing indistinguishable from the latter. Through the introduction of expressive gestures, it produces a more lively effect and often is more strongly persuasive than simple narrative reporting, but, above all, it greatly enhances the narrator’s art and project, allowing him a voice within the voice of the character, and a shaping of the narrative generally. The mingling of voices also demands greater interaction between the reader and the text; as Pascal claims, it “provokes an astonishing imaginative agility in the reader” (33).

While more muted, less pervasive than in earlier works, this stylistic device plays a fundamental role in Wiebe’s third-person narrative in the September section of My Lovely Enemy particularly in pointing the reader away from James to a lesser figure who carries the larger meaning of the text. In the very first paragraph, the narratorial report is coloured by Wiebe’s use of the deictic (demonstrative) adverb “now” and adjective “this” (MLE 184) which serve as syntactical indicators that what we are being given reflects James’s situation in time and place, and must originate with him. James thus continues to have some position of privilege, particularly since he is the only character through whom this double-voicing occurs, but to understand the novel it is crucial to recognize that in these passages James’s ‘voicing’ is
always tempered by the presence and the judgment of the narrator.

In James’s reported reaction to the ramming of the Lincoln - “he swore at himself and this stupid limo driver and all stupid Edmontonians clammering to get down here” (186) - the syntactical indicators “this” and “here” of free indirect speech give us both the immediacy of James’s emotional response and an ironic narratorial comment on James’s own involvement. But the irony is more pronounced in the judgmental portraits of Whitling-Holmes and his wife Rikki, obviously drawn in James’s mind, but which, through their expression in free indirect speech, serve to carry a narratorial rebound upon James himself. Sarcastic reference to Whit’s English immigrant background and his “massive imperial accent” (188) is further extended:

Already resources minister, second only to the Leaderhimself, O he sounds so cultured, so utterly...cultured! Cultivated with never a plow. (188)

But culture is also James’s way of making a living, and something he is not above using to achieve an impression, say with a graduate student like Gillian. His relationship with her undermines his judgment of Rikki (“Charmingly bucked teeth, a ruddy face of probably mindless laughter” [189] and her involvement with Whit (“too young by a quarter of a century at least”), enabling the narrator to heap ironical coals on James’s own clandestine bridging of generations.

The double-voicing implicit in James’s repeated judgments - of Whit, “all he needed was a fired pitchfork” (190), and even of an unrecognized Gillian, “rentable no doubt in that mint condition from any modelling agency” - further divorces the narrator from James. Undermined by the irony which spills over into the narrative generally, the image of James increasingly reflects the falsity that surrounds him - the entrance to The Mine (reminiscent of
Wade’s fake fort in Jack Hodgins’ *The Invention of the World* (1977), “a processed plastic barrier” made to look like rock but which is actually “glued together from the photograph of a Blackmud Creek cliff” (191), or even Rikki’s “tremendous decolletage” which is “so artfully contrived.” This professor, with a prodigious memory who “seem[s] to know everything” but who is at a loss as to what to profess, and whose memory is more a bane than a blessing (he recognizes that much of what he recalls is for him but trivia, except for his distorted recollections that constantly alienate him from his father’s memory and eat away at his own sense of self-worth), becomes, in the transformed point of view of the September section, an even more questionable conveyor of the text’s transforming message. Despite his recognition of his own weaknesses, which outweigh his potential strengths, and the insights he is frequently afforded, he continues (in a manner containing an echo of Kroetsch’s ‘loving’ Liebhaber) without meaningful discernment - “he could control nothing while he wanted everything” (193).

James, like Liesel Driediger and Jakob Friesen before him, is not a Christian. Like them, he has come from a Mennonite background, but one which he like them has rejected and from which he has consciously fled. Through his prodigious memory he may recall a wealth of Scriptural and poetic material, and may be adept at arguing theological and philosophical niceties, but like Harold Lemming, whom he holds up to ridicule, he too lacks “discernment.” Much of what he contributes positively to the dialogue is by rote and not by understanding. This is the case for him even at his best, for example when he talks ‘beginnings’ with Becca and is able to latch onto the Creation words of Genesis, words “of willed forgetfulness,” which he finds as “solid, solid good like the fundamental rocks, nothing to trip and fall between” (64). The limited extent of his vision, at that point, is to present them as “a different way of talking about beginning...like poetry.” He may be “tempted” by Christianity, but what
he hears from others, and is able to recite, has a minimal effect on the way he conducts his life. Even at the novel’s conclusion, it is not clear where he stands or what he is about to do. His anger has dissipated; he has aspirations; he wants to “listen his loved ones into life;” he “would” speak; but we are left with his “opened...mouth” (262).

The constant authorial judgment afforded by free indirect speech should divert the reader’s attention away from the apparent main protagonist to someone more representative of the values espoused by the narrator. Insensitivity to the authorial accent results in the kind of textual misreading provided by David L. Jeffrey who, missing “the author’s controlling perspective” ("Lost" 114), connects James’s weakness with the novel’s “ultimate statement” which, as has been noted, he describes as “cliché-ridden, hackneyed and trite.” Sensitivity to the author’s presence in this double-voicing should direct the reader away from James. Despite Liv’s much more limited role, she is the one who does exemplify the “larger meaning” of this novel.

At the beginning, Liv is presented as just another working housewife and mother who feels the frustration of contemporary living, the male domination of the work-place, and an adverse reaction to the religion of her parents, but she is clearly more ardent than James in her search for “the good life” (79). In the early laundry-room exchange with James, she claims that “[a]s you read more, the Jesus stories just make more sense” (62), and while she vows “never [to] tell” what she is reading, this reader suspects she is reading Yoder. It is Liv who takes Becca to church and applauds the sermon on the Song of Songs, insisting that the Mennonite preacher “would have explained a few little things to D.H. Lawrence” (116) about love. We never hear the sermon, but what we do see is a revitalized Liv “act” out the effects of “seeing things differently.”
She it is who follows John Reimer’s directive in *The Blue Mountains of China*, “you handle offenders, by forgiving” (BMC 215), as Liv forgives James for his adultery, “pulling him...into a revelation of something so profound he had somehow always sensed it in her without grasping its dimension...her gentle merciful goodness always there though hidden until now” (MLE 233). Again, as if responding to Reimer’s “you show wisdom by trusting people,” Liv contends that “[l]ove is trust beyond all possibilities.” Finally, she makes the move that both James and Gillian saw as an impossible possibility: following Reimer’s admonition, “you handle enemies by loving,” she introduces Gillian, portrayed as her ‘lovely enemy,’ to James’s mother, “This is our friend from Edmonton....” (258).

Through the deflection away from the main protagonist James, particularly through the double-voicing of free indirect speech, and the suggestion that the supportive Liv is the agent of grace, Wiebe exerts his authorial control over a representation that would appear, for the most part, to simply mirror the heteroglossic reality of everyday life. This reflects Bakhtin’s point that what enters a novel is not simply a variety of everyday languages or voices but the author’s artistic representation of them. For Bakhtin, authorial control is the aesthetic essence of the dialogic novel:

> Behind the narrator’s story we read a second story, the author’s story, he is the one who tells us about the narrator himself. We acutely sense two levels at each moment in the story; one the level of the narrator, a belief system filled with his objects, meanings and emotional expressions, and the other, the level of the author who speaks albeit in a refracted way [shades of Wiebe] by means of this story and through this story. The narrator, himself, with his own discourse, enters into this authorial belief system along with what is actually being told. We puzzle out the author’s emphases
that overlie the subject of the story, while we puzzle out the story itself and the figure of the narrator as he is revealed in the process of telling his tale. If one fails to sense this second level, the intentions and accents of the author himself, then one has failed to understand the story. (Dialogic 314)

Van Toorn, who attacks Wiebe’s specifically for controlling the narrative, cites Bakhtin’s approbation of Dostoevsky’s practice of not letting “the sovereign Word...colour the work with the personal ideological tone of the author,” while suggesting that Wiebe differs from Dostoevsky in refraining from “full polyphony...[by] arrang[ing] the many voices concerned into a new monologic order, centred on the voice of Jesus” (Historicity 198). But this again suggests confusion on van Toorn’s part since Bakhtin also adds that “an authorial idea or thought...must...enter into that world as an image of a human being, as one orientation among other orientations, as one word among many words” (Problems 98). Furthermore, he argues that the idea does not extend beyond the limits of the great dialogue and does not finalize it. It must exercise leadership only in the choice and arrangement of material [‘through the choice of story’], and that material is other people’s voices, other people’s points of view, and among them ‘the man of the future is constantly placed on a pedestal.’

(98-99)

Bakhtin’s point is that the idea should not be formally introduced into the discourse by the author himself, but should be expressed as “an image of a human being” especially “the ideal human being or the image of Christ” (97). Is this not exactly what Wiebe does in the May
section of My Lovely Enemy?

Van Toorn argues, to the contrary, that it is in the September section that Wiebe introduces monologic closure with the "last-minute appearance of a deus ex machina" in the "absolutely authoritative voice" (Historicity 173) of the mortician. But, in fact, that 'other-worldly' voice also sounds in both of Jesus's appearances and, interestingly, what he pronounces is incorporated (a good word) into the dialogue of discovery. A prime example is Jesus's metaphor of love as a wheel, where the "spokes are hope and its hub faith" (MLE 142), which James "quote[s]" (178) and develops in his closing exchange of the May section with Gillian.

While Jesus's appearances occupy a significant part of the text, and his sayings become part of the dialogue, ultimately in the May section the confrontation with Jesus has little impact on James's activities. When Jesus indicates the healing nature of true love by reference to Hosea where "the injured spouse responds to adultery with always more love" (138), James must admit that for him healing does not have top priority: he is not yet prepared to abandon his liaison with Gillian. Further, to anticipate, even the mortician's pronouncement, that van Toorn finds monologically offensive, that "One for one marriage is for earth, now" (261) is interjected into an ongoing dialogue in which James does not participate and which does not result in closure.

This is in marked contrast to Jesus's other appearance in contemporary literature, in Iris Murdoch's novel Nuns and Soldiers (1980), which was published just three years prior to My Lovely Enemy. There are several pertinent similarities between the two encounters. Both writers emphasize the reality of the event: for Ann Cavidge in Murdoch's book, "[t]he visitation began in a dream...[but] changed into a veridical vision" (288-9); James, as narrator, asserts emphatically, "this is no dream I am not sleeping" (78). Each presents Jesus as
comfortably contemporary, caring, willing to engage in dialogue, but somewhat ironic and distanced. Anne, a former nun, has, like James, lost her faith, but is being forced out into a world that compels personal reassessment. Each poses one of those bedrock biblical questions to their visitor - Anne: “Sir, what shall I do to be saved?” (291); James: “How can a human being live the good life?” (79). But while Anne’s query appears sincere, and Jesus’s very appearance and response continue to haunt her throughout the novel, James’s interrogation seems casual, impersonal and almost formulaic (what does one ask Jesus?), and the appearance and the answer seem to have minimal personal impact.

Wiebe’s adaptation of Murdoch’s bold narrative device (Jesus’s sudden literary ‘resurrection’ twice within the span of three years seems more than fortuitous) allows for dialogical biblical voicing that in its surrealist effect seems less intrusively didactic. Through James’s casual acceptance of Jesus's presence and casual disregard for his authority, while the heteroglossic nature of the novel is enhanced, James’s own role as a model for emulation and a bearer of the novel’s message is further diminished.

There is a subtlety to Jesus’s presence and the biblical voicing which may escape the reader’s attention as much as it seemingly fails to impact on James. Jesus’s reference to the Old Testament book of the prophet Hosea lies at the heart of an understanding of Wiebe’s novel. The poem Hosea writes, a parable describing God’s relationship with Israel “seen as wife and husband” (MLE 138), is adapted by Jesus as applicable to James’s situation, and is then used by Wiebe to explicate his novel as a whole through a process Paul Ricoeur describes as “metaphorization.”

In his article “The Bible and the Imagination,” Ricoeur focusses on the role of Jesus’s narrative-parables within the Gospel accounts of Jesus’s life. Noting that “the narrative-parables are narratives within a narrative, more precisely narratives recounted by the principal
personage of an encompassing narrative” (55), he argues that “the embedded narrative [the parable] borrows from the encompassing narrative [the account of Jesus’s life] the structure of interpretation that allows the metaphorization of its meaning [and further that] the parables in their turn are productive of meaning at the level of the narrative of the life of Jesus.” The metaphorization, which he equates with parabolization, “occurs through the intersections of discourse within the encompassing narrative” (66), an intertextuality which “exercises the reader’s productive imagination.”

An identification of the role of the parable of Hosea, although it occupies little space within Wiebe’s novel, and has little apparent influence on James - he grasps the message that “the injured spouse responds to adultery with always more love” (138), but cannot see beyond his own immediate desires - is essential to an understanding of the encompassing narrative of the Bible and of My Lovely Enemy.

In his early article “The Artist as a Critic and a Witness” Wiebe already addressed the significance of metaphor for his method of indirection. Claiming that “the parable is the simplest form of fiction” (44), he continued with the assertion that “[i]n one sense [the novel] is nothing more than a long, drawn-out metaphor consistently and artistically worked out to its logical summation.” My Lovely Enemy in that sense is a working out of the parable of Hosea. Since the machinations surrounding the foregrounded adultery are, for Wiebe, too trite to justify the novel’s existence, Liv’s forgiving love rather than James’s affair serves as the novel’s essential focus and the measure of its significance. The novel then becomes a parable itself, modelled on the insight afforded by Hosea, proclaiming love and forgiveness. Recognition of this compels us to read the novel differently - to read it typologically. As such, we perceive that as Hosea directs us beyond human love and forgiveness to God’s loving forbearance with his people Israel, a God who is “passion...hopelessly, endlessly in love”
(MLE 138), so Jesus, in his retelling (thus making it his own) of this Old Testament parable, directs us in the context of typology to himself, the Other who continues to express his forgiving love for all generations - “Father, forgive them....”

**Descent and Resurrection**

The “September” section also mirrors its Biblical model through its portrayal of the downward movement inherent in trespass and sin that fractures and alienates human relationships and the upward movement of faith and love leading to reconciliation and resurrection. While the icon of the log church that provides the bridging in “The Black Bridge” is apocalyptic, James’s car which effects the translation into “September” gradually assumes a demonic air. Unlike the rental car, of unknown character, without history (Liv has not sat in its passenger seat), in which Gillian and he made the ascent to the medicine wheel where the world was laid out before them (Temptations of Christ), this car, in which Liv and he make their perilous descent to the Mine, is identified specifically as a Volvo. Renowned for its safety features, the Volvo in this context is emblematic of reliance on human technology. In an imagistically-loaded passage, their auto is metaphorically transformed into a “tufted” buffalo, that “shudder[s] like a shaggy beast” (MLE 184), and “shivers” as it traverses a perilous “scar” of a road seemingly “scraped out for hoofed animals.” The mention of buffalo recalls the image of the ‘natural’ man Gabriel Dumont of The Scorched-Wood People with his “huge shaggy head” (16) who “bellowed like a wounded buffalo” (17). How fitting that James, the contemporary ‘natural’ man, should drive a vehicle depicted in terms of a shaggy beast.
The conjunction of the buffalo, the repeated concerns about safety, and the deficiencies in superior automotive technology - it does not save the car from leaking ("its watermarked ceiling" [MLE 184]), nor, despite their concerns about safety (they carefully buckle their seat belts), Liv and James from "sudden, as it seemed, annihilation" ("seatbelt burned across gut and shoulder" (185) - puts technology under a cloud of ultimate suspicion. It is only "by a miraculous industrial coincidence" that their bumper "met dead-centre" with that of the "huge black...lurch[ing]" (186) Lincoln limousine (shades of the "Black Vulture" of The Blue Mountains of China) they rear-ended. The extinction of the buffalo, by extended association, serves to undermine trust in technology. A way of life dependent on either promises no enduring means of salvation.

The collision with Whitling-Holmes’s Lincoln (if it is fitting for James to drive a Volvo, it is ironic that the unresourceful Resources Minister ["Politicians are not much given to contemplation. They have no time" (220)] should possess a vehicle that bears the name of one of America’s foremost statesmen) identified both as a hearse and a black message “sent to us not to go down here,” adds to Liv’s existent sense of foreboding - a multiple paranomastic play on her reservations about their reservations, “printed bits like detonators simply waiting a connection,” for the Mine located on the formerly “Papa-chase” reserve - and to their joint depression.

Despite Liv’s fears, however, and appearances to the contrary, there are early suggestions that this section promises a Frygian comedy in the triumph of the apocalyptic. James, who has the most to fear from the descent, unwittingly makes the first proclamation in his tuneless parody of Sankey, “Though the road leading down be rough and steep, I go to the de-epths to fi-ind my sheep....” (184), and Liv, speaking of their literal descent in the Volvo (which can now be seen apocalyptically in terms of its etymology - from the Latin, to roll, to
turn round) speaks the harrowing but also the reversal, “You’ll have to go to the very bottom anyway, to turn around” (186).

The aftermath of the collision with the Lincoln introduces traces of something akin to ‘magic realism’ that surfaces repeatedly in the September section. The Lincoln, which James claims is “empty,” disappears down the steep road, leaving him “as if he did not exist on a splotch of tacky tar” (MLE 186). The road itself, which ran into a valley wherein James and his family had hiked “for years,” they had “never seen”; it was “as if” they had “contorted their way into a barranca.” When James locks his car at the Mine, he ignores the black car beside them, claiming “I’m not looking at it. It doesn’t exist” (186). But these experiences are mild in terms of what is to come.

In his entry into the mine with Rikki, the cabinet minister’s wife, James is totally disoriented. It “must have been down,” but he could not tell - “here only blackness” (192). She becomes “one metamorphosis of inevitable woman,” a conflation of all his sexual desires - “he could control nothing while he wanted everything” (193). All this compounds the unreality of the descent: “It was the road, the blazing valley descent, the unexpected lurch into one sense deprivation: like being slammed sideways into dream without the warning of sleep.”

In the midst of the story of the Mine, James disrupts the narrative flow with another quotation from his prodigious memory. The truncated verse from Genesis - “Adam and Eve he created them and blessed them and said, Be fru -“ (216) - serves momentarily to reintroduce the discussion of human sexuality developed in the May section, emphasizing its innate goodness as a result of God’s creative word and blessing. A brief glance at Adam’s role as name-giver immediately gives place to a a flashback to Gillian and James’s earlier physical union, which Gillian, “spread naked under the rough blanket of her wide bed” (219), attempts to condone by blanketting it under the purity of the original creation, with her
imprecise quotation from Flannery O'Connor's Hazel Motes: "there ain't no sin because there never was no fall" (219).

This interjection is a classic example of the demands Wiebe places upon his reader, and another instance of his critical use of indirection. On the one hand, the text presents but another of the dislocations effected by repeated changes of direction in his narrative. The mystery and promise of the mine seem abandoned, and we are compelled to refocus on the earlier discussion. On the other hand, Wiebe jolts the narrative even further by the intertextual reference to O'Connor's first novel Wise Blood (1949). Since the narrative quickly shifts again - after the enigmatic question "What could a man named Motes say to understand so much?" (219) - to the truncated etymological discussion of the Low German "verlieft" (enloved) which the flashback to Gillian and James has just interrupted, the reader might feel justified in simply ignoring this brief section. As if there is not enough happening in this convoluted text, this flashback to what clearly belongs to the May section is reported uncharacteristically for that section in the third person. Further, while the query about Motes could be a first-person statement, the speaker seems to defy identification. Finally, what sense is there in the question? Should it not be restated as "What could a man named Motes understand to say so much?" Why the emphasis on "named?" Through these confusions Wiebe certainly risks losing his readers' attention; the combinations may simply exhaust their patience.

But it is this last query in particular, however, in its arresting ambiguity, that will challenge careful readers to dig deeper, and in so doing to succumb to another aspect of Wiebe's method of indirection - in this case doubtly indirect. Submitting to the text's demands, readers are indirectly referred to the Gospel through O'Connor's witness which is indirect as well.
It is Gillian, not James, who quotes from O’Connor’s work, and for Gillian there is no perception of either fall or sin, as she is not haunted by a Christian past. Perhaps in this she like the “naming” Adam speaks from a prelapsarian position in which naming and saying equally reflect the world accurately ensuring that our understanding is true. And while Motes is not the Motes of “wise blood” (“something that enables you to go in the right direction after what you want” [O’Connor, “Carl” 920]), his name is Edenic in its accurate identification of his spiritual affliction. His vision obscured by a “particle of dust” as in Matthew 7:3, this errant preacher lives under rebellious illusion, “going counter actually to his own wise blood” (920).

The story of the man named Hazel “Motes” is most helpful in an elucidation of the role of a man named James “Dyck”. Like James, Hazel is a rebellious product of a Christian home. For both, a repellant Bible-toting, redemption-preaching, fundamentalist figure looms as a primary force of alienation: for Hazel, it was his own grandfather who would single him out (“that mean sinful unthinking boy standing there with his dirty hands clenching and unclenching at his sides” [Wise 11]) as an object of Christ’s first redemption; for James, it was the thundering Pastor Hildebrandt (“my father’s final ultimate and immovable vital authority; they fitted together like a fist and an eye” [MLE 123]), who “always knew right from wrong” as he “explain[ed] again and again the Evil of mankind.” James’s reaction was to run away from home, particularly from his father and this “Ancient of Days” (123), and to keep himself pure by never facing serious temptation. Hazel, convinced that “the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin” (Wise 11), soldiered off into the army with a successful resolve to resist corruption, and converted “to nothing instead of to evil” (12). Hazel becomes a preacher, but of The Church Without Christ; James becomes a professor, but with nothing to “profess.” But both are pursued by the voices of their past; try as they might they are convicted of sin
and redemption. While for both it is a matter of both vision and the flesh, for Hazel (a colour of eyes) it is primarily a matter of vision (he of the mote and hazy) and for James it is the lust of the flesh; he cannot control his “Dyck.”

For Hazel, as O'Connor states in her letter to Carl Hartman, it is the temptation of a vision of nihilism which eventually “leads him to what he most does not want” (920). It is in blinding himself that he escapes the mote that prevented him from seeing the truth of his own redemption:

When Haze blinds himself he turns entirely to an inner vision. Now one irony is that where he started out preaching the Church Without Christ he ends up with Christ without a church. (921)

The question of temptation and resultant fall is something that haunts Wiebe’s novels. While The Temptations of Big Bear is titularly the most obvious example, in other Wiebe novels a host of Mennonite characters reared in some semblance of the Christian faith are represented as facing seductions of various kinds, with sexual temptations the most prominent. One has but to think, for example, of the vulnerability of Jakob V and Liesel in The Blue Mountains of China. Jakob Friesen gave the appearance of Christian fortitude:

He had been trained well, a good Mennonite boy; learned quiet joy and denial and prayers...had been taught his sins and cried over them and asked the Lord Jesus forgiveness...knowing evil thoughts led to evil actions....His teachers...had said if only they had more pupils like Jakob.... (28)
But with the upheaval of the revolution, the weakness of his faith overwhelms him - “all he had pushed aside and gotten around though he knew it wrong, rose in the praying blacker and heavier than sin....” (28); despite the constant fragmented presence of words of Scripture and prayer (“glory to god and peace on earth...blessed savior o my blessed savior make me...” [37,39]) that well up within him, he resorts to violence and succumbs to the certain temptation of Esau’s nameless “girl from Borsenko” (20).

For the young Liesel Driediger, the glittering allure of the glitzy first-class world of the S.S. Hindenberg proves too much of a contrast to the repugnant, drab world of her fellow Mennonites wallowing in steerage. The stalwart serving faith of her father is not hers, and she, bewildered by the realities of that worldly first-class debauchery, tumbles, transfixed and uncomprehending, from a world of innocence into the dark water below.

But, as Shirley Neuman points out, and Wiebe concurs, there was an “obvious re-enacting of the Fall” (UL 242) in his very first novel, Peace Shall Destroy Many, in Elizabeth Block’s desperate liaison with the half-Cree Louis and the violent disintegration of the proud Mennonite community. Wiebe does not admit to any conscious pattern but allows:

Well, clearly the story of the Fall is there; whether a man falls because of a woman or falls with woman or whatever, you end up with that story. (UL 242)

In each of these cases, it is a tragic weakness of faith, an inability to resist the pressures of physical temptation, that precipitates the fall.

My Lovely Enemy effects a startling alteration to the perceived pattern’s function, and presents it in the context of distinctive “falls.” At the ‘literal’ level, when “the clay crumbles”
James almost falls from the cliff above Whitemud Creek, provoking an imagined caution from the disturbed nameless walker in the valley below, “If you fell I’d be forced to try and fish you out” (22-23). His mother “wrenched her left arm out of its socket falling between the split poles of the hayrack” (25), and in her disfigurement raises an association with Maskepetoon. Gillian and James are aware of a train passing the High Level Bridge - “a body, any body falling?” (173). From “the enormous, slightly sagging line“ of this bridge, “they say,” six hundred and seventy-two people have fallen” (183) - “fallen from its high, cold steel, fallen down into treetops, into water, onto inexorable ice” (182).

At other levels, Jesus contests why “passionate love is a ‘fall’“ - “Why not ‘soaring into love’“ (82). He refuses to accept “so platitudinously easy a response, fall, helpless it isn’t that easy!” (83). The story of creation and fall “stings [Maskepetoon] with happiness” (52). For James as well, despite his rejection of the faith of his family, the words of the creation story remain as “solid, solid good like the fundamental rocks, nothing to trip and fall between” (64). Then, James and Liv, lying in his mother’s bed after her death are also prepared to see ‘fall’ positively; they sense

a whiff of promise perhaps or an abyss they could hurl themselves into with dreadful joy, a fall that would transfigure the abhorrent edges of their bodies into an elixir or nothing but bloods intermingling until all their cells lost identity in a single oneness that knew neither longing nor desire nor want, above all not repletion. (242)

Gillian, who make no profession of faith from which to fall (and consequently, for her, “there ain’t no sin”), appears nonplussed by their adulterous relationship. And yet for all their protestations that no one is being hurt, she with James is forced into lies and suffers feelings of
guilt. But the challenge of Gillian, the spectre of beauty who wishes to expand his vision, does have a profoundly beneficial effect upon James; she jolts him out of a life of uncommitted sameness that confined him to the shadows of working with the dead and the indiscriminate mouthing of other people’s words into the daylight of personal responsibility and commitment. It is Gillian who compels him to see things differently, to contemplate the possible existence of another life - “otherwise how could I sink in this so quickly” (134). She tempts him in the flesh, but also tempts him to faith - “what I do not believe is not enough for me. The certain temptation of Gillian drives me to the possible temptation of the personal Jesus” (169). She provokes a fundamental fall; his fear “of falling with[out] words/over and over of/mouthing the silence...”(58) becomes a reality when Gillian “pushes” him - “perhaps I have fallen into the perfect white between what few words I have found into another world” (45).

This admission occurs in the context of the “ashen depthlessness of the Micro-materials Reading Room” (45) where the words “appear to be without substance” (11). James, then, immediately, out of the vast caverns of his prodigious memory, recalls a provocative conflation of words from Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* and the Eucharistic liturgy (part of which Wiebe has also used as a title of a chapter in *The Blue Mountains of China*) - “drink me, eat me, all you have to do is taste me, come, drink ye all of it” (MLE 45). In Rossetti’s work, Lizzie, prepared to sacrifice herself for her sister Laura who has succumbed to the temptation of the goblins’ forbidden fruits, has braved their abuse to bring the saving juices to her “dwindling” sister:

Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip

Lest they should cram a mouthful in:

But laughed in heart to feel the drip

Of juice that syrped all her face....  \(\textit{Selected} 93\)

The overpowering association with the Gospels’ account of Christ’s sacrifice speaks to James’s memory, lifting him to a recollection of his childhood prayer “\textit{Lieber Heiland mach mich fromm}” (MLE 45), turns him about, brings him, as it brought Maskepetoon, to face the claims of Jesus, and for a moment causes him “to see the whole world pendent, hung on nothing. On a hair of the mercy of God” (55). Later, reflecting on his relationship with Gillian, James muses tantalizingly:

Golden stones could you fall all May and summer and then three weeks apart and still be falling together. A fall was once for all, exclusive, probably requiring single-minded recovery. (220)

Where Hazel’s nihilism “led him the long way around to the Redemption again” (O’Connor, \textit{Wise} 920), it is, strangely, this relationship with Gillian which promotes the possibility for James of a redeeming faith. But, whereas in \textit{Wise Blood} Hazel is ultimately seen to possess this wisdom, in \textit{My Lovely Enemy} it remains but a possibility for James. What he understands is only part of the problem; his lack of self-control is his debilitating weakness.

But the Mine is a dreamworld (“what was there to life but endlessly and eternally more” [MLE 222]), the desire of “all stupid Edmontonians” (186), the place to experience “the inexpressible and the so-far unimaginable for which you have always longed, though perhaps you could never decide what it should be” (213). For James, though, there is no apparent
indecision, and he reaches the epitome of his desire, with “hilariously wonderful tears sliding down his cheeks” (228), hugging both Liv and Gillian, “one arm around each,” building their snow castle of warm snow.

Only the appearance of Harold (“did every Eden generate a snake?”), the incipient ‘dreamland’ developer, with his jealous repudiation of James’s relationship with Gill, threatens to disrupt James’s sense of fulfillment. It is this jealousy that leads to the real ‘snake in the grass’ in this Eden-like world. When Liv laughs at Harold at play, “very much as she would have had she loved him” (228), James finds her body “suddenly...strange” (228). But he is unnerved totally when he perceives Liv and Harold embraced by Gill, himself excluded, and the possible apparition of Harold making love to Liv in ecstatic and relentless passion. Could he, could they all, “endure this and live” (235)?

James is graphically and painfully forced to realize that the satisfaction of personal desire, our constantly expanding ‘wants,’ comes at much cost, a cost implicitly illustrated in the fantastic, ephemeral image of the buffalo, ridden by singing cowbirds (shades of O’Connor), gathering to drink of the lake’s burning water (title of George Bowering’s novel) while the two couples sleep in the snow castle. To recognize the cost is to recollect that in the party’s search for exciting discoveries of the tactile world of the palate, to satisfy their desire for more, ever more, something new, it is these creatures they have sacrificed in their consumption of magpie paté and bison in utero. The text does allow, however, that, perhaps for some of them, escaping domination by their incessant wants, their lives were indeed transformed - “on the other side of waking, where we may sleep with all our five and wilful senses open, they dreamt they were free at last from the necessity of want and freedom and were only good, and found themselves unimaginatively happy in that at last” (235).
The 'magic realism' is equally, if not more, present in the concluding funeral chapter. As Wiebe continues to challenge the reader's vision of reality. The tinge of 'magic' spreads gradually across a canvas of revelation. In anticipation of the plants of W.P. Kinsella (Wiebe's bête noire) that refuse to freeze (The Iowa Baseball Confederacy [1986], 100), Gillian discovers crocuses, with their purple flowers a symbol of Easter and resurrection, that have miraculously escaped the freezing cold of the September prairie, that tip over in the car but do not spill, and then "guide[] them in a straight line between stones" (MLE 239) to the grave site. A rain of "blessing" (250) falls from a clear-blue sky. There is something otherworldly about the venerable black mortician, with his "relentless, ancient eyes" (238), on the job for "thirty-three years," who was able to make James's father in death so lifelike and, to James's mind, uncharacteristically "dignified as a doctor" (240), but, to the indignation of almost everyone in the family, leaves the mother looking "just awful" (239) - as if he recognized outward appearances mattered nothing to her.

The mortician, calling to mind the depiction of the Jesus of the Gospels, appears to look at Olena with "such profound tenderness" (251), 'writing' in James's mind the message of Maskepetoon's act of forgiveness, "only love can so destroy" (251), and seems "to be crying" (256). It is he, also, who administers the elements of the picnic supper, and seems to speak with wisdom beyond human ken. The coffin can be carried effortlessly by small children ("as if there was nothing whatever inside" (247); indeed, it seems to float - for James, "the coffin was drifting, the children swimming around it in bright, golden water" (239) - and sits "suspended" (247) over the burial hole. But the most stupendous occurrence is the Lazarus-like resurrection of James's mother Liese, who, after the service, sits up in the coffin, on command, uttering the nonplussed, "Well, that is nice" (257), that is so infuriating to D.L. Jeffrey ("a preposterous and effectually gratuitous resurrection ['Lost' 113]).
The concluding party, catered to by the familiar farmer ("with all his false teeth" [258]), with his 'loaves and fishes,' a bit of salad and a "seemingly bottomless thermos" (260) of coffee, continues the 'magic,' taking place "inside a globe of nothing but field and sky...even the water tower and the tops of the elevators were gone where the horizon should have been" (259).

Throughout this chapter, Kroetsch's influence continues to be felt, generally in terms of the fabulation, but particularly in terms of the bees of What the Crow Said. W. J. Keith, in private conversation, recalls Wiebe's fascination with Kroetsch's imaginative use of these creatures in their impregnation of Vera Lang in that novel. In My Lovely Enemy's last chapter, there is an omnipresent sound, "like relentless bees swarming" (241), which provides an aural dimension to the magical setting. Initially, the sound is identified with red and silver combines, "wavering in heat" (241), that move incessantly around the giant fields, but is then transformed into the "droning" (259) of the funeral procession's intonation of the Mennonite hymn, "Es Geht Nach Haus," that accompanied the people on their seemingly endless pilgrimage and now arises among those that come together "in a great cloud" (248) among the tombstones. Finally, in the wake of Liese's resurrection, it becomes "a humming as of pan-flutes in the air" (258), as the children are "unable to walk" but are carried into a dance of joy, and accompanies the celebrants "whenever they moved" (261).

Typically, Wiebe's usage of the image of the drone of the bees is not, as with Kroetsch, limited to surface effect. The constant humming eventually 'speaks' to James in his perception that, contrary to the earlier recognition of the impossibility of "Gillian's dream of truly knowing someone other; I am still alone, alone" (233), he actually is "surrounded" by all those whom he loves and who love him. Praying to see and know them "not as distinct and separate, even himself, but all one" (262), he glimpses the need for dialogue; what was "ready
to be” must be spoken by them all. Van Toorn correctly identifies the parallel in James’s recognition of the need for dialogue with Bakhtin’s claim that “a unified truth requires a plurality of consciousnesses” (Problems 81). Contrary to idealism’s denigration of this plurality as “accidental” and “superfluous,” and its promotion of a teacher/pupil model of learning - “someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it or in error” (81) - Bakhtin and Wiebe, and Yoder behind him, perceive all words as caught in a historical process of becoming in “humanity’s communal, dialogic search for ‘a larger meaning of life, a larger meaning of the universe, which all the universe is going towards’” (van Toorn, Historicity 211). Anabaptist Wiebe and Yoder recognize that the revelation of the Word is not something one possesses - as Jakob Friesen rightly perceives, Jesus “never gives you a thing to hold in your hand” (BMC 227) - we are always “on the way,” and on the way together.

The main protagonists whose lives are disrupted by the novel’s love affair, James, Gillian and Liv, are depicted as sharing in the uncertainties attending our common passage through life. Each is realistically represented as torn between conflicting motivations, victims of oscillating moods, and but transient possessors of significant insights and understanding. With their own idiosyncrasies, they are portrayed as ordinary and fallible, contemporary residents of a modern metropolis, caught up in the concerns of every-day living. At the same time, they are each represented as in pursuit of a vision to give meaning to lives they find unfulfilling. Even in this, they are perhaps not so extraordinary.

We have noted that, of the three, Liv is the most evident follower of the Anabaptist vision, but her fallibility is graphically drawn in the bedroom scene interjected into the concluding funeral narrative. Lying with James in her mother-in-law’s bed, “clutching him as if she would claw off his skin behind the paper-thin walls...he could not tell if she was crying
or he or both and motionless, bared teeth to teeth” (243), she with James craves a physical comfort left them by the dead Liese, be it in “a whiff of promise” or even “an abyss.” They seek a fall of transfiguration to carry them beyond the whims of the flesh into “a singular oneness that knew neither longing nor desire nor want, above all not repletion.” The brief scene closes without resolution, with a conflicting sense of isolation in the midst of the most complete physical union, and a movement “beyond touch,” and a compelling recognition of the limitations of the flesh - “no body can ever touch enough, deeply” (247).

Woven throughout this scene is a recurrent image of James’s mother, Liese - “Where was that life motionless as a knitting needle...forever cooking the same food for the same endless hungers” (243). Liv’s frustrations at the meaningfulness of her own life (her vacuous role as travel agent to monied but miserable clients in pursuit of yet another novelty), are seen juxtaposed to the harshness of Liese’s life - “what was there to it?” (244). Liese’s distinctive trait is one of constant perseverance, tending house and caring for James’s father, that, and praying - “that’s what she was doing, here, for all of us, praying” (245).

It was Liese’s belief that permeated her existence and sustained her through her trials - the family’s impoverished flight to Canada, the hardships of the farm, the family conflicts, the deaths of her children and her husband, the bargaining for favours by Wiens, her own disabilities and sensory deprivations. Through all these vicissitudes, she persevered, carrying on as best she could. When she could do no more, “she did what she could” (244). The image of Liese, blind and deaf, sitting at the window, knitting for far away children, stands in stark contrast to the image of the elderly Muttachi in The Blue Mountains of China who sits, without faith and without hope, knitting endlessly with the same wool, over and over again.

But the portrait of Liese is not without its own ambiguity. James has always adored her, while despising his father from whom he fled as a youth, but Olena, who attended his mother
after his father's death, challenges his bias, suggesting that his mother was not only strong but “hard” (124). To James's sardonic claim, “She had to be, married to him,” Olena retorts, “Maybe from the start, and he fit in” (124). About to tell him more, she “changes her mind” (125), and that is yet another issue that resists closure. But whatever his parents' relationship one to the other, Liese remains a paragon of enduring faith, who can confidently anticipate her resurrection - “Blessed are the dead who die in the faith of Christ” (the novel’s dedication). It is she, above all, who triumphs over ‘my lovely enemy.’

The conclusion of *My Lovely Enemy*, for all its baffling complexity, is perhaps at root not all that different from *The Blue Mountains of China*. In their concluding stance, James Dyck and John Reimer are both caught in what Yoder describes as “the ditch of uncertainty;” they are both “on the way...part of a movement between a past fiat and a future parousia...between an irretrievable beginning (a non-original origin) and a postponed but presupposed end” (Ward, “Derrida” 266). What distinguishes them may be a greater commitment on the part of the one, and a more wavering bewilderment on the part of the other, but each in his station is “on the way.”

Jesus may, as Jakob Friesen states, never give you “a thing to hold in your hand” (BMC 227), but, as Reimer responds, “There are things, many things that that you can’t hold in your hand” (227), and his attention and that of Dyck are directed to their encircling community. Acknowledging that one can “never really ‘understand’ about someone,” Reimer concludes, nonetheless, that “[i]t is best to believe in them as human; feel that they are alive like you and need warmth, concern” (225). Dyck, likewise, turns his attention to his loved ones, “even the ones who were no longer here” (MLE 262), and wants “to listen [them] into life” (261). He understands that “they all together had to speak or he could never say what was ready to be if only it would be spoken” (262).
"What was ready to be" seems to hang in the balance. James’s “pre-inspired words were quite gone” (261), but other voices proliferate in the concluding paragraph. There is an echo of Kroetsch - “if he could now speak the beginning he could utter the future (“Liebhaber...remembered, for the third time in his life, the future” [Crow 144-145]) - and of Ondaatje - “He wanted to listen his loved ones into life” (“I wanted to touch them into words” [Running 22]). But it is the Biblical voices that resonate most emphatically as snatches of text and allusion spill forth: “My soul waits in silence” (“My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning” [Psalm 130:5]); “To teach the stones to speak” (“if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out [Luke 19:40]); “Be still and know” (“Be still and know that I am God” [Psalm 46:10]).

“What was ready to be” returns us to the enveloping typological story wherein James’s family makes its true pilgrimage. Jesus the Christ, the Word made flesh, the antitype of all types who are “on the way,” must be grasped by the human beings who attempt to make sense of him, together. But as Marion states, our words become the Word only when the Word “says himself” (God 140), when the Word is interpreted “from the point of view of the Word” (149) - “if only it would be spoken” (MLE 262).
CHAPTER VII

A DISCOVERY OF STRANGERS (1994)

We shall often be tactical allies of some apologetic thrust, when it rejects the results of a previous too close identification of church and dominion. We may be tactical allies of the pluralist/relativist deconstruction of deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty, without making of relativism a new monism. (Yoder, Priestly 61)

This [evangelical] challenge does not prove that people at home in that other wider world view are bad. It simply brings them news. (55)

In the conclusion to his Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic (1989), a historical treatment of the tragic events of the first Franklin Expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 1819-21, Wiebe recounts Netsilik Inuit Orpingalik's explanation of his artistry to the explorer Knud Rasmussen:

Songs are thoughts sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech is not enough.

A person is moved just like the ice floe sailing here and there out in the current. Your thoughts are driven by a flowing force when you feel joy, when you feel fear, when you feel sorrow. Thoughts can wash over you like a flood, making your breath come in gasps and your heart pound. Something like an abatement in the weather will keep you thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small,
will feel even smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want shoot up of themselves - and then we get a new song. (119)

Wiebe, “rendered more and more word-less” (113), then closes his contemplations:

So I am trying to understand and accept that, and to prepare myself. To walk into the true north of my own head between stones and the ocean [a surface so narrow it is no more than a possible line for a possible balance]. If I do, I will get a new song. If I do I will sing it for you. (119)

_A Discovery of Strangers_ is this promised song. His first novel in eleven years - a novel that won for him the 1994 Governor General’s Award for Fiction - is to my mind his most beautiful song, a celebration of “the true north”¹ of his own head that in its sensitivity to joy, fear and sorrow washes over us and causes our “heart[s] to pound.” In the second essay of _Playing Dead_, Wiebe makes the telling comment, “Something beyond mere facts is being told, a truth only words, not facts can create “ (56), and five years after the publication of these essays this story-maker returns to the Franklin Expedition and, using the same documents, engages in an imaginative retelling of this chapter in the history of Canada’s north. While the story most definitely concerns the first Franklin Expedition and draws extensively from its documents, his concern is to provide another telling, one not controlled by those documents. By placing “the diamond of the document in the artificial set of the fictive situation” (UL 237), Wiebe is confident, once more, that “the truths of things can be gotten at still.”
At one level, the story sung is one of a clash of cultures, between the White explorers, who claim much knowledge, and the indigenous Tetsot’ine, “Those Who Know Something a Little.” It is a mutual discovery of otherness between the Indians who have survived many generations in these barren lands, and the Whites who desire only passage through the Indians’ land (“Before these feet felt this grain of land, they had decided it was empty....Before they had looked through this air, these heads had decided it must be cold” [4]). In exploring their encounter, Wiebe, as he has done many times before, “place[s] before the reader a complex reality that yields to no easy moralizing” (Duffy, Sounding). At another level, recalling Jeffrey’s claim that in The Blue Mountains of China the Bible “is always working just under the surface, as though history itself were really, as in typological homiletics, an ongoing fulfilment of the story begun in the Bible” (“Search” 186), we could confidently anticipate a typological reading of this ‘discovery of strangers,’ and based on our reading of other Wiebe novels do so without fear of disappointment.

From the outset, it is the young Greenstockings as representative of her people, presumably the woman referred to in Wiebe’s 1990 interview with Linda Hutcheon - “a nineteenth-century woman [of] an Indian tribe wiped out about 150 years ago” (Hutcheon, Other 85), who most influences the shape of the narrative, at both levels. In that interview Hutcheon had raised the issue about “speaking for the ‘Other’” (84), suggesting that some writers are “very nervous” about doing so. Wiebe, refusing to be apologetic in his response (“You don’t steal anything from anyone when you tell their story, you make them live” [85]), admits his responsibility and his compulsion: “Who will imagine this? Who will remember this? An ‘Other’ must. Who else?” Where John Moss is critical of “how casually Wiebe enters into Indian consciousness, male and female, young and old, at a most cataclysmic and confusing time in Native evolution,” claiming that “it must be taken that he creates their reality
according to his own design(s), quite separable from origins and actuality” (“Dreamvision” 43), Elizabeth Brewster in her discussion of native viewpoint “as represented here” (“Exploration” 23) is much more sympathetic and perceptive in her recognition: “if we don’t try to imagine one another, how do we discover one another?” Moreover, since the Tetsot’ine were wiped out by their traditional enemies the Dogrib and left no records, Wiebe is compelled more than ever to resort to an imaginative representation of Greenstockings’ story. In this admittedly fictive recreation, while Greenstockings tells little of the story herself, and the White documents consume so much of the text that her role is often obscured, once we acknowledge her importance, the story is heard differently. And once we acknowledge the typology in the telling, we begin to see totally differently - to borrow Wiebe’s statement from My Lovely Enemy, “like standing on your head in order to see the world clearer” (MLE 44-45)

Where earlier in Playing Dead the White documents controlled the telling, now the story sung must take account of Greenstockings and her people, a people that lives in a symbiotic relationship with its environment: “Where would we be without the raven and the owl, the caribou and the wolf who taught us how to hunt them, the mouse who gives us wit and small discretion, the beautiful animals, all gifts” (122). As such, then, it is also the story of the caribou who “always make it possible for human beings to live” (116), and “once or twice” may be “incarnated” as a child, of other animals “who have accepted snares as they always have” (115), of the wolves who will leave them something from a kill, and of the ravens who assist them in their search for food.

The opening chapter, “The Animals in This Country,” is fittingly an imaginative tale echoing those told by Greenstockings’ father, Keskarrah, when “animals talked like people” (18). The telling is unmistakably more sympathetic to the native than to the White, but the
identity of the speaker is not clear. While conceivably Greenstockings’ own account - at the novel’s conclusion we know that she is party to her mother and father’s “dreaming” and “thinking” - the fact that her mother, Birdseye, later in the narrative, in foretelling Hood’s fate, speaks of the silver wolf (“she details that silver wolf exactly” [147]) and the caribou (“female here and male there...against the light of an evening lake” [148]), identifies Birdseye as the most likely narrator. Indeed, the suggestive reference to the wolf’s future action - “The silver wolf may live into and perhaps through the perpetual light of summer...he may well discover the helpless trail of the few Whites....[he] may gouge and gnaw and tear from each whatever he can before their corpses harden....” (11) - suggests, in turn, that Birdseye’s account may be the controlling frame for the narrative as a whole. But in this she does not act alone but becomes the seer and voice of the whole people.

This perception is illuminated through Julie Cruikshank’s comments about the collaborative nature of native story telling in her preface to Life Lived Like a Story (1990), a work Wiebe acknowledges “stimulated” his novel. She notes that native story tellers “mobilize traditional dimensions of their culture...to explain and interpret their experiences” (x). In this light, A Discovery of Strangers is much aligned with native story telling as a collaborative activity that probes native and white symbols and traditions in a plurality of voicings that confront, juxtapose and, on occasion, simply intermingle, giving the reader what Bakhtin describes as “a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (Problems 6).

While the initial chapter may be Birdseye’s narrative, the literary basis of the story in this chapter is undoubtedly George Calef’s Caribou and the Barren-lands (1981) which contains a speculative tale of a wolf attack on a caribou herd’s northern migration, an account closely paralleled by the opening narrative. The significant alteration in Wiebe’s text concerns a life-destructive, and isolating, injury suffered by the wolf pack leader; in Calif’s story, the
white wolf leader remains both physically sound and undisputed master of his pack. In a concomitant, but seemingly minor move, Wiebe also alters the wolf's fur from white to silver - perhaps to avoid redundant identification with the Whites who also face isolation and the termination of their lives - since this wolf, on the unmistakable, and unrelenting, road to starvation, is dramatically aligned with the dead members of the expedition: "the silver wolf will recognize his death in that straggle of frozen meat briefly marking the tundra" (11). There is irony in that alignment since these Whites enter this alien land determined to remain alien. From the start, however, we have intimations of the tragic future that reveals the mutual dependence of all the inhabitants of this land. Birdseye's telling makes this point emphatically in the relentless sharing of her premonitions.

There is so much familiar in Wiebe's fictional telling of this poignant adventure in an arctic landscape, not the least of which is its rich polyphony of voices heard many times before - impatience with white arrogance and its penchant for indiscriminate naming, approbation for Native spirituality and sensitivity, imaginative blurring of fact and fiction, particularly in the use and fabrication of documents - to name but a few. But, in terms of this essay's thesis, what is most remarkable in this magnificent novel, over and above its controlling, exalted lyricism, concerns absence rather than presence, and involves an evolution of his method of indirection.

In the consideration of My Lovely Enemy it became clear that James, despite all the attention he receives, is not the pivotal figure. Instead we are compelled to see Liv, and then her mother-in-law, as most reflecting the typological paradigm, in their constant love and forgiveness. But in that novel the appearance of Jesus himself also serves as a means of direction. He it is who points us to the parable of Hosea proclaiming a love that constantly forgives and sustains, a love reflected in Liv. Now in A Discovery of Strangers, on the other
hand, there is no Jesus, nor even a less authoritative speaker, to enter the heteroglossia and point to resolution; all the characters, all the voices, are shot through with fallibility. None of them speaks with undisputed authority. Despite that, and, in a sense, because of it, A Discovery of Strangers becomes his most effective witness to the Christian faith.

In the “Acknowledgements” Wiebe emphasizes Greenstockings’ role by explicitly asserting that this is her story, and I would suggest that in this tale of fallible figures she is also the person deserving our primary attention. That contention gains support by her substantial sustaining presence throughout the novel - she appears partly to the prophetic account of the first chapter, participates with Hood in the love story at the novel’s heart, and is the resolute force at the story’s conclusion. One could argue that her response to Twospeaker’s question at the novel’s close about whose child she carries, could equally be her personal claim about the story itself: “Do you hear me?....Mine” (DOS 317). But the argument that this is her story applies most importantly to her role within Wiebe’s “larger fiction.”

Through Wiebe’s imaginative elaboration of her role and that of her people in the metaphorization of the narrative, the parable of the Good Samaritan comes to permeate the text. It is Greenstockings and her people, the Tetsot’ine, who serve to criticize the rigidity, the “logically coercive certainty” (Yoder), of the White explorers, who tailor their picture of the world to their own image, and closely align “church and dominion.” It is the pagan Greenstockings and her people, the others in a strange land, who challenge assumptions in becoming, paradoxically, the Good Samaritans to the Christian Whites who fall victim to the harshness of the arctic tundra, and Greenstockings herself who enters a transforming relationship with Midshipman Robert Hood, and in so doing witnesses to the sacrificial act of the unacknowledged Other.
In leading to this end, I begin first with an exploration of the futile attempts by the Whites to control a world they increasingly find alien or strange, then examine Wiebe’s artistic adaptation of the White documents that lead to a metaphorization of the narrative, and finally enter into the implications of the parable of the Good Samaritan as it becomes intrinsic to an understanding of the text as a whole.

The Picturesque and Strangeness

The Whites’ attempt to define and control is evident in the expedition’s artistic recreation of its travels, a record that was considered an essential part of its mandate and, as Wiebe argues, subject to external pressure. In his “Acknowledgements,” Wiebe indicates his debt to Ian MacLaren for sharing with him his research on George Back, research which was subsequently published as appendices to Arctic Artist: The Journal and Paintings of George Back, Midshipman with Franklin, 1819-1822, the third volume of Franklin expedition journals edited by C. Stuart Houston. MacLaren’s “Commentary,” in which he addresses Back’s ambivalence in both his writing and his painting to the conventions of the picturesque, the dominant aesthetic in the England of his age, when read in the context of A Discovery of Strangers, reveals the measure of that debt.

While, as MacLaren argues, the designation of a landscape as picturesque often meant no more than “it was ‘like a picture’” (287), he contends that “the essence of the picturesque was something that reminded [travellers] of the sort of landscape that characterizes the English Home Counties” (288):
a small scale topography - no huge land-forms and no endless vistas - that divided itself into foreground, the middle ground, and background. The foreground was usually an elevated point from which one could look out over a sunken middle ground and towards a background that enclosed or finished the landscape, often in a row of blue hills. Meanwhile, foliage in the form of oaks and other trees closed off one’s view to the left and right, while a meandering brook in the sunken middle ground attracted the eye from foreground to background. The mood was one of repose, the tone pastoral. Usually, this consummate picturesque effect demanded a foreground animated by people (staffage) or domesticated animals; thereby the scene was endowed with a human presence and human scale. And human figures, by being turned from the picture’s view to look into the landscape and interact with it, offered the viewer of the picture an entry into the scene on human terms. This quality helped to achieve the chief ideological thrust of the picturesque, which was that all of nature, various as it was, existed harmoniously with man and came under human control.

(287)

The underlying implicit objective is to give identifiable frame to man’s existence, to provide him with a sense of place, understanding and control. The world is simplified. It becomes familiar and intelligible - with man very much at its center.

Wiebe, impressed by MacLaren’s perceptions, introduces this search to domesticate the landscape, to exert human control over an alien land, into the heart of his novel. In the chapter bearing his name, George Back speaks specifically in terms of the picturesque:
Before the last portage of the day - around a rapid picturesque enough for any painter
- our voyageurs suddenly, as if by bad instinct, stop and cluster into a huddle beside
the canoes they have just dragged onto the rocks. (DOS 50-51)

But such a vision is rare. While the domesticated countryside of England might lend itself to
description in terms of the picturesque, where man’s presence and the effects of his labour are
very much in evidence, what is ultimately to be made of the Arctic wilderness where, as the
narrator of the first sentence of *A Discovery of Strangers* explains, “The land is so long, and
the people travelling in it so few, the curious animals barely notice them from one lifetime to
the next” (1)? Back reveals his picturesque ‘bias’ and the inadequacy of the landscape to
measure up to his demands in his judgment that “these natives live in a dreadful land with
more than enough space quite empty around them” (44).

Another term, the sublime, that identified a different aesthetic response, one central to
the Romantic movement’s impulse to travel, seems more apt for this wilderness since it speaks
of “endless vistas, huge land forms, or uniformity, which either wither the individual into a
sense of his own significance or inspire him with a sense of God’s ubiquitous majesty”
(MacLaren 289). But the sublime is so intimidating, so alienating, it is no mystery why these
nineteenth-century men, in their desire to provide themselves with a sense of place,
understanding and control, would resist it so strongly, opting even in the most unlikely
environment for that domestic aesthetic of the picturesque.

MacLaren notes that, while Back was “hard pressed to find this aesthetic exemplified in
wilderness landscapes” (287), he was “not alone” in his attempt “to render the wilderness in
picturesque terms” (288). Wiebe seizes on this, and immediately after his description of the
Indians intense expression of grief at the loss of two of their men, in a noise the expedition
members “could not order, a tintinnabulation of insanities” (DOS 61), the camera’s eye is
directed to Robert Hood:

In the last canoe, [he] had been trying all morning to capture once more, on a small piece of paper, a coherent quadrant of the world through which he was being carried. But even after an exhausting year of continually widening vistas, he was tempted to look sideways, tugged toward a periphery in the corner of his eye that, when he yielded, was still never there. (62)

Hood's desire to frame his sketch is constantly thwarted by "the moment of discovery that the continuous world was...not at all or anywhere ever the same," and yet, "his sketch must stop, must have frame," so he would provide his own, "[s]cribbling in trees where none could exist" (62). He strains to see evidence of the familiar. In the evening light, Dogrib Rock appears, initially, to give respite from the endless tundra ("the beauty of green vistas swirled like fingers over hills - in the distance imaginably the English winter downs - was beyond his hopes" [66-67]) and after Back has set the trees afire, Hood desperately perceives the flames that "flickered with beauty; and cheeriness" in terms of the picturesque as a "further touch of humanity in this surround of water and bare rock without ending" (69).

Keskarrah, who "has been given the power to know something a little" (19), and his wife, Birdseye, the dreamer, together gain insight into the essential problem. He claims, "For them the world is always wrong because they never want it to be...the way it is...before these Whitemuds got here, I think they decided how the world should be" (132). When Greenstockings seeks her parents' permission for Back and Hood to "make" her picture, she attempts to allay Birdseye's fears by saying, "It's...really no different from looking in the water...." Her mother, however, sensing a disturbing difference, counters that in a water
picture, "When you look away the picture is gone," but "the way These English make a picture...shows more...and less...." (38).

The "more" could well be the comprehension these naval artists seek. There is something 'areal' in their pictures, a static framing that imposes perception upon the subject matter. (Native grammar distinguishes between the "areal," things that appear equal in dimension and essentially motionless, and the "linear," those that seem longer than they are wide and moving [see PD 49-50].) Greenstockings glimpses that the White "draw[s] what he wants" (39). The "less" is perhaps the resultant abstraction from the pictured world itself. In contrast, Keskarrah, who is "powerful and old enough to draw the picture of the world in the sand and name a few places what they are" (20), seeks to find in the ground what is already there. His drawings, which are hesitant, because everything keeps changing, are linear. He "finds" his line maps (86) in the dust, "which is where all land lies fully and complete, though hidden" (24) and "dare[s] to draw" but "a very small picture of the land" (19).

The struggle of the Whites to impose order on what they perceive as an alien environment is revealed in Birdseye's dreaming picture of the Whitemuds ensconced in their canoes - "These heavy water-logged strangers [who] really want no land to be here, especially not this land with ice growing down into it...." (146). Her picture bears striking similarity to MacLaren's portrait of the English tourists who recited the picturesque parlance of their prized guidebooks while they operated their Claude glasses, some of which were fitted into a book's binding in order to enable the trendy viewer to turn his back on the scene, open the volume to the brownish-coloured glasses, and read the book of nature as it was framed and coloured in it like a painting. ("Commentary" 287)
Birdseye’s portrait, however, relates specifically to the officers’ approach to their scientific exercises, which, significantly, exhibits a strong parallel to their vision of their aesthetic tasks:

[they] observe the immense land pass inside the tubes they hold to their eyes, and see nothing except the folds of paper they always clutch in their hands, the tiny marks they continuously accumulate heap upon heap between straight lines, down in columns. What they lay out flat and straight and hold in their hands in these marks, which only they will know how to interpret, will be enough to guide them....Sometime, somewhere, they have decided to believe this simplicity of mark, and they will live their lives straight to the end believing that. (DOS 146-147)

Despite a confessed faith in the Almighty, the officers represent the implicit rationalism that characterized so many of their age, be it in their belief in science, their aesthetic, or the “categorical, logical clarity of preposterous faith” given expression in Hood’s father’s “absolute sermons” (237) (where man’s desire to understand domesticates the Otherness of the Gospel), or couched in the “slow, stentorian rhythm of King James, the ritual comfort of its Judeo-British confidence” (234) in Richardson’s Bible reading. All of this is at odds with Yoder’s perception of being “on the way,” and subject to his (and Wiebe’s) critique of “deceptive orthodox claims to logically coercive certainty” (Yoder, “But” 61).

Wiebe’s novel constantly challenges the picturesque and all forms of the comfortably anthropocentric. John Hepburn, whose comments reported in Joseph-Rene Bellot’s Memoirs have fueled so much speculation about what went unsaid in the official journals, is made to voice a specific disclaimer to the officers’ official aesthetic:
Hah! Life on the polar Barrens ain’t no Admiralty report, nor a thick book neither like Sir John’s, so “picturesque”, as they call all those pictures and nice words put so nicely together to cost ten guineas. (289-290)

The controlled and comforting picturesque is clearly absent from the second chapter, “Into a Northern Blindness of Names.” The unidentified third-person narrator, cognisant of the story from start to finish, immediately establishes the chapter’s alignment with the Natives, in a voice which is both ironic and temporally distanced. While maintaining some element of supposition, the narrative is punctuated with belittling judgment that incessantly condemns white arrogance:

It may be that when the naval officers returned at last from their “discovery excursion”...they did notice the snowshoes they had been given....Certainly they must sometimes have been aware of the muscled Yellowknife (as they named the Tetsot’ine) arms that supported them, kept them from collapsing on the wind-ridged surface of the (to them) nameless lake. (14)

The officers’ attempt to use their scientific knowledge for apologetic purposes fails to impress. The fallibility of such pursuits is patent in John Hepburn’s humorous account of John Franklin’s spurious attempt to use his foreknowledge of a partial eclipse of the sun (noted on his calendar) to establish the superiority of Christian over Native knowledge. The attempt was undermined, first, by the clouds which happened to obscure the occurrence and, second, by Keskarrah’s mocking perception: “If Lieutenant Franklin could foresee the passing of the
sun, how was it he did not understand the approach of winter?” (97)

As the narrative develops, it is the unfamiliar that increasingly asserts itself, gradually forcing the officers, generally against their will, to sense the inadequacy of their vision. A case in point is Wiebe’s description of the emotional episode on the island following the deaths of two Indians. In his account, which is a brilliant example of his use of free indirect speech to reveal the narrative’s double-voicing, the Whites are forced into yet another discovery of strangeness in this alien land: what they experience escapes their understanding because it challenges and violates their aesthetic, their ethic, their distaste for and fear of the excesses of the flesh, and their controlling sense of utility. The episode, preceeded by the sceptical questioning of Keskarrah’s understanding of their need for trees to build the fort, is followed by Hood’s attempt to capture “a coherent quadrant of the world” in his drawings. Flagged by the adverb “here” (61) and the interjected “...ah yes” and deepened by an imaginative juxtaposition of sight and sound in “above the swing of paddles,” the text establishes point of view (the officers’) while voicing narratorial distancing.

What Hood pursues later with his pencil - to make sense of what he experiences - the officers collectively now attempt through language. The noise of the paddles, which is the only sound on the “glacial water” of this “calm lake,” is gradually interrupted by the strangeness of another sound which “they could not order.” The diction of attempted description - “a tintinnabulation of insanities” (associated with the tintinnabulant fancies of Edgar Allan Poe in “The Bell” [1831] but of earlier usage) is specific but numbing. The onomatopoeia of tintinnabulation (Latin, bell, f. tintinnare to ring + -bulum suffix of instrument), which recreates but does not explain, is met by incomprehending judgment.

The island is first perceived as a “hump” - as of a whale, as we are told later - and the ensuing vision of motion is then couched in terms of tentative description: “things thrown up,
or leaping. Shapes skipping erratically....people flailing...jumping wildly....” (DOS 61). The officers venture some assumptions (significant in terms of later assumptions regarding Michel): “It must be their Indians since no one else could be there.” Back grasps at understanding, interpreting what he sees as the effect of too much rum: “Carnival,” he shouts. Later, Richardson is convinced that it is “a witches’ or (more likely) a devils’ sabbath” (63). The sound is finally recognised “as wailing, as aboriginal dirge” (61), but it is the translator St. Germain who must interpret the event for them: “Somebody for sure dead” (63).

As St. Germain again explains, the drowning of two Yellowknife braves has caused the people to engage in sacrificial grieving to purge themselves, by making themselves “poor” (64). Through the sacrifice of their possessions, animate or inanimate (“lodgepoles being broken and skins ripped, kettles crushed, axes splintered, dogs throats being slit and everything, any thing or animal that came to hand, smashed and torn and bleeding, being flung everywhere into the lake” [63]), they attempt to escape the bonds of the things that hold them.

For Georges Bataille, what is perceived in the novel as “the necessity of destruction” (DOS 63), is an endeavour to “restore a lost value through a relinquishment of that value” (Religion 48). Their possessions are sacrificed in order to rescue them “from all utility” (49) which is bound up with the world of things and individuality. They separate themselves from this apparently real world to return themselves to “the intimacy of the divine world.” The tears the living shed so copiously are “a keen awareness of shared life grasped in its intimacy” (48).

As Bataille explains, such acts which are “concerned only with the moment” give an impression of “puerile gratuitousness” (45), and that is how the Indian sacrifice is interpreted by the Whites. They are totally astounded. Given his “reverence for life” (DOS 64), Franklin attempts to stop the destruction and killing. When St. Germain “knock(s) up his arm” and
urges him to hide what he can, Franklin, in turn, urges the Indians not to destroy their guns
“given them by their Great Father in England, who would be very angry if his gifts were
destroyed” (64). (Evident in this is what Yoder describes as the “too close identification of
church and dominion” [Priestly 61] which limits Franklin’s ability to perceive the
dehumanizing role possessions may play and the need to free oneself from their insidious
control.) Franklin then mistakenly interprets their compliance as one of gratitude, “believing
he understood something profound at last “ (64). Richardson is rendered virtually speechless.
Feeling “lost as in a vacant ship on an empty ocean” (65), and groping in vain for a “suitable”
English word, he must content himself with the sterile and emotionless “intemperate” (65).
From a brief moment in which this reserved British officer and scientist “almost wish[ed] it
were possible for him to wail as they did” (65), he quickly reverts to his accustomed
rationality and dispassionate duty - “These people have mourned before, and they still live”
(65).

Greenstockings, for her part, may experience the release of “all the accumulating weight
of stolid living” (72) - she “had come out of the long paroxysm of community grief as
powerfully cleansed as she always was” (72-73). But for the Whites, conditioned to thinking
in terms of utility, this is something they could neither entertain nor care to understand; the
destructive acts of the mourning Yellowknives were clearly without productive purpose.
Further, Richardson, taking “the useless husk of [a] canoe in hand,” refuses to accept an
obvious responsibility for heightening Indian acquisitiveness that, in turn, heightened their
need for purging - “‘They contracted to hunt for us, that cannot harm them’“ (66). Instead,
he perceives the destruction as not only an outright waste of useful objects and animals, but
also as a threat to the very survival of the mourners, to say nothing of the expedition itself.
For the "properly regulated minds" (143) of these English explorers who struggle to make sense of their world and to approach it systematically and rationally, the grief and attendant waste they encounter is not only "unimaginable" (66) but totally mindless. But this was but one example of experiences that increasingly overwhelm them. In place of the known, the understandable, they are relentlessly confronted by the strange, the unimaginable. "Strange" or "stranger" punctuate the entire novel; there is barely a page where they do not surface, as the narrative constantly questions accepted perceptions, encouraging an openness in the reader to see things differently: "to see and hear things [they] have not experienced before" (ACW 40).

The local inhabitants, in turn, see their world change; it becomes strange to them as well. The animals on the first page are confronted by the "strange noises, bits of shriek and hammer" the Whites make upon their arrival - "These were strangers, so different" (1). For the Indians, there was a time when all they thought about was "of People, and of animals and coming weather, and food, and the prevention and curing of possible illness," but with the coming of the whites, "a fireball smashed through the sky," and things are "[s]trangely, for ever, different" (17). For Greenstockings, and we remember that this is her story, what she has to tell is "a story of a stranger, of danger coming and going" (21): people who look strange (with skin that, despite appearances, "is not at all hard," and hair that "is crinkled light brown, not black and hard and straight" [21]), strange names ("As if they had no stories in them" [39]), and a strange language ("these incredible pointed words hissed into the coming-winter air, which are as strange in the mouth, or the ears, of a woman as anything these English have dragged into their country " [36]). When the whites inadvertently burn down the trees across the river from the site of Fort Enterprise, the translator, St. Germain, exclaims, "It is strange....All those trees have never burned themselves for us," and Keskarrah
prophetically responds, “It will get stranger....” (70).

There are also intimations that these Whites, blind as well as arrogant, are not harmless, as they, in passing, infect the Indians, not only with a Whitesickness “of blisters and bleeding perhaps,” but also with their most insidious sickness - “the sickness they bring is a spirit, of things” (269) - their “civilized” desire, not for passage, but for possessions: “They must want more than they need. That is civilization” (59). White ‘success’ is assured when Broadface, Greenstockings’ companion, is so wrapped up in slitting “the endless throats and bellies” of the animals that fall easy prey to the Whiteman’s guns that he forgets to “remember[ ] to lift his head for a breath of gratitude” (116). But Bigfoot (Wiebe plays with our colloquial “foot in mouth”), whom the Whites mistakenly perceive as the Indians’ “boss,” is the prime victim: “These English have made him by turns either foolishly arrogant or obsequious, either superbly dignified or fawning without seeming comprehension” (134). Even Keskarrah, the purported ‘man of wisdom,’ is not immune to White influence. He claims to guard Greenstockings in Hood’s portrayal of her, but is less protective of his wife, succumbing to the alleged magic of Richard Sun’s salve to heal her cancerous nose: “He is so strangely, thoughtlessly content about the salve” (118). (Curiously, he seems momentarily to have forgotten what he later recollects, that in his childhood some tribes infected by the Whites were killed “by a blistering, bleeding sickness that no medicine could stop” [264]).

Greenstockings recognizes that, despite his protestations about white power, he is at times as blind as they. He supposes that the sun “through glass” (78) deceives the Whites, but does not perceive “the truth of that grand deceiver” (80) in his dealings with the doctor - “if he does not believe in the power of These English, why does he go every day to Richard Sun for another portion?” (79).
But surely the most extraordinary aspect of the novel concerns signs. The entire novel is an elaborate semiotic study of the strangeness revealed in the cultural confrontation between the white English-speaking explorers and the Yellowknife natives. Ample evidence convinces that the semiotic and cultural gap is not readily bridged. In addition to all the basic language problems, exemplified particularly in the chapter “Entering Exhaustion” where Hood, visiting Greenstockings in her family tent, acknowledges that “neither he nor they understand a single sound either can utter” (82), the meaning of any sign can be misconstrued; indeed, the making of signs itself falls under suspicion. In an amusing instance of miscommunication, Wiebe reports Franklin’s decision to set fire to some of the brush to signal Bigfoot (he “understands smoke”) that the Whites “are coming to help them off the island” (68). When Bigfoot does meet up with them, after the “signal” has “metamorphosed” all “their magnificent green prospect south...into a hideous waste,” he asks from the context of his own sign-system, “Who is dead?” (69).

Although the focus rests primarily on the Whites and the Indians, there is one particular vignette concerning the attendant voyageurs that significantly presages the novel’s semiotic development, to a degree disproportionate to its brevity. Back, having noted Franklin’s insistence that, although they “understand not a single word of English save curses,” the daily Scripture readings “must have a beneficial effect” on the voyageurs, appears to mock his leader in his appended comment - “he alone remaining steadfast in such Christian hope” (54). This remark is surely fraught with an abundance of interpretive baggage. For Back, who is at times inclined to be critical of Franklin’s leadership, such an expectation is clearly delusory since an inability to understand the words would preclude any possibility of comprehension. While surprising in terms of Franklin’s normal rationality, it is judged as but further evidence of his exaggerated piety and his “implacable optimism” (60). Certainly such an expectation
was alien to the kind of reasonable Christianity to which Back would subscribe. If this incident were totally isolated, it might be appropriate to dismiss it as simply Wiebe’s identification of a humorous anomaly in Franklin’s character, but it is actually a foretaste of other strangeness the Whites will face that is even more disconcerting.

Dominant assumptions are also assailed in Wiebe’s exploration of naming, as the novel foregrounds fundamental differences between the White and Indian cultures in their attribution of names. The Yellowknives judge the apparent goal of the Whites, “their grand attempt to rename the entire country” (13), as offensive and pretentious. Their own narratorial bias and judgment are revealed in the use of the word “rename,” since, as is said later, “Of course, every place already was its true and exact name” (24), even that, to the Whites, “nameless” lake (14).

From a Yellowknife perspective, naming appears too easy for the Whites; they simply and indiscriminately impose whatever name comes to mind, “whatever sound slips from their mouths” (22). (Here we are reminded of Maskepetoon’s complaint in My Lovely Enemy, that the White names do not mean anything.) Greenstockings is amused but bewildered by the names of Back and Hood: they seem to mean something, but it is “[a]s if they had no stories in them” (39).

On the other hand, for Birdseye (who is able to see into the future, her name thus meaning something) and Keskarrah, to know is to name. Between them “they know the land, each name a story complete in their head,” but a story “greater than any person or two could comprehend” (24). The names are waiting there, “all waiting to be breathed out again” (25). Keskarrah painstakingly reveals to Hood, not the ‘real’ name of the lake that the Whites “unseen...had already agreed to call “Winter” (60), but what should lead to its proper naming:
"The lake that you named 'Winter' is really a fish with its head to the east and its tail whipping up the froth of rapids just below us....This great lake fish is trying to swim away east, as fish generally do, against the current. You can see that clearly by walking around the lake.... that giant fish tries to swim east, but these giant trees hold it back....If you drew the lake as it is you would have to see the fish, and you could name it correctly. That is, if you wanted to." (86-87)

He cautions, however, that since the Whites have destroyed the trees, the fish may escape, suggesting that this change would obviously also change the name of the lake.

Since the Indians, whose perception of the world is from their perspective simple and coherent, expect so much more from a name, they are more vulnerable than the Whites to any alterations in the naming process. The dislocation for them is particularly severe because they are open and susceptible to other systems. The Whites, however, who seem to have heard "only their own telling" (15) and, in their arrogance, are "basically enclosed within their own certainty," remain untouched. Thick English steps onto the land as if he owns it. He and his entourage do not bother to learn native names; they simply impose their own. Some of the women upon whom they were dependent for "spliced meat and tanned hides" simply remained nameless. Greenstockings, obviously named for the stockings Hood gave her, loses her native name - it "vanished from every memory, even it seemed from Birdseye, who bore her and named her first" (17), but she has perceived through the stories of her father and the trial of her own life that actually "her name is She Who Delights" (198).

The Yellowknife belief in names also misleads them when confronted by someone like Dr. Richardson, whose name can be seen to mean something. "Richard Sun," through his
strong name, is perceived to have some connection with the power of the sun itself; his name causes Keskarrah to believe the man himself has power over life and death, and mistakenly justify entrusting his wife’s health to the expected magical powers of the doctor’s salve. It blinds him to the salve’s inherent danger - “As if that bit of White they are given everyday for [Greenstockings’] fingertips to spread might not be as lethal for People as instruments and dreamlessness” (78). It is only much later that he senses the danger, and acknowledges the potential deception in a Whiteman’s name.

Wiebe does not naively suggest, however, that misinterpretation of signs is restricted to those of different cultures, nor to intentional signs. There is a magnificent prophetic insert revealing semiotic blindness in Franklin’s perception of Hood’s visits to Keskarrah’s lodge. Hood takes off with his pencil and papers, and the Lieutenant draws his own conclusions - “Lieutenant Franklin will decide that his conscientious youngest officer is off for another session of sketching the natives” (142). While Hood is certainly off to draw a picture of Greenstockings, what Franklin fails to recognize is that the motivation for this sketch is not, as he believes, to provide “an essential element” for the book Franklin is contemplating writing, but to draw himself into intimacy with this woman who has become his obsession. Obsessed with his own concerns, Franklin misreads his midshipman’s intentions because he does not know that Hood has already escaped his knowledge, and that the man “he sees disappear...has, in fact, left him; vanished for ever” (143).

Misreading is a constant hazard for the Whites who make their way across the arctic tundra, including some who begin to think they know one another. Richardson, for example, who “assumed that in their suffering together [he and Hood] had already spoken of everything necessary,” and that starvation was “their complete and mutual confessor,” is compelled to realize that Hood remains a stranger to him - “truly there are more things in heaven and on
The repeated confrontation of the otherness of the other invokes a recognition of parallels with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. The tendency for the regulated mind to presuppose that truth exists within the self ("the tranquil identity of the same" [Totality 203]), and to constantly attempt to reduce the other to the same, is shattered by the encounter with the face. The face "tears consciousness up from its center, submitting it to the Other" (207) and constantly ruptures continuity and sameness, putting into question "the brutal spontaneity of one’s imminent destiny" (203). It is in the "alterity of the Other...whom I do not conceive by relation to myself, but confront out of my egoism" (121) that I gain knowledge of myself.

(For both Levinas and Wiebe, this acknowledgement of the other which is not reducible to the same is effected through the encounter with the Totally Other whom we encounter "on the way.") This novel is a relentless attack on those who would wrest sameness out of strangeness, to reduce the other to the same for purposes of comprehension and control.

What is particularly special about the relationship between Greenstockings and Hood, as we shall see, is that, although they encounter one another in terms of the greatest intimacy, they remain strangers to one another, in a relationship which is constantly one of discovery.

Their intimate love story, the novel’s primary discovery of strangers and Wiebe’s continuing celebration of the flesh, arises out of contemplation and distance but is consummated in the heat of physical intimacy. Greenstockings is at the age of fifteen already well-experienced, having lived willingly with two men before her present companion Broadface. She well knows that for the men of her tribe, as Birdseye states, "women are places to go," and Keskarrah adds, "the place of living and men want to be there too." While finding assurance in their embrace, she is repulsed by their forceful possessiveness, as they constantly stand over her, always above her. They may gently guide a canoe through troubled
waters, but they seemingly have no sense of tenderness. She well remembers the
knife-stabbing pain and her own rage at the thrust of Broadface’s first attack upon her:

in an instant he had thrust himself so savagely into her that she lost every awareness
except scream and a sharp, cutting agony that sliced, circled through her like a knife
stabbing past any intimation of pleasure. (74)

In her discovery of the two young English midshipmen, she senses a difference, but
quickly learns that one of them, Back, is not unlike her Indian pursuers; he is but another lover
of force and conquest: women are to be assailed, boarded, and subdued. Constantly aware of
his roving and possessive eye, she expertly cools his ardour and thwarts his
attempt to take her by force with a swish of her knife.

But, then, in Hood she discovers a man who truly is a stranger: “he asks nothing,
demands nothing, forces nothing to happen even with his possible male domineering” (161).
But Hood is a stranger not only to her but to his fellow officers as well. Richardson,
convinced that he and his young companion have, through the horrors of their starvation trek,
fully opened themselves one to another, is shaken when readings from Leviticus prohibiting
the uncovering of familial nakedness cause Hood, incongruously, to break into laughter, and
then, in a whisper, to ask about a daughter or son’s nakedness. The Doctor is immediately
suspicious of some “childhood abomination” (245). Further, hints of sexual abuse during
Hood’s nine years in the “dedicated debauchery of life at sea” in the Royal Navy arise through
a juxtaposition of Hood’s song to Greenstockings, “you are such a woman...any sea captain
would forget his cabin boys and the palm trees of Africa” (87), and Back’s earlier judgment
that “he must have been as pretty a boy as any captain could wish for, but he will confess to
me nothing but duty and Bible reading” (55).

In the end, however, on closer reading, we are left with the impression that Richardson’s suspicions are a misreading of Hood’s concerns for his unborn child. Presumed understanding has again been misled. The intriguing hints about Hood’s possible naval experience notwithstanding, the innocence Hepburn evidences in Hood, “which would have been amazing in a priest” (102), may perhaps be genuine. Attempts to read some sexual aberration into an understanding of this restrained English midshipman, tantalize, but then come to nothing. Somehow this seemingly frail, otherworldly youth has survived the nine years at sea without misadventure, and there is no evidence to support a charge of sexual abuse in his childhood.

Clearly, in his dealings with Greenstockings he shows nothing but tender innocence. His initial desire of discovery (although unconsciously exploitive) is aesthetic; he desires to uncover more of her so he can draw her better. The continuation of his undemanding innocence leaves her marvelling throughout at his strangeness - “this stranger whom she sometimes believes she can understand”:

when he isn’t there in the red, smoky warmth of the lodge she moves effortlessly, turns, works in what she comprehends to be the memory of his gentle tenderness, the kind of undemand he offers her humming a desire within her...strange...strange. (161)

His otherworldliness gives the appearance that he has lived his twenty-two years unmarked by the world through which he passes so silently.

Nonetheless, being raised “into ritual goodness” in the “familial decorum” of the Bury manse, a youthful participant in a “parade of Anglican clerical perfection” (244), has left an enduring, restrictive mark upon him. He is the dutiful child of a generation reared to worship
man's ability to order his existence, aesthetically, scientifically, religiously, and sexually. Rational comprehension is the goal, and man is confident that through rigorous observation, notation, compilation and interpretation he will succeed in understanding and controlling both himself and his environment. Through his rational will he will escape the denigration and limitation of his fallible flesh which is essentially evil and must be purged through the rigour of strict religious practice; all this to the enhancement of his indominal spirit. Hood, a dutiful disciple of his age, appears clad in all its rationalistic assumptions.

In the chapter "Entering Exhaustion," as Birdseye "begins to sleep towards the future" (145) foretelling the tragic fate of the expedition's return from the "inexorable ice," Greenstockings and Hood are represented as "both bent forwards but aware only (she thinks, he thinks) of each other side by side" (160). Their relationship, shot through with incomprehension - as in earlier meetings, "the meanings of their two incomprehensible languages pass each other unscathed in the close warmth of these hide walls" (82) - becomes increasingly intimate. They revel in that incomprehension; it bestows on both a delightful sense of unaccustomed liberty. Greenstockings is freed by his quiet and patience. Where he rejoices in the expression of his thoughts, "knowing no one will ever know he thought this, leave alone said aloud any English word into this north air" (88), the occasion is, for her, an opportunity "to tell him anything, whatever has always been unspeakable" (160).

Hood, after "[y]ears of latitudes and distance, of darkness, of cold and the secret constructs of language," has, through his contact with Greenstockings, "fallen into freedom." (To which Wiebe adds a nice touch of paranomasia for this midshipman - "Unfathomably" [83]). Predictably, for Greenstockings, his attempts to capture her through his art have failed ("the futility of that repeating pencil") because she is always "different again" (88). When his pencil, dropped and forgotten, is devoured by the tent fire, he finally recognizes that, "led
astray by her exact edge,” he will discover her only by “uncovering” (87) her. He becomes aware of and enveloped in all his senses - “all thought, all necessary decision, all duty gone” (158). He escapes all the required journals, reports, all the words of his duty-bound life. He is free to say what he will and will what he says.

The comprehensive fabric of the restrictive garment of rationalistic assumptions begins to fray and unravel in his increasing intimacy with Greenstockings. We have seen him struggle with the aesthetic presumptions of the picturesque, and now he quickly reaches the point that he does not want to understand what she says because the very demand for understanding has become an unbearable burden. To escape the force of that compulsion is the liberation he seeks:

The freedom of watching, of listening with incomprehension, fills him with staggering happiness: all the reports they are duty-bound to write, the daily journal, the data piled in columns upon page after page - but in this warm place thick with indescribable smells there is no listable fact, not a single word. Never. Simply the insatiable influx of eye and uncomprehending, musical ear, of fingertips and skin. As if time could be eaten out of her hand, ingested and lived into one enveloping physical containment, all thought, all necessary decision, all duty gone. Vanishment. (158)

The warmth and comfort of the flesh envelop the two of them, she “listening to his happiness,” as he “speaks softly” to her “only to encourage the rhythm of her voice” (161). They are bound one to the other; “her happiness begins to dance with him” (162). In their freedom, they both explode with laughter and, in common expression of their disparate, innermost longing, burst into mutually incomprehensible song. The freedom of their
explorations, both physical and mental, transports them through the variable country of their minds, providing blissful delight in the privacy of their own thoughts. Neither one comprehending the other, or what is happening between them, they become one in the liberating intimacy of this primitive lodge - "the Bury manse stone chimneys suddenly as trivial as twigs" (171).

Hood’s halting attempt to ladle her hot blood-soup, heavy with "all the sweet and bitter parts" (158) so repugnant to these English, into "her wet, open mouth" with the crafted silver spoon emblematic of the distant Bury manse, evokes the strange contradiction of their unlikely union: "as if English silver could ever place that savage concoction acceptably on white linen" (168). But Greenstockings’ feeding, the hot blood-soup, the "crafted silver spoon," and memories of the Bury manse coupled with the Biblical assertion that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (176), come to evoke for this reader an image of the eucharistic chalice at St. Mary’s Anglican church and the mystery words of Institution and Administration, "Take, eat: this my Body....This is my blood" (Mark 14:22-24).

As in My Lovely Enemy, the role of the flesh is key to an understanding of A Discovery of Strangers. The pronounced physicality of the union between Greenstockings and Hood, set over against the formal correctness of the senior officers is presented as a source of developing awareness and sustenance as Wiebe continues his repudiation of the neoplatonic denigration of the flesh.

But in this chapter of discovery, it is the thread of Birdseye’s telling that holds the story together, as her daughter and Hood drift through their individual streams-of-consciousness. Amazingly, and at times shockingly, these streams often not only run together but intersect with the mother’s narrative. Words, images or themes are snatched one from the other and transformed. When the silver wolf of the opening chapter, for example, enters her story in this
chapter, it trots across the tundra of her mind, and steps into Hood’s dream world. When he tries to capture it in his drawing, a tug of the raven’s quill frozen in his inkwell shoots its jaw away, and it appears in Greenstockings’ eyes (his own reflection, perhaps?) as she admonishes him to live in harmony with the raven and the wolf: “they have always been our sisters and brothers, we never kill them. They will feed you too, if you are careful and let them” (173). Thus, Birdseye’s story and their dreams intermesh while retaining their independence.

But then, abruptly, the peace of their contemplations is shattered, and this already strange world is mysteriously upended by Birdseye’s sudden utterance of sounds that neither mother nor daughter can comprehend, but which provoke “unavoidable understanding” (180). Her “spastic” shaping of the words, her transformative echo of Hood’s recitation of the story of Cock Robin’s death, in English, now tolling Hood’s own death, “force him into stupefaction” (179), and rouse the sleeping Keskarrah to echo Bigfoot’s earlier question, “Who is dead”? (179). Indian incomprehension of the words is matched by Hood’s inability not to understand. While he struggles to resist the unmistakable message, “as if two years of labouring to reach the ends of the world he has arrived there in time to find what he most hated already waiting for him,” the women - “as if they understood where Hood knows nothing” (179) - scream from fear.

Wiebe might be seen to challenge the Saussurian assumption (or more particularly that of his followers) that restricts words to a symbolic function, that perceives the relationship between the signifier and the signified as arbitrary, a convention that must be learned. He might appear to be claiming an iconic (onomatopoeic) relation between particular sounds and the meanings they carry, which would enable one to grasp the meaning of an alien tongue simply from the sound. But most certainly he is engaged in a rebuke to an insensitivity to the mysteries of language that, for example, would dismiss out of hand Franklin’s seemingly
misguided expectations regarding the reading of Scripture in English to the Francophone voyageurs.

Wiebe, who challenges Modernist polarities, truly believes that in the Incarnation the Word became flesh. Marion, as we have seen, claims “an incarnation in our words can be undertaken only by the Word” (God 141). Christ “abolishes... the gap between the sign and the referent...that elsewhere the human experience of language dissociates” (140). The mystery of language is His mystery, not ours to understand or limit. Wiebe, by entertaining the possibility that the sense of words of an alien language can somehow be communicated in the context of physical intimacy, challenges conventional semiotic assumptions, and does so in his faith in the Word. Thus for him, Greenstockings and Hood, despite their lack of knowledge of one another’s language, can come to understand one another, can through language as well as the flesh discover one another.

But perhaps it is an appreciation of mystery of any kind that Wiebe feels is threatened by the Whites’ pseudo-Christian closed-mindedness. In his early Goshen article, he asserts that “[t]he artist...must be exploring new areas, saying new things, giving new perspectives, saying old things in new ways that jar us out of our stupor” (ACW 47). And here within the confines of Keskarrah’s lodge, he draws on Biblical precedence both in the ‘confounding’ brought about by the diversity of language in the aftermath of the tower of Babel (Genesis 3:7) and in the marvel of communication for diverse tongues in response to the apostles’ preaching at Pentecost: “how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:8).

Wiebe’s openness to new perspectives within A Discovery of Strangers is constantly reflected in his treatment of the strange. Franklin, despite his willingness to subject the French speaking voyageurs to English readings of the Bible, would, we are told, “refuse to consider [Birdseye’s capacity to foresee the fate of the expedition], as being “un-Christian” (DOS 143).
But Wiebe, working from his typological heritage where there is an abundance of prophecy and fulfillment, and wonders of communication, vigorously attempts to break through our close-mindedness, to challenge presumptions about language and underlying epistemological claims, and to promote an openness to the possibilities of the strange, an openness to the signs and mysteries of the the Native, and our own contemporary, world.

**Document and Art**

To this point in considering Wiebe’s telling of the discovery of Indian and White strangers, we have noted his challenge to the dominant White account of the Franklin expedition through the introduction of a distinctively Indian voice. We have followed his lead in examining other texts in order to enter his imaginative exploration of what is occurring within the official record, identified the constant Biblical presence that works “just under the surface,” and highlighted his probing of the strange which constantly eludes our control and comprehension. Now our attention is directed to the relation between the documents which serve as the basis for his writing and his artistry in dealing with them, since at crucial instances his approach to the documents alters in his promotion of a typological telling of the story.

In his insightful 1979 essay “From Document To Art,” W.J. Keith substantiates his claim that Wiebe in his use of historical documents is engaged in “drawing from an existent document the implicit artistic effect which the original writer lacked the necessary imagination or language to reveal” (106). Through omissions and embellishments, Wiebe seizes on what has proven most significant, heightening its dramatic effect. As Keith clearly shows, while there is often little to distinguish Wiebe’s account in terms of subject-matter, “in terms of artistry, the difference is between talent and genius” (118): “Wiebe’s adaptation loses nothing
of substance but gains considerably in emotional impact” (118). This use of his artistic genius is clearly evident in this present novel.

Beyond that, and I think most importantly for Wiebe, his imaginative recreation, his rewriting of history, is motivated for him by other considerations. While John Moss, in his review of A Discovery of Strangers, goes too far in claiming that “Authenticity and historical insight are quite beyond the point” (“Exploration” 43), since the latter, if not the former, is to my mind unquestionably at least part of Wiebe’s concern, Moss is right that Wiebe does not write “historical fiction.” Wiebe himself describes what he writes as “meditation[s] on the past” (Wiebe in Reimer and Steiner, “Translating” 129). These meditations involve an exploration of the known material that enables him to probe its complexity from past, present and future vantage points.

In the 1980 Neuman interview, when attention is drawn to the interpenetration of temporal planes in The Scorched-Wood People (1977) and connections are made with Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (1970), Wiebe responds that that kind of organization “works especially well in a story about Riel because everybody knows what happened to Riel” (UL 240). But certainly the same can be said of his story concerning the Franklin expedition. Here as with Riel “[t]here isn’t any suspense about what’s going to happen.” The position is assumed, right from the beginning, that, as with Riel, the fate of the White explorers (but not that of the Indians, I might add) is already known. In both novels, the story’s parameters are well defined - from its beginning we are made aware of its end - with the perspective pivoting, as in García Márquez’s work, on the word “later” in the opening sentence:
Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice. (One 1)

Sixteen years later Louis Riel would be dressing himself again, just as carefully.

(SWP 10)

The lake they named after her, later, was no more than an infinitesimal detail in their grand attempt to name the entire country. (DOS 13)

What we then get from all three novels is a meditation on what is already known to have occurred in the indicated historical time frame, the events being culled from the narrators’ memory. But, while in The Scorched-Wood People Pierre Falcon has seen the whole story before it is told, and in One Hundred Years Melquiades has seen it not only before it is told but even before it has happened, in A Discovery of Strangers, not only is the story clearly known before its telling, but a significant part of the novel concerns the foretelling by Birdseye of what we already know to have taken place.

In such an instance where the story is already well-known, Wiebe’s oft-repeated dictum (in his essay on Grove [“Novelist’s” 193], for example) that the facts are less important than what is made of them, is most evident. He does not try to reinvent the facts, but attempts to capture the things done, which tend to “vanish with their doing” (193), and reveal their truth in his imaginative creation, a structure which he admits is deliberately “made.”

This story provides a further vision of that process, as its participants anticipate, experience and reflect back on the historical events, and then anticipate once more. Keskarrah argues that stories are “like ropes”: “They pull you to incomprehensible places....a story can
tangle you up so badly you start to think different” (DOS 125-127). He also says of Birdseye’s prophetic story of the Whites’ tragedy, that, “the story is telling itself backwards” (152). While these Whites want the straight story, a unified linear telling, Wiebe’s novel mimics Indian telling, as it begins from what is known of the end, and constantly circles forwards and backwards, telling and retelling, but with a difference. More particularly, it reflects the movement of Biblical typology beneath its surface. As is the case in Heilsgeschichte, salvation history, the reader is forced to rehear familiar words and recognize familiar patterns, but always with a difference, as the telling takes its course.

As the story expands, providing more points of view, more pieces of information, the mystery deepens, and comprehension constantly eludes the reader’s grasp. And as the narration circles the known and the imagined, the interpretive process becomes seemingly endless. In this novel, the history is constructed then deconstructed by the various points of view, expressed through the changing narrators, the authors of the inserted reports, and the characters in action, which confirm, are slightly at odds with or in outright disagreement with, one another.

Depending on the context, even comments from the same character may be, not only stylistically different, but also in substantial disagreement. A classic instance occurs in the comments of seaman John Hepburn. The chapter bearing his name is devoted to a formal testament, allegedly made to his “Lordships,” recounting the events leading up to a defused duel between Back and Hood. Hepburn expresses his concern that this “confidential” report be couched in language “properly composed and written for your Lordships’ consideration” (DOS 95). That this could be more than a reflection on his limited erudition becomes clear later in Doctor Richardson’s admission that “[i]n his [own] report he will arrange and edit [the facts] properly, as always, so they will make proper and decent acceptable sense,” and that, if
he cannot do so, then “the notes must be burned” (247), allowing that “[t]hings have taken place that would not be understood properly” (247-248). In his own formal report, Hepburn takes care to align his claims with those of Franklin (“As Sir John writes in his book” [98], “Sir John noted” [99]). Further, in his mention of Hood’s death - “Mr. Hood did not die beautifully. Death did not carry him peacefully into eternity” - he chooses not to elaborate on the officers’ reports: “You have that story in your reports from the officers. I corroborate what they say. Let them stand” (108).

But in a later account, formally unattributed, ostensibly made while serving in Australia, Hepburn, speaking in what Keith finds a “hopelessly unconvincing” (note to writer) Orkney dialect, is far from cautious as he takes issue with Richardson’s report, particularly in terms of Michel Terrahaute’s death: “That’s right. The Doctor cannot lie, I tell you he doesn’t. But you think he just walks up to that big bastard with a loaded pistol....Life on the polar barrens ain’t no Admiralty report” (289). He is much more critical of the officers generally, and offers his own version of the facts. For example, where earlier he spoke of Back’s “superhuman effort that would save some of our lives a year later” (110) in locating the Indians and their supplies when the remnant of the expedition was on the brink of starvation (a claim Back also makes for himself in his poem), he now acknowledges that it was Solomon Bélanger who “found the Indian track for Mr. Back that saved us all” (287) - a point MacLaren makes in his essay - and Back becomes “a raunchy little midshipman.” Where Hepburn earlier said of Franklin that “his thoughts [were] concerned with nothing but the performance of his Christian duty and service to His Majesty’s Government” (101), he now belittles him as believing the voyageurs “died because they cursed so much” (288), and charges that these men under Franklin’s command “were just worked to death” (289).
But which account is to be believed? Where earlier Hepburn had many reasons to abide by the official statements, his later comments may be motivated by personal grudges, least of which is that these English officers “live to come home an’ every one of them quick as winking Knights of the Garter an’ famous” (286), while his own role goes largely unrecognized. Here as elsewhere, Wiebe in his questioning of historical reporting is not concerned to replace one certainty with another, but to recognize the subjectivity and imprecision of the process generally, and to point out the rigidity of the officers’ thinking. Desperate to ‘know,’ they remain entrenched in the certainty of their own perceptions, even when they themselves ‘fudge’ the facts.

In his review of *A Discovery of Strangers*, Moss makes the further claim that “the Indians in this novel...are remarkable creations, as are Franklin and his men, but they exist entirely as projections of the author’s own sensibility” (“Dreamvision” 43). This assessment has some merit in terms of the Indians who are historically speechless, having left no personal record of their discovery of these Whitemen, and Moss’s point may be acknowledged in the following assertion:

The success of Wiebe’s Indians as figures in a fiction is that they inhabit a thoughtful, white, late-twentieth-century middle-aged male’s imagining of what the world might have been if he had been its creator - as, indeed, he is. (43) (See note 2)

But, by also including Franklin and his men as “entirely” Wiebe’s creation, Moss distorts Wiebe’s work. The Whites are definitely not speechless and a record of their thoughts remain since most of them kept journals, parts of which enter into Wiebe’s creation. As Wiebe notes in his prefatory comments, extensive quotations from the journals of Robert Hood and John
Richardson, "some with minor arrangement," are inserted between chapters. As a close examination of these insertions and the original journals reveals, while there are often more than "minor arrangements" - paraphrases, omissions, temporal licence, stylistic adjustments, and one seemingly of Wiebe's own creation - there is little substantive alteration of the historical texts.

What is of primary import here are the particular excerpts Wiebe chooses to include. As both Roy Pascal and Bakhtin contend, the very selection accents the voice of the given narrative. From the five excerpts from Hood's journal, the picture we are given of the voyageurs is decidedly uncomplimentary. While giving lip-service to their suffering - "few could have borne the hardships they endured without murmuring" (57) - Hood censures them for their "very ill timed" (57) complaints. They are portrayed in "ludicrous postures" (40) and slow-witted: "an uncommon exertion of thought for Canadians" (12); "the Canadians never exercising reflection unless they are hungry" (57). The Yellowknives likewise are disparagingly depicted in their Dogrib dance: "Some...rose from their besotted sleep and joined the circle, bouncing with uncouth alacrity, but out of time" (40). In contrast, John Hepburn, who suffers consignment "to the society of foreigners" (12), is extolled for his "constancy [which] absolved his country from the disgrace attached to it by the others" (12). The approving citation of Hepburn, heightened by the disapproval of the conduct of the others (seamen, voyageurs, and Indians), serves Wiebe in what we shall see is his re-writing of Hood's death in making the servant a deserving object of the midshipman's self-sacrifice.

The twenty-five selections from Richardson's journal are more variable in their effect upon the imaginative recounting of the expedition. Perhaps in order to justify the expansion of his role within the novel, Keskarrah is featured in four of them; in one his daughter Greenstockings is introduced ("one of Bigfoot's hunters being enamoured of Keskarrah's
daughter” [216]) - the only time she is mentioned in either of these officers’ journals.⁵

Further, while there is specific reference to such things as the “heavy drain” (112) the Indians make upon white provisions, humorous camaraderie among the various participant groups (144), approbation for Esquimaux (Inuit) ingenuity in the construction of their igloos and St. Germain’s desperate creation of a “shell” to ferry the men across Obstruction Rapids, the selections up to Hood’s death would appear, for the most part, to simply advance the narrative common to journal and novel.

The selection on Hood’s death, taken not from the journal but from Richardson’s separate, official, “Narrative Report,” ironically lays the ultimate blame for Michel’s homicidal act on the Yellowknife Indians: “he...seemed to have imbibed and retained the rules of conduct which the Indians here prescribe to themselves” (252). The irony is pointed, since, in the next selection but one, the last, the Indians are extolled for their sacrificial act of effecting the expedition’s survival. (Of no little significance, the intervening journal selection expresses Richardson’s personal indebtedness to Hepburn: “[i]f [he] had not exerted himself far beyond his strength....I must have perished on the spot” [273].) The concluding journal selection ends: “The Indians treated us with the utmost tenderness, gave us their snowshoes and walked without themselves, keeping by our sides that they might lift us when we fell....[they] cooked for and fed us as if we had been children, evincing a degree of humanity that would have done honour to the most civilized of nations” (295).

Wiebe’s use of this journal material, however, is not limited to inter-chapter insertions; journal entries, often virtually untouched, enter the chapters themselves, sometimes as specific quotations (“The Doctor has reported, ‘Immediately on Michel’s coming up, I put an end to his life by shooting him through the head with a pistol’” [DOS 289] [Richardson 155], “An’ he reported to the Lieutenant that I ‘exerted myself far beyond my strength’” [DOS 292]
[Richardson 159]), but often with minor adjustments as in the insertions between chapters.

A typical, unexceptional, case occurs in Wiebe’s recreation of the letter written by Richardson to Hood’s father. The doctor’s report for November 3rd that “Hepburn’s limbs have now begun to swell, and the incisions in Adam’s legs have been renewed” (DOS 280) is an abstraction from much greater detail in Richardson’s journal covering the 3rd and the 4th, and only slightly reworded - “Hepburn’s limbs began to swell today....The incisions in Adam’s legs have been renewed....” (Richardson 163-164). These insignificant alterations and combinations are cited partly because they are the rule rather than the exception, but, more importantly, because the repeated implicit faithfulness to the original documents can lull the reader into a false sense of expectation, since Wiebe can surprise by introducing significant alterations even in what appears a harmless deviation.

For example, Richardson, in the novel’s description of the futile attempts, on the part of Hepburn and himself, in the days following Hood’s death to hunt for partridge and deer, paraphrases the journal’s report recounting their inability, as a result of starvation, to hold their rifles steady or to chase the fleeing partridge. He is reported as claiming “a large herd of reindeer, perhaps thirty or more, passed close before me, indeed, under my very gun, as I supported it against the bole of a tree” (277). The journal, contrariwise, states that Hepburn was looking for deer and Richardson for partridge, and reports no presence of deer at all, for either.7 The function of this deviation, given the novel’s general faithfulness to the original text, is unclear. Is it simply to emphasize that the expedition’s inability to feed itself is a result of the men’s overall weakness and not a scarcity of game, or is Wiebe subtly suggesting that the survivors, generally, and not just Hood, are succumbing to hallucination? If the latter, Wiebe could be supporting his re-writing of the text regarding Hood’s death, and Richardson’s subsequent justification for killing Michel.
While the novel, for the most part, basically adheres to the narrative of the journals, there are two chapters in *A Discovery of Strangers* ("Offering Strange Fire," the imaginative third-person description of Hood's death, and "Eating Starvation," the adaptation of Richardson's journal report, through a recreation of the letter addressed to Hood's father, relating the deaths of both Hood and Michel) which deviate significantly from the historical record, and thereby heighten our understanding of Wiebe's use of document in promoting a typological reading of this fiction.  

In considering these two chapters, it is crucial to recall Wiebe's comments on historical reporting. In the Neuman interview, Wiebe argues:

> you **should** distrust [inherited or given history] because when you start looking at the actual stuff from history from a slightly different angle you start seeing so many different stories there than the standard ones we have been given....I have to doubt history all the time....the **official** given history....You know there is another side to the story and maybe that's the more interesting side. Maybe even truer?....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 in them. It's amazing how ironic it sometimes becomes. (UL 230)

In the same interview he expounds on his role as a story-maker in terms of his fictive use of those historical documents:

> Granted, my whole structure is invented, the story didn’t take place like that...but you see what I'm saying: 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. (237)

In terms of the story of Hood’s death, Wiebe, in “Offering Strange Fire” (the title ostensibly relating to the Leviticus account of the incense offered by Aaron’s sons “before the Lord, which he commanded them not” [10:1 cited DOS 234]), takes as the given document Richardson’s “Narrative Report” of the incident, and explores its inherent ambiguity. Pursuing Richardson’s observation that Hood “was much affected with dimness of sight, giddiness, and other symptoms of extreme debility” (Richardson 150), Wiebe creates an enigmatic but powerfully moving account of the events leading up to Hood’s death, in which he introduces three fictive elements designed to probe the official record and to explore the theological implications of sacrificial suicide.

As in Richardson’s historical account, Hood, Richardson and Hepburn, reported as made motionless in a hostile tundra by Hood’s inability to proceed farther, are joined by the Mohawk voyageur, Michel, with a “muddled note” on a piece of the back page of Franklin’s Bible, explaining that J.B. Bélanger and Michel are joining them because they “can no longer keep up even with” (DOS 221) Franklin’s advance party. Michel is immediately under growing suspicion: Bélanger is not with him, he has a rifle (with rare exception, “no voyageur has ever before been permitted a loaded rifle; especially this one” [222]), he exudes power (“it is obvious that he could walk wherever he pleased” [222]), and he has meat. The three whites become increasingly apprehensive.

In his imaginative rendering, Wiebe plays up the case against Michel and then dramatically obscures it. In the first place, whereas in Richardson’s “Narrative” the
Mohawk’s animosity is directed primarily at Hepburn (Richardson 156), Wiebe gives Michel cause to hate Hood through a fictive abduction (Wiebe’s adaptation of the Dene ‘Stolen Woman’ story [Slobodin Proceedings] referred to in the “Acknowledgements”; there is no historical evidence of Greenstockings being abducted) in which Michel, perceived as a rival for Greenstockings, steals her forcibly from her father’s tent, and then is subsequently apprehended and humiliated. In the novel, Michel’s constant threatening of Hood after the aborted abduction (“I tell you, I kill you, before you die, I tell you I kill, you...” [DOS 250]) serves to reinforce the claim that Michel did, in fact, commit the murder, and, further, that the act was premeditated.

But, in the second place, Wiebe also alters our understanding of Hood’s role in his own death. From the moment of Michel’s return to Hood’s camp there is something of anger in Hood that he himself cannot quite grasp. His mind wanders through prayers, Biblical verses, nursery rhymes, memories of his childhood and meetings with Greenstockings, things his father pronounced so distinctly, and things Greenstockings and her family told him despite their mutual failure to understand one another’s language. But now he is unable to make connections.

When Michel first reappears, Hood, in his delirious ramblings, shows a vague awareness of his own particular vulnerability: “Why has he, so powerful, come?” (227). He is acutely conscious of Michel’s anger - his mind “shimmers over hatred scattered like ash upon his past” (228) - but is incapable of focussing on its cause. The occurrence of the abduction has slipped his mind. His memory falters: “he cannot find it” (224). Michel’s malevolent promise, however, has “eaten” away at him. The word “kill” is dislodged. From punctuating Michel’s threats, it resonates through Hood’s fragmented memory, seizing on its reference in the nursery rhyme story “Who Killed Cock Robin”: 
robbin-a-bobbin

he bent his bow shot at a pigeon and killed a crow shot at another

and killed his (250)

a sighing and sobbing

To hear the bell toll

for poor Cock Robin (251)

The words of Cock Robin had surfaced for him once before. In the intimacy of Keskarrah's tent, the " unintelligibility" (164) of Greenstockings' song had become "strangely tangled" into

I, said the Fly,

With my little eye

And I saw....

Then, Hood had been strangely transported back to his childhood. Not able to comprehend Greenstockings or her mother, somehow his mind latched on to the question of sacrifice:

I, said the Fish,

With my little dish.

And I caught his blood. (170)
Now, the mention of blood coupled with Richardson’s readings from Leviticus, with its obsession with sacrifice, carries Hood back once more to the “ritual goodness” of his family at St. Mary’s Anglican Church, Bury, his father’s “absolute sermons” (237), and his sacrificial theology, based on “his categorical, logical clarity of preposterous faith” (176). He can hear his father’s recitation of his favourite text from Hebrews 9:22, uttered in his “thin, ascetic voice”:

And [“almost” omitted] all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin. (176)

Michel’s outbursts perhaps “permitted Hood to utter at last that impossible word sacrifice” (239). And Hood suddenly awakens from his nursery rhymes and his childhood perception of duty (“the confident, simple world of English games, and endlessly elaborated, confident duty, words” [251]) to a recognition of the solidity of his present responsibilities.

Hood’s mind is described as “sodden with texts” (244). Sodden, etymologically, suggests that something “has been steeped or soaked in water, rendered dull, stupid, or expressionless” (O.E.D.). For Hood, the texts are there, are a constitutive part of his upbringing, but through the distortions of his education, have been “rendered dull,” have long since lost application. Now, however, they gain relevance (“his doors wrenched open and the rivers of sacred English words dammed up in his memory stream out, all of them into this arctic dawn, visible and blaring out loud...[DOS 244]) some to confuse, accuse and condemn, others to uplift. A jumbled conflation of Job 28 and Jonah 4 evokes recognition of his responsibilities to his unborn child. While he sees Greenstockings (she of “this land of goodness, of beauty, of tenderness and love” [251], that woman “more gentle and tender”
meeting, in her own way, the admonitions of Leviticus 12 to cleanliness, Hood is convinced of the necessity of his own personal sacrifice.

For the officers generally, sacrifice was what “they expected [of] every inhabitant they met” (242). For Richardson, the required sacrifice is to burn notes that would undermine a “proper” report. He is quite prepared to “arrange and edit them properly, as always, so they will make proper and decent acceptable sense” (247). But, if he cannot so arrange them, he will make a burnt offering of his notes. For Hood, though, the question of sacrifice demands a personal offering, and since he cannot make an offering for the cleansing of his child, he directs his responsibilities toward Hepburn: “we must not, sacrifice, him too” (239). For one who persevered in the face of such great adversity, the prayer of Princess Elizabeth of France both sustains and instructs:

What may befall me this day, O God, I know not. But I do know that nothing can happen to me which Thou hast not foreseen, ruled, willed and ordained from all eternity, and that suffices me. I adore Thy eternal and inscrutable designs, I accept all, I make unto Thee a sacrifice of all with patience under suffering and with perfect submission (emphasis added). (276)

His mind seems intent on telling him something, but he is unable to “hold” it until, in a moment of clarity, he knows not only the necessity of Cock Robin’s death, but also his own role as both object and agent. Since he “no longer has dimension...a sheet laid between frozen hides...a hide ‘twere better ‘twere scrapped [sic] clean of hair and eaten” (249), there is something he “must explain to Michel” (249). But what that is, is not what, in his muddled state, he says it is - “that he will not show him how to use the compass” (249). Instead, what
he feels compelled to say to him has something to do with the word "kill" that punctuates his conflation of several texts, from Matthew 6:30 (extolling God's perseverance ["if then God so clothe the grass"]) to Luke 12:38 (warning of the Second Coming ["in the second watch or in the third"]).

The action he takes is to force his own death by thrusting his head back against that "spot of round, hard ice...surely the fine, reassuring solidity of English steel" (DOS 251), presumably the barrel of Michel's gun. Again, presumably Michel has finally "thrust the weapon against Hood" (250). Leaning back, Hood "pushes himself up against it with his last bit of fervent strength" (252) with the hope that in the midst of so much that erratically comes and goes, "perhaps that at least can be properly, firmly fixed" (252). At that point Hood's recitation of "Cock Robin" is stilled as the gun fires and Robert Hood is killed.

For Richardson, the thought that Hood might have "hurried himself into the presence of his Almighty Judge by an act of his own hand" (282) fills him with horror. The church's admonitions against suicide (reflected in The Book of Common Prayer rubric) are perceived so categorically, it is almost with a sense of relief that he can find Michel responsible for Hood's death. One is reminded of the earlier comment about Franklin that "if such knowledge [as envisaged by Birdseye] of the future were offered him, he would refuse to consider it, as being un-Christian" (143).

In contrast, if Hood's suicide is his sacrificial offering of "strange fire" of the chapter's title (we should note Wiebe's word-play with the word "fire" - in this case with the discharge of the rifle as opposed to the incense of Aaron's sons), it suggests that, even in his delirious state, Hood realizes that human certainties are misleading, and that even the Biblical injunctions must be weighed in the context of one's personal responsibilities. In his obligations to his friends he recognizes that the "[o]ne last attempt [that] must be made"
(DOS 240) for the survival of any of them, must be made immediately, without any further delay, and that necessitates his death now, because they will not abandon him while he lives.\textsuperscript{10}

Wiebe rewrites the account of Hood’s death, but does not replace the presumed certainty of the official history with one of his own. While not attempting to resolve the mystery (we recall his general claim regarding his story-making: “my whole structure is invented, the story didn’t take place like that” [UL 237]), in his chapter “Offering Strange Fire,” Wiebe challenges the given record through an exploration of a convergence of factors that could have contributed to Hood’s death. Through his fictional recreation, the truth is shown to be more complicated, woven of more threads of possibility, than have been acknowledged. At the same time, in his role as witness and critic, Wiebe takes a controversial historical event, and through an imaginative exploration passes judgment on a rigid approach to the Christian faith. Simultaneously, he provides witness to the dawning recognition of faith’s appropriate ethical response. In terms of his “larger meanings,” Wiebe rewrites Hood’s death in a manner that provokes a typological reading. Weak as he is, Hood, if only in a small measure, becomes a Christ-like figure, as he ‘offers’ what he has left of his life for the sake of his comrades.

In the apparent instability of the text as its approaches Hood’s death, in the bizarre juxtaposition and fragmentation of the midshipman’s demented musings, the fact that Hood is actually approaching an ultimate decision and drastic action is obscured. The description of the shooting in its subtlety demands the reader’s close attention to the detail of the narrative and a willing ‘suspension of disbelief’ at the particular means of Hood’s role in his own death, but in his account Wiebe transforms Hood’s story into a Frygian comedy of redemption. Seemingly for the first time in his life the implications of his acknowledged faith shine through the world of “games” and “duty.” Despite his starvation-induced delirium and “with his last
bit of fervent strength” (252), he offers his sacrifice. While his recognition of his responsibilities comes late - some may contend that he sacrifices little because he has little to give - his response, analogous to the widow and her mite (Mark 12:44), is to give of his all in the sacrifice of his life.

The other chapter in which Wiebe significantly alters the historical record to promote a typological reading, “Eating Starvation,” is concerned primarily with the account of the killing of Michel, the Iroquois voyageur. In Wiebe’s fictive recreation of Richardson’s letter to Hood’s father, the doctor makes the unqualified assertion:

It was [Michel Terohaute] who killed your son Robert, who did not die of famine. Michel shot him, and he was instantly, painlessly gone. (DOS 280)

While Richardson’s “Narrative” does not make the accusation so unequivocally, the doctor’s suspicion that “Michel was guilty of the deed” (Richardson 155) served as the justification for his own later killing of him, and has become the basis of the accepted historical record which indicts Michel for Hood’s death, and the concomitant exoneration of Richardson for his own action. Wiebe, again distrusting the accepted story and attempting to see it from a different angle, probes the implicit White antipathy to the Iroquois voyageur and reveals the officers’ prejudices against Indian and Voyageur alike.

Although Richardson in his “Narrative” informs his readers of Hood’s delirium, he never suggests that either Hepburn or himself were so impaired that their judgments of what was occurring could be unbalanced. He freely admits that the case against Michel in terms of Belanger and Perrault’s death is conjectural (conveniently Franklin’s conjecture, not his own [Richardson 151]), and then engages in a lengthy defence of his decision to kill Michel that is
equally speculative, based on “several material circumstances, which [Hepburn] had observed of Michel’s behaviour, and which confirmed [Richardson] in the opinion that there was no safety for [them] except in his death” (156).

Richardson in the novel is much more emphatic about Michel’s guilt. He entertains but dismisses the suggestion that Hood has committed suicide, opting instead, perhaps as the less repulsive choice, for murder. He recognizes that, “in a fit of despondency,” Hood might have “hurried himself into the presence of the Almighty Judge” (DOS 282), but interprets the evidence to conclude that Michel was totally responsible for the midshipman’s death, not considering that Hood could have been an active participant in his own death.

Despite Michel’s protestations of innocence - “the gun must have gone off accidentally” (283) - and the fact that “[u]p to the point of his attack upon us - Richardson’s “Narrative” says ‘return’ (157) - Michel’s conduct had been good and respectful to the officers” (DOS 253), he stands accused of murder. Further, despite the inconclusive evidence, he is quickly found guilty in a decision seemingly influenced by Michel’s alleged heathen “rules of conduct” (253):

His principles...unsupported by a belief in the divine truths of Christianity, were unable to withstand the pressure of severe stress. His countrymen, the Mohawk-Iroquois, are generally Christians, but he was totally uninstructed and ignorant of the duties inculcated by Christianity; and from his long residence in this part of the country seems to have imbibed, and retained, the rules of conduct which the Indians here prescribe to themselves. (253)
Having made the subsequent decision to kill Michel - “there was no safety for us except in Michel’s death” (285) (Wiebe omits the doctor’s claim [Richardson 156] that it was Hepburn’s life that was uppermost in his mind) - Richardson then justifies the timing of his action: “We discovered then that Michel...had halted for the purpose of putting his gun in order with the intention of attacking us....” (DOS 285). While Richardson’s account ends this sentence with “perhaps whilst we were in the act of encamping” (Richardson 157), Wiebe has the doctor conclude with the more prejudicial “as we had suspected” (DOS 285). Michel is then killed as soon as possible.

We have been adequately instructed by Wiebe that the doctor, under Franklin’s advisement, is prepared to edit the facts such that “they will make proper and decent, acceptable sense” (247). In the novel, Wiebe substantiates that admission particularly through Hepburn’s challenge of Richardson’s claim of responsibility for Michel’s death (“I determined...to take the whole responsibility upon myself” [Richardson 156]), counter-claiming that the two of them accomplished the deed “together, me an’ him” (DOS 289): “you think he just walks up to that big bastard with a loaded pistol...?” While it can be argued that Richardson is assuming moral responsibility for Michel’s death, and thus would not be concerned, unofficially, to deny Hepburn’s involvement, Wiebe’s point in introducing Hepburn’s claims would appear focussed on the willingness of the officers of the expedition to alter the record to meet Admirality standards and expectations.

But Wiebe, while not necessarily intent on indicting the doctor, or Hepburn, for that matter, for Michel’s death, is generally concerned to show the officer’s lack of humanity in their dealings with the Indians and the Voyageurs. Earlier, Back has indicated the harshness with which Franklin is prepared to deal with insubordination:
If they do not pick up their packs immediately for this last portage of the day, he will not hesitate - as he has every right under English law - to blow their brains out. (52)

And when the voyageurs do refuse to comply with Franklin's command, Back also shows the spurious nature of white reasoning in assessing guilt and meting out justice. St. Germain, although he has been sent off to hunt, is judged responsible for initiating the rebellion of the voyageurs at Dissension Lake:

we instinctively think he has initiated this. And even if he is not here, he may well have done so, and Lieutenant Franklin would accept the necessary responsibility of having to execute him first. (53)

On the other hand, as Wiebe argued in Playing Dead, the Whites themselves are treated as above the law. Despite the fact that the Northwest Company clerk, Willard Wentzel, who had accompanied the expedition on the early part of its journey, accused Richardson of murder in Michel’s death, “no investigation is ever made....A special law for whites persists in the north” (34).

What Wiebe achieves in A Discovery of Strangers is to sow a substantial seed of doubt, not only about the northern judicial system, but about any claim as to what actually transpired. As we have seen, at least as early as his “Where Is The Voice Coming From?,“ Wiebe has wrestled with the ‘fact’ that so-called historical facts are consistently weighted with controlling subjective baggage that undermines our common assumptions about truth claims, to say nothing about the bias of subsequent interpretations. There is no one telling of a story,
and a large measure of the artistic success of *A Discovery of Strangers* rests on Wiebe’s refusal, despite his criticism of White arrogance and blindness and his pronounced sympathy for the Indians whose way of life is being threatened and whose very existence will be destroyed, to absolve any parties to this arctic encounter and to gloss over their fallibility.

Keskarrah, while represented as the real spiritual leader of the Tetsot’ine and admired for his wisdom and insight, is moved to humanitarian concern only through the intervention of Bigfoot. Bigfoot himself, the designated spokesman, who often appears inflated by his own importance and easily duped by the Whites, and only grudgingly gains Greenstockings’ respect, argues that because the Yellowknives have “seen” them, they now bear responsibility for them: “I would be as happy as you if we never had [seen them], but unfortunately, now we will never be able to say we haven’t” (26).

While Bigfoot appears to lose the argument to Keskarrah’s retort, “What will come and ask for them?”, the latter acquiesces, “All right” (26). But even Bigfoot’s motivation, to say nothing of that of his people, is suspect. The Yellowknife do take food to the starving members of the expedition, but, in Wiebe’s adaptation of the story, only grudgingly, because the people have so much personal need. Greenstockings goes to see them but, intentionally, goes “empty-handed” (303). There is also a compromising suggestion that Bigfoot, despite his largesse, is well-infected with white materialism as he proposes a quick trip to the traders’ fort “to get every White thing they want for all the food and clothing they have already given the Expedition....and they must get it before the traders hear that Thick English is dead” (302). That the Indians should want what has been promised them is understandable, but what has been promised them is mainly an abundance of guns, powder and shot, White things which will ultimately lead to their destruction (315).
On the White side, Richardson, for all his compassion for his fellows and his devotion to science, shows “an ungodly cynicism” which Franklin recognizes but seeks, unsuccessfully, to dismiss. When the doctor claims that “the fundamental problem in the economic development of primitives” (59) is the limit of their materialistic motivation - “They must want more than they need. That is civilization” (59) - it is only Franklin’s “implacable optimism” (60) which blinds him to Richardson’s cynicism. Likewise, Hood, for all his sensitivity to Greenstockings and to Hepburn, is represented as basically insensitive to the voyageurs, including Michel. The voyageurs are unthinking louts who are motivated by their stomachs. Michel is “the wrong kind of Indian” (227) in two ways: not being of the Tetsot’ine means both that does he not know his way through this country and also that he is perceived as aligned more with the voyageurs than with Greenstockings and her people. Of interest, Wiebe omits from his novel (but not in Playing Dead) Richardson’s specific note that Hood “offered to share his buffalo robe with [Michel] at night” (Richardson 149). Hood, if my understanding of Wiebe’s presentation of the midshipman’s death is correct, feels no responsibility toward Michel and is prepared to make him an unwitting participant in his own suicide.

Eventually, it is the stress that Wiebe lays on the White inhumanity to the voyageurs that gains primary significance in his rewriting of Michel’s death, an inhumanity that stands in stark contrast to the Indians’ sacrificial act on the Whites’ behalf. Indian motivation may on occasion be suspect, but in the Whites’ moment of need the Tetsot’ine come to their aid. In contrast, the Whites who have left the voyageurs to “rest” in the arctic wilderness are also prepared to kill an Indian voyageur because of their “suspicions” and their concerns for their own safety.

The claim must be made, however, that while Wiebe is critical of the officers involved in the Franklin expedition, and nineteenth-century British imperialism and British logical
certainty generally, his unequivocal challenge, again in concert with Yoder, is to all systematic attempts of any age to step out of the ditch of uncertainty to presume a knowledge beyond man’s capacity. The particular explorers are but representative of a world view that appeared to dominate English life at the beginning of that century, and in a variety of forms has asserted itself throughout history.

Further, in terms of the members of the expedition themselves, Wiebe reveals an inherent ambiguity. While the officers appear arrogant, insensitive, rationalistic and domineering, there is, paradoxically, another side to their character that counters the former. Both Richardson’s journal and Wiebe’s creative rendering attest unequivocally to a simple, committed faith that exists beneath their formal religion with all its assumed logical certainties. In *Playing Dead*, Wiebe had asked the rhetorical question, “One might well ask what is faith for if it cannot guide us as here, in considering our mortality” (26). In the Whites’ agonizing time of personal need, the reality of their faith comes to the foreground as portrayed in Richardson and Hood’s faithful devotions and their repeated recitation of the prayer of the Princess Elizabeth, accepting all “with patience under suffering and with perfect submission” (276). It is the account of their sustaining faith, a faith which enables them to approach their impending death with equanimity, that, despite their acknowledged failings, lies close to the heart of this novel’s witness.

But Wiebe does not dwell at length on the fundamental reality of these officers’ faith, nor does he engage in any homiletical pursuit. David L.Jeffrey’s perception that the concluding sections of *The Blue Mountains of China* provide an exploration of “interpersonal and historical consequences of sacrificial action” (“Biblical” 101) could be equally applied in this case. In keeping with Wiebe’s Anabaptist heritage with its primary emphasis on discipleship, the ultimate focus of this text rests not on faith but on the requisite sacrifice of
which the suffering incarnate Christ is always the measure. (See Appendix 3 for a comparison with Patrick White’s *Voss*.)

**The Narrative as Parable**

While Wiebe, here as earlier, eschews outright preaching, there are numerous instances of biblical quotation, allusion or echo which subtly alter this narrative, and eventually reveal its typological base. Often the reference is oblique, and just as often disquieting. For example, in Birdseye’s vision of the men facing their desperate need to cross the full force of Obstruction Rapids, she dwells at length on the oppressive baggage of ignorance, that will weigh them down more than anything else they carry: “I am your most faithful ignorance. I will go with you and be your guide, in your most need to go by your side” (DOS 155). This promise, without the shocking personification of ignorance, is resonant with Biblical language, echoing passages such as Psalm 78:52 & 53 - “[God]...guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not” - and speaks to the role the Yellowknife will play for the survivors of the expedition.

The statement in its original form, however, occurs in the morality play “Everyman.” Of unknown authorship but “written probably by a churchman” (Cohen, *Milestones* 78) and “employ[ing] Biblical and legendary material” (79), this late middle ages’ creation dramatically portrays Death’s “Summoning of Everyman” (line 4) who requires that Everyman give an account of his life (an issue which in his delirium is also of pressing concern to Hood). Although Fellowship, Cousin and Kindred (all allegorical types) renege on their promises and decline Everyman’s request to accompany him on his final pilgrimage, Good Deeds agrees to
go with him and introduces his sister Knowledge. It is she who utters the statement (lines 522-523) assigned not to her but to her antithesis, Ignorance, in Wiebe's text.

Birdseye’s foretelling of the expedition’s fate is yet another telling of Death’s summons, but by having Ignorance usurp the role of Knowledge she effects a startling transformation. Then, as if that in itself were not sufficiently shocking, she continues on relentlessly, couching the Whites’ ignorance in what some would perceive as the most blasphemous statement. Putting into Ignorance’s whispering mouth (“softly and tenderly” anticipates the first words and the title of the evangelistic hymn by William J. Thompson [1847-1909] - a composer curiously outside this story’s time-frame [1819-1821]), Jesus’s concluding words to St. Matthew’s Gospel - “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (28:20), she suggests that these arrogant Whites, abandoned to their own misguided devices, will surely fall victim to this strange, alien world through their own blind conceit.

But the suggestion that this is the text’s ultimate statement is subtly denied on the same page. When the men, at the brink of freezing and starvation, huddle so desperately around the fire at Obstruction Rapids, the narrator relates that “A mess of rock moss and two tiny fish boils there” (DOS 156). Surely in this token of warmth and sustenance there is an echo of St. Andrew’s report, “There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?” (John 6:9), which led to the feeding of the five thousand, and more particularly Jesus’s presence and preparations on the shore of Galilee for his disciples who had fished all night and “caught nothing” (John 21:3):

\[\text{As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.} \]
Wiebe suggests in this subtle allusion that in their time of turmoil, even in the midst of their assertive ignorance, Christ should be recognized as present with them, present perhaps in those labouring strangers (the voyageurs) who huddle with them. Further, the ‘blasphemous’ adoption of Jesus’s words resonate with, to use Bakhtin’s phrase, “dialogic overtones” (Speech 92) such that the sense of their original promise accompanies this utterance. The words continue the novel’s embracing typology, which, while critical of man’s sense of self-determination, proclaims the Good News: “Emmanuel... God is with us” (Matthew 1:23).

Significantly, Barth speaks of this presence in his Epistle to the Romans: “To us God is the Stranger, the Other, whom we finally encounter along the whole frontier of our knowledge” (318). For him, “[o]ur world is the world within which God is finally and everywhere - outside,” a world in which “[t]he health-bringing function of suffering is open to our eyes,” in which “there is kindled, as a new and third thing [in addition to our knowledge and ignorance], the not-knowing apprehension of God and the apprehending not-knowing of the vanity of our existence.” There is an echo of this in A Discovery of Strangers in the novel’s juxtaposition of the Whites’ repeated failure to recognize the vanity of their own existence, while confidently assuming a positive knowledge of God, and the Indians’ hesitation (Keskarrah’s specifically) in making claims about God, while acutely aware of the vanity of man’s existence. Greenstockings’ father makes no claims about knowing God, explaining to her that, old as he is, and having seen so much, “he has never seen the Supreme One everyone believes is everywhere around them” (DOS 18), but he responds to the suffering of his neighbour in his people’s “ultimate kindness of food” (303).

It is this “ultimate kindness” that is particularly challenging to White expectations leading to a major reconsideration of the role of the stranger as God’s agent. Using Ian
MacLaren’s research on George Back as a resource, Wiebe explores the Whites’ prejudices and the witness to God’s presence in the rescue of the White strangers by the Indian strangers. In MacLaren’s analysis of Back’s poem “Recollections of our unfortunate Voyage....” a poem Back claims (and MacLaren disputes) to have written spontaneously (“The following lines are set down - just as they occurred to me during a quick walk - approaching to a run” [“Poem” 318]), three rescuing agents are variously identified: the Indians, the Almighty, and Back himself.

MacLaren remarks that while clearly it is the Indians who are the rescuers of the Expedition, shortly after the rescue Back “began in his own mind to turn the near tragedy into a series of misfortunes from which he emerges as the hero” (“Commentary” 280). Although he “does manage to thank heaven and the Indians for his rescue” (281), he presents himself “as an agent of providential salvation, not just its beneficiary.” Particularly in the prose notation Back “takes the credit himself”:

I arrived at our house first; I hastened on; I was fortunate enough to discover the tracks of the Indians; [I] sent abundance of provisions to my friends; and, thus, by the blessing of heaven, [I] saved them from an early grave.  (MacLaren’s précis 283)

In his notes, Back “all but topples the authority of the poetic tale” by failing to mention Pierre St. Germain who has been generally credited as the first to get to the Yellowknife camp. In his annotated poem, Back becomes the “valiant Romantic hero defying all odds by finding the Indians and thereby saving all his fellow men all on his blessed own” (284).

The “sudden religious dimension” occurs only at Stanza 13 (of fifteen) in terms of Back’s personal “flight for aid” (283). MacLaren suggests that in Back’s introduction of God
("sought th'Almighty's aid") in that stanza, and the crediting of the "hand of heaven" for the expedition's "relief" in the next, he may be simply "reverting to a well-worn convention. not to say formula, in Anglo-Christian poetry." The more Back 'trumpets' his own role in the rescue, the less 'divine Providence' has to do with it.

But the concluding stanza (and its prose note) "casts a profoundly Christian colour over the providential arrival of the Indians" (284). This is most evident in his prose tribute:

We owe everything to the Kindness of the Leader and his tribe - they not only supplied us with meat but were anxiously careful of our health - We saw the parable of the Good Samaritan realized - and - "can such things be without our special wonder" - I fear so much could not be said of three fourths of the civilized world. (322)

While McLaren feels that the credit Back gives the Indians is given "backhandedly and belatedly" (284), he notes that "to be fair to him requires pointing out that all Christian imperialists would predictably run aground on contradiction when endeavouring to explain how heathen had kept them alive in the wilderness" ("Commentary" 284).

Wiebe, in his exploration of agency in A Discovery of Strangers, builds on this sense of contradiction. The White prejudicial perception of the Indians totally precludes the possibility of the Indians being the agents of their salvation. Back might be represented as dallying with Indian maids before they become "saggy and wrinkled as native females [from long feeding of their infants] invariably are" (DOS 45), but he dismisses Bigfoot as "this greasy primitive" (50), and refers to Michel as "that glowing blackface" (53). Franklin allegedly never referred to Michel as other than "the native" (240). Richardson in his letter to Hood's father condemns their "natural fickleness" and abhors their "most inappropriate mode of expressing
grief" (275). Even Hood, who has the strongest affection for Greenstockings, demeans the Indians as “superstitious natives” (226), and will entrust the compass only to “English Hepburn,” judging that “no savage can be entrusted with this civilized mysterium” (249).

While Back also insists on a “class” distinction between the Whites and the voyageurs (“the Britons and the Canadians” [“Commentary 281]), Wiebe extends his own portrayal of White bias further in Hepburn’s facetious alignment of the voyageurs with Jesus’s disciples (“An’ only two of them lived, that’s all. Two of the eleven, or twelve - talk about disciples, ha” [DOS 287]) particularly in the claim that the officers discriminated against them in their abandonment. In their perverted thinking, the officers might perceive the Indians as beyond the pale since they were but heathen, but what justification could they find for their treatment of the voyageurs since Hepburn insists that “these poor buggers were all praying like the true Christians they was raised to be, not one of them wasn’t” (288)? Hepburn complicates the situation even further in his report that he heard even Michel “call himself a Christian” (291). The officers’ discrimination is so entrenched that when Hood “chant[s] some scrap of memory,” recalling the biblical story from Daniel 3 of the casting of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (whom Hood identifies in childhood playfulness as “Shadrack, Meshack and To Bed We Go” [224]) into the fiery furnace, neither he nor Richardson even considers Michel Terohaute (Back “always mocked him...o high and lofty land, who is like God indeed” [221]) as the necessary fourth, an angel (“the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” [Daniel 3:25]) who was sent to save them, even though Michel had been specifically sent by Franklin “to assist” (221) as he could.

The issue of the Indians and the voyageurs’ unworthiness is central to Wiebe’s imaginative account of the expedition. For him, the restricting aesthetic MacLaren identifies, while related, takes second place to his identification of the judgmental religious provincialism
exhibited by these British explorers.

It is specifically in their paganism that the Indians appear disqualified as agents of God’s providence. Since these English imperialists see themselves as the inheritors of God’s promises, when Richardson reads the admonition from Leviticus 18 that the people of the Lord God should not do “[a]fter the doings of the land of Egypt...and...of Canaan, whither I bring you” (242-243), the Whites are “His people” and those lands are the Canadian north-west and, despite Hood’s claims about Greenstockings’ cleanliness (246), the Yellowknife Indians are perceived as, in both body and spirit, fundamentally unclean. The doctor, for his part, accuses them of corrupting whatever Christian principles Michel might have had (253). In their presumption that their salvation falls within God’s plan, they would find contradiction in the possibility of that salvation being effected by heathen.

But unfolding events challenge their certainties. Richardson makes his remarks on the Indians’ fickleness on October 30th, but by the very next day he is compelled to admit that they “before God remain our last hope” (278), and then, to the Whites’ surprise, the Indians keep their promises. Clearly, in rescuing the Whites the Yellowknives perform a sacrificial act - “Never will we allow our new friends, the White warriors, to go hungry” (49) - and respond unstintingly to Back’s request, even when constantly on the edge of starvation themselves and not without their own lament:

We ourselves are always dying. When the caribou and the rabbits vanish, to whom can we run and cry pathetically, ‘I am here, feed me or I die!’ Who pulls us out of vicious rapids or sews our clothes? Who kills himself carrying us around portages and over snow? (299)
For Keskarrah, despite his early hesitation, at the moment of need, when he finally knows that the Whites have nothing he wants from them in return - conscious at last that his hope that English medicine might save them from sickness and death was but another delusion (299) - his course of action is unequivocal: “We couldn’t, of course...withhold food from anyone if we have some, especially from those to whom we have already given hospitality” (299). The meat they have only recently acquired is, at Bigfoot’s order, taken from the mouths of their children and swiftly transported fifty-five miles to these Whites who “always need food, right now, food!” (297).

The Indians’ response to the Whites in their need clearly saves a remnant of the expedition, but it also provokes a fundamental challenge to the certainties of the Whites’ understanding. It is in a consideration of this challenge that Back’s reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan becomes relevant to an understanding of what is occurring in A Discovery of Strangers, since the Samaritans, like the Indians, were not deemed as of God’s chosen people and were thus also questionable agents of his grace. I would suggest that this parable can be seen below the surface of his narrative and that Wiebe draws upon an understanding of this parable in his own parabolization of the discovery of strangers.

John Dominic Crossan contends that traditional use of the parable of the Good Samaritan, following the domestication imposed by its “first evangelical interpreter, Luke” (Raid 102) through his addition of Jesus’s injunction “Go and do likewise,” has been to treat it as an example story and thus remove its sting. In fact, where an “example puts the Samaritan in trouble and has the Jew help” (104), the story as Jesus first presents it is “like a square circle, an oxymoron” (101); it “provokes” because it reverses the roles. Crossan argues that this, as in all Jesus’s parables, involves “a double reversal of expectations” (104): “The forces
of good (Priest, Levite) do evil; the forces of evil (Samaritan) do good."

Wiebe’s implicit use of the parable reflects the White officers’ inability to comprehend what is occurring. Given their picture of the world, they should be the ones giving assistance (as in fact they always perceive themselves as doing) and the Indians should be the receivers. The scenario cannot be otherwise, and yet, paradoxically, it is: the savage Indians are the givers and the civilized Whites the receivers. Further, in Wiebe’s representation it is the Christian Whites who, in addition to receiving, also do evil by abandoning the overworked voyageurs and Eskimos to death by starvation while preferentially attending to their own comrades, and it is the heathen Yellowknife who do good sacrificing their own needs in their rescue of the Whites.

While it is difficult to assess the measure of Back’s response to the Indians’ sacrifice - he is by nature incapable of seeing himself as victim - particularly in the light of the inflated self-consciousness of his poem, Richardson tells us that Franklin’s reaction to these Good Samaritans, despite the collective White bias and all expectations to the contrary, is to recognize that the Indians are indeed their saviours and, perceiving the ultimate source of their succour, is to “immediately give thanks to the Almighty for his goodness” (DOS 164). Richardson pays his own tribute in a passage already quoted which, significantly, is the last of the ‘journal’ items inserted in Wiebe’s text. In its pronounced Biblical echo, it attests to Richardson’s recognition of the parable’s application. Conceivably, it was a hearing of that echo that may have instigated Wiebe’s own narrative parable:

The Indians treated us with the utmost tenderness, gave us their snowshoes and walked without themselves, keeping by our sides that they might lift us when we fell...The Indians cooked for and fed us as if we had been children, evincing a degree
of humanity that would have done honour to the most civilized of nations. (DOS 295, Richardson 167)

One can hear echoes of several Biblical passages in Richardson’s expression of gratitude:

Two are better than one....For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow....Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.... (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. (Matthew 25:35-36)

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. (Psalm 91:11-12)

But none takes precedence over the parallels in the action of “a certain Samaritan”:

when he saw him he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Luke 10:33-34)
The perception of *A Discovery of Strangers* as building on this parable and as a parable in its own right is amplified by J.I.H. McDonald's study with the pertinent and provocative title “The View From The Ditch - And Other Angles” wherein he asserts that a story “becomes a parable precisely at the point at which it becomes transparent upon a situation other than that directly portrayed” (23). While he is charting the parallels between folk tale and parable, I would suggest that Wiebe’s creative rendering of an historical event also assumes a parabolic function, speaking beyond the Canadian barren lands of the early eighteen-hundreds to the contemporary reader in his situation today.

To take this step and read *A Discovery of Strangers* as a parable itself, to measure that story against Jesus’s parable, causes us in turn to perceive ourselves as aligned both with the members of the expedition and the ‘man who fell among thieves,’ and to recognize that no one has exclusive claim as the agent of God’s grace. McDonald suggests that the audience for Jesus’s story “identifies with the traveler, the victim of the action, and ends up with him in the ditch”:

The ‘view from the ditch’ is the perspective in which a Jewish audience sees the action. From there they observe the priest and the Levite pass by. Some are angered by this slur on Temple functionaries...others are quietly satisfied that the story-teller knows the score! Then comes a Samaritan! Outrage, panic in the ditch! What can you expect from a Samaritan? (28)

What can Franklin’s officers who are in a comparable situation with that earlier traveler reasonably expect at the hands of their ‘ignorant’ ‘savages’? And we, if we know this biblical
story, where do we stand in the parable of *A Discovery of Strangers*? Once we read Wiebe’s adaptation of the history of the Franklin expedition in the light of Jesus’s parable, in McDonald’s words, “Can there be such a fusion of horizons that modern auditors can not only hear the parable as addressed to ancient settings but also find such correlations with their own situation that the parable can be heard as addressed to them” (31)? McDonald continues:

> Such an event is not an automatic process. It requires a sensitivity to text, context and perspective, ancient and modern; without these, the parable’s address to the auditor or reader is misheard and the parable itself caricatured.

In his creative development of the theme of the Whites’ salvation at the hands of the Indians, Wiebe compels us that much more forcefully to enter into a rereading of the expedition story. In Wiebe’s parable, he challenges those who perceive themselves as being anywhere but in the ditch. But to recall Yoder’s words “the view from the ditch” is all that we possess. Through his adaptation of the story of the Franklin expedition, Wiebe draws an implicit parallel between a certain traveller on the road to Jericho, the White explorers on the road to starvation, and his readers who, at best, are no less on the road, or in the ditch, than they.

To appreciate what is occurring in Wiebe’s text in terms of his “larger meanings,” once we perceive the informative role of Jesus’s parable, it is helpful, as in the consideration of his use of the parable of Hosea in *My Lovely Enemy*, to attend to Paul Ricoeur’s argument that “the embedded narrative [the parable] borrows from the encompassing narrative [the account of Jesus’s life] the structure of interpretation that allows the metaphorization of its meaning” (“Bible” 55). That structure of interpretation is typology, and not to see typology within our
perception of *A Discovery of Strangers* is to fail to identify the structure of Wiebe’s art. As Ricoeur notes, if we “consider only the primary narrative,” in this instance the parable of the Good Samaritan, and “neglect[] its anchorage in another narrative,” the life of Jesus and his pivotal role in typological history, then “one does not understand the phenomenon of metaphorization characteristic of the parable.”

Wiebe’s indirection within *A Discovery of Strangers* is a complex example of intertextuality that rewrites the story enacted on the barren lands in the context of salvation history. While the concrete historicity of Franklin’s expedition is not undermined, to perceive the Biblical parable below the surface of the narrative serves to rewrite the expedition’s ‘secular’ history in terms of Biblical or typological history. As any attempt to separate Jesus’s parables from the person of Jesus himself, or as Ricoeur states, “to reduce the parable to the speech act of the personage whose story is recounted in the encompassing narrative,” is a fundamental misreading, so too Wiebe’s parable must also be seen as leading ultimately to the fundamental Good Samaritan, Jesus the Christ, the suffering servant.

To recognize, further, that a distorted perception of man and a restrictive view of God and the nature of his revelation precludes an adequate appreciation of Jesus’s parable and its reflection in Wiebe’s novel, it is useful to refer back to Karl Barth’s treatment of the Good Samaritan in his *The Epistle to the Romans*. There he argues that “it is in the ambiguity of the neighbour who fell among thieves that we encounter primarily and supremely the ‘Thou’ which is both question and answer” (495). This parallels Jesus’s claim in the parable of the last judgment of his presence in the feeding of the hungry or the receiving of the stranger: “in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).
The reality of Jesus’s presence is reinforced in Wiebe’s extension of his parable in his continuing challenge to expectations through the role Greenstockings plays in Hood’s transformation. Her effect on Hood through their intimate relationship while at Fort Enterprise and her continuing influence on him long after their enforced separation are as problematic as the expedition’s rescue by the Indians generally. How can a pagan through a predominantly physical relationship (one outside the bounds of wedlock, I might add) effect a spiritual transformation? One would imagine that Franklin in particular would in principle find such a claim suspect. And how would contemporary Christians who pride themselves on their spirituality, their godly living and their separation from the things of ‘this world,’ respond? But, clearly, the import of the parable of the Good Samaritan must be also seen as entering into a consideration of Hood and Greenstockings’ relationship and again challenging the temptation to perceive God’s agency as restricted to those expressing an orthodox or acceptable faith. Exclusive Christian certainties (and we recall Richardson’s confident distinction between the Whites and the Indians: “‘But we,’ Richardson says, steady and careful, ‘are Christians....’” [DOS 242]) are undermined. The one from whom commitment is to be expected appears forgetful and weak, while an enduring strength of companionship is revealed in the other who is considered only pagan.

Despite Greenstockings’ abduction and her enforced removal (at Franklin’s fiat) from the stranger she loves, she knows that their “strange, short moment of profound difference” (207) has bonded Hood to her for life - she “still enfolded him as tightly as ever, as completely as she could within herself” (305). But such is not the case for Hood. His liberation from the restraints of his upbringing through the intimacy of his physical relationship with Greenstockings is but momentary. In the weakness of his resolve, her claims upon him quickly become but a distant memory. In a moment of passion he has given her his stockings
(stockings revealing the contradictions of his life - “the interwoven circles knit so lovingly by steel [emphasis added] in the hands of his loving mother” [177]) but, in the aftermath of their enforced separation, he has nothing more to give, not even “so much as a gesture” when they see one another in their “perpetual exile fixed for one another” (305). Life resorts once again to the employment of scientific instruments, note taking, and picturesque painting, and now primarily coping with the weather and his own physical weakness. Hood, for all his tenderness, for all the beauty of his love-making with Greenstockings, is thereafter, but for a momentary meeting and touch, forever physically distanced from her, and for a long time mentions her not again.

It is only at the point of starvation that, recognizing that “he no longer has dimension” (249), he gains some insight into true love and concern. Then he begins to recall Greenstockings’ presence and the truths he somehow heard her utter. It is then that the novel’s epigraph from Rainer Maria Rilke appears to gain relevance: “Strangely I heard a stranger say, I am with you.” Long since forgotten, what Greenstockings told him of the sustaining role of the wolf and the raven returns to uplift him in his time of need:

The ravens and the wolves shall feed thee. He has always known that, wolves and ravens. But who told him first, who told him so indelibly what he now thinks whenever a bird - any bird, blue or black or white - moves through air? Where it may rise and where it rests there indeed is God’s good plenty.... (236-237)

This combines with his recollection of the words of I Kings:
And dwelt at a place by the brook Cherith, and the ravens brought Elijah bread and flesh in the evening, and he drank from the brook. (17:6 quoted on page 223)

The juxtaposition of memories serves to support the strength Hood gains from his recitation of fragments of the prayer of St. Elizabeth of France.

In Hood's delirium, pieces of John Newton's hymn, written in 1779, surface in his disturbed mind but, in a slippage of synesthesia, the first line is transformed from "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds" into "How sweet the name of Jesus feels" (229), as Hood slides from the memory of the taste of Greenstockings' nipples to the intrusion of an earlier memory. In light of Hood's earlier relief at escaping the confinement enforced by words, the alteration is provocatively suggestive and reinforces for him the increasing importance of the flesh, evoked in terms of his affirmation of his Christian faith. For Hood, who shares no common language with Greenstockings but somehow ("Strangely I heard a stranger say...." [emphasis added]) manages a measure of communication with her. This communication combined with memories of their physical union leads to his measure of liberation and, in concert with his recollection of the Biblical texts, promotes his sacrificial act.

Readings from Leviticus which speak of the need for cleanliness and sacrifice jar his mind to his responsibilities toward the child Greenstockings carries. Memories of his father's sermons remind him that a new born requires cleansing and that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (176), but since he is in no position to do anything for either Greenstockings or his child, what he would do for them in an attempt to atone for his past insensitivity, he does for Hepburn and Richardson. Finally, at last assuming responsibility for himself, he is determined to sacrifice what remains of his life that they may be free to leave him and thus continue to live. At the moment of his death, in the midst of his delirium, he
asks only that his final desperate, fervent act “at least can be properly, firmly fixed” (252).

But at another level, the epigraph which appears to lead us to Hood becomes more provocative when perceived in its original context as the conclusion to Rilke’s poem “The Abduction” (1908). The poem ostensibly describes a kidnapping in a “dark carriage” (“when down from the silken ladder he caught her/in his arms and further and further brought her...: till the carriage was everything”) that concludes with the speaker’s retreat within herself:

Into her hood she crept away

and felt her hair like a friend still true,

and heard estrangedly a stranger say:

I’m herewith you¹¹. (New 281)

As the epigraph to A Discovery of Strangers the concluding lines emphasize the significance of Greenstockings’ role since she too is the victim of an abduction. The fact that Wiebe through his adaptation of the Dene ‘Stolen Woman’ story has introduced the abduction into the narrative - as mentioned, there is no historical evidence of Greenstockings’ abduction - lends further support to the claim that the novel is ultimately her song and, also, causes us to ponder the poem’s extended significance. While Greenstockings is clearly associated with the victim, it is the identity of the stranger that is most intriguing. We are returned to a familiar question: “Where is the voice coming from?”

That the victim has hidden herself within her hood before hearing the voice suggests that what she hears comes from elsewhere. It can be argued that in the novel it is Hood’s voice that is heard and, indeed, in the aftermath of Greenstockings’ abduction she senses that “Hood is there!”:
Greenstockings hears, smells his movement: when she opens her eyes it is as if he has always been beside her, his hand on her arm, his eyes blue as sky filled with the tenderest longing and concern, his warm, weeping face leaning forwards to touch hers.

And in the novel’s conclusion, indeed on the last page, Greenstockings attests to the continuing reality of Hood’s presence:

But Hood will remain here, alive in every wolf and raven she sees, forever. (317)

But in terms of the poem in which we confront only the victim and the abductor, we are directed beyond any human presence. The one who speaks “estrangedly” would appear to be the divine Stranger who draws near to the victim assuring her of His protection in her hour of need. As the epigraph to Wiebe’s novel, the voice then, by extension, affirms God’s underlying presence in the discovery of strangers throughout the course of the expedition, countering the effect of Birdseye’s perverted adoption of the closing words of St. Matthew’s Gospel, and resulting in a positive echo of Jesus’s words, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (28:20).

In a manner reminiscent of his early story “Where Is The Voice Coming From?”, Wiebe draws the connection between the divine Stranger and the strangers who encounter one another on the arctic tundra. Wiebe’s use of the epigraph serves to direct us back to the parable of the Good Samaritan and a recognition that God, the Wholly Other, is revealed specifically in the other, be it on the road to Jericho or on the arctic tundra. We are directed back as well to our early discussion of Barth’s treatment of this parable and his question whether, when we encounter the neighbour ‘who fell among thieves,’ it is solely his voice, in
all his suffering that we hear, or are we simultaneously, and “primarily and supremely” (Epistle 495), confronted by the Christ who calls us into question and calls us into life? If the voice of Christ is not heard here, then “quite certainly the voice of the One is nowhere to be heard.” For both parties on the road to Jericho or on the arctic tundra, it is in their meeting, in the expression of love and compassion, that the presence of the Other is to be recognised, that the Other is in the other, be he Jew or Samaritan, White or Indian. And in this we are directed back to a consideration of the typological foundation of Wiebe’s narrative.

The Indians’ self-sacrifice, made on behalf of the remnant of the expedition, and Greenstockings’ role in Hood’s transformation are both problematic for those convicted of their own sense of certainty, but both are presented by Wiebe as further expressions of the mystery of God’s sustaining presence, and both point ultimately to the sacrificial role of Christ. The Other identified here is not a first principle of some philosophical discourse, a certainty in some logical system, but the One who revealed Himself in the flesh, in the Incarnation, and continues to be found in ‘a discovery of strangers.’

In this novel Wiebe sets out to challenge Christian certainties and sensitivities, particularly in the role assigned Greenstockings. Her earthy native richness expressed in her openness and warmth presents such a refreshing contrast to the rigid certainty and carefulness of the White explorers. For those who narrowly define the agency of God’s grace, her role may be perceived as but another expression of a repugnant strangeness inherent in this text, but for those prepared to think differently, whose perception of typological history is not static but open to the direction of the Spirit, she assumes a measure of retrospective typological status in pointing us back to the antitype Christ. Greenstockings leads us through the unsettling discovery of the Tetsot’ine, “Those Who Know Something a Little” (4), and the White explorers, those who presume to know a lot, and her liberating discovery of Robert
Hood in their mutually transforming strangeness and love, to an experience of the ultimate
Stranger, "the Other, whom we finally encounter along the whole frontier of our knowledge"
(Barth, Epistle 318), but who, incarnate, has been there all along:

Strangely I heard a stranger say,

I am with you.
AFTERWORD

In his 1965 article “The Artist as a Critic and a Witness,” written while he was at Goshen College, Wiebe articulates his understanding of the novel as “a work of art which can and should contain ideas no one else has broached before” (47). The response the novel hopes to elicit

is that people who come in contact with it take it seriously and, with all their faculties alert, ponder what it is trying to do or be.

This essay is one response to that challenge: taking Wiebe seriously, I have pondered what he is attempting to do, particularly in his two most recent novels, My Lovely Enemy and A Discovery of Strangers. However else Wiebe’s writing may be described, it is both frustrating and eminently rewarding. My struggle to penetrate the density of his writing has often left me at a loss, scrambling unsuccessfully to understand what is being said. But close attention has just as often been rewarded by sudden insights, surprised recognition of things that had simply escaped my notice at previous readings.

The novels’ complexity, however, does raise the question of the intended reader. Wiebe is clearly not writing for the Mennonite community or, should we say, not solely for that community. The demands he places on his readers are great. These are not novels easily skimmed through; they unfailingly disorient, disconcert, and require careful reflection and re-reading. Given the nature of the reviews they have received, even from critically-informed readers (who are generally at odds over how the novels should be read), they most certainly
ask for much more than they receive, and are consequently frequently misread.

What we have discovered, however, is a remarkable consistency throughout his post-Goshen career as the pattern of his thinking faithfully reflects the typological framework of the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this, since Wiebe claimed in 1980 that “I’ve simply never found a better way of thinking about the world” (UL 242). But the control typology exerts over the narrative is not obvious, nor, given Wiebe’s method of indirection, should we expect it to be so. Further, the difficulties for the reader are increased by the fact, as Northrop Frye states, that “typology is so dead a language now that most readers, including scholars, cannot construe the superficial meaning of any [work] which employs it” (Anatomy 14).

While his novels will be appreciated at a certain level for their challenging insight and inherent lyricism (I am thinking particularly of A Discovery of Strangers), their complexity is an indubitable stumbling-block to their success as vehicles of witness and criticism, simply because there are so few readers who will give them the attention they deserve and fewer still who will have access to the keys of interpretation.² And yet we are reminded of Flannery O’Connor’s response to the question whether her readers could unravel her “Scripture-anchored fiction” (Gable, “Ecumenic” 129). Addressing herself particularly to her “Catholic” readership and “the fact that Catholics don’t see religion through the Bible,” she argues that “[y]ou don’t write only for now”:

I don’t think the novelist can discard the instruments he has to plumb meaning just because Catholics aren’t used to them....Maybe in fifty years or a hundred Catholics will be reading the Bible the way they should have been reading it all along. I can wait that long to have my fiction understood. The Bible is what we share with all
Christians, and the Old Testament with all Jews. This is sacred history and our mythic background. If we are going to discard this we had better quit writing at all [sic].

(Wells, "Off" 87)

Wiebe would wholeheartedly applaud that statement. His own "pattern of thinking" causes him to write "as a Christian just as Camus writes as an existentialist" (Reimer and Steiner, "Translating" 127). As reflections of the typological metanarrative of the Bible, his novels explore the contemporaneous meaning of the Incarnation. If readers find that problematic, or misread what he has written, then he too can wait until they are more willing or better able to understand.

If it is Wiebe’s method of indirection that poses the primary problem, he is not prepared to sacrifice that either:

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 novel itself, the poorer the novel will be and the less likely he is to convince anyone, even if he were supposed to convince them. (ACW 42)

G.F. Hildebrand, despite the narrowness of his reading of Wiebe’s faith, and his evident lack of sympathy for Wiebe’s project, provides grudging recognition of the measure of Wiebe’s achievement through a back-handed compliment. He applies Louis Dudek’s concluding assessment of Christianity and other forms of "excessive idealism" - "it is a matter of excess of virtue. I admire it; but I will have none of it ("Art" 174) - to Wiebe’s fiction with the sardonic comment that "this critique may become our age’s ultimate evaluation of Wiebe’s artistic achievement" ("Theological" 30).

Our age, while it has already expressed a less equivocal appreciation of his artistry in the
conferral of two Governor General’s Awards for Fiction (for The Temptations of Big Bear [1973] and A Discovery of Strangers [1994]), has generally not recognized the subtlety of Wiebe’s artistry in his witness and criticism. One can but hope that readers less alienated than Hildebrand by Wiebe’s Christianity will give his work, particularly his two latest novels, the close attention it deserves, and in pondering “what it is trying to do or be” will recognize the measure of his achievement.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Yoder informed me at my first meeting with him at the University of Notre Dame in June 1995 that he had been leading a discussion group at Wiebe’s cabin outside Edmonton sometime in 1983 around the time the first reviews of My Lovely Enemy appeared.

2. “In 1970 Julia Kristeva wrote the introduction to the French translation of Bakhtin’s Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics. Taking his Marxism as axiomatic, Kristeva assumed an obligation to apologize for the ‘theoretical limitations’ of Bakhtin’s work, and in particular for ‘the unrecognized influence of Christianity in a humanist work’” (Lock, “Carnival” 69).

3. Michael LaFarque draws our attention to Barth’s comment in his The Epistle to the Romans [12] that “his basic approach to [Paul’s Epistle to the] Romans consisted simply in taking it seriously [emphasis added]” (“Texts” 324).

CHAPTER 1

1. In response to an early draft of the first part of this essay, Yoder wrote me (June 25,1996):

The ‘truly literate Christians’ refers to [Wiebe’s] being generously welcomed by the entire Goshen faculty and community, in which I was not involved. There he met all
the things you quote. I was not College faculty. At that time my primary employment was as mission board staff person, with occasional invitations to teach in Mennonite Biblical Seminary (not at that time very far toward its ultimate merger with Goshen Seminary). Then secondly there were livingroom fellowship meetings, convoked around Rudy’s Canadian MB [Mennonite Brethren] friend the late Clarence Bauman, with three other couples all psychology types. What he got from the Politics of Jesus he got not from me but from the book. The impression he got from me in the livingroom meetings (about every three weeks) would primarily be that I was not afraid of the psychologism of the others.”

2. In his letter to me, Yoder objects to Klaassen’s term “laundering” as not being “fair to Bender”: “No reading of history does not edit. If you are looking for a founder of a pacifist movement you should not feel a duty to include Thomas Muntzer.” Klaassen’s concerns about a monogenetic interpretation of Anabaptism appears to me part of the movement of the “third wave” to break down what was perceived as a narrow interpretation of Anabaptist history.

3. Yoder, again in his letter to me, claims that “Concern movement” is an overstatement”: “There was a series of pamphlets; nothing worth calling a movement. I was assigned to continue editing the pamphlets when it had become clear that the group of 7 or 8 who had met in 1952 would not be doing anything more together.” I had implied the existence of an agreed, formulated position by saying “Concern...,” and Yoder perceived that as an unwarranted hypostasis.
4. In his letter to me, Yoder is sensitive to “some legend-formation going on when you cite Reimer about my being a ‘leading interpreter’”:

What I did with Jesus in Politics was authorized by a Mennonite institution but not drawn from Mennonite thought. By the time it came out it was decided that I would not continue as Goshen Biblical Seminary president. If my writing ‘shaped Mennonites’ understanding’ it has to be recognized that that occurred backhandedly or despite Mennonites not wanting it to happen. This is really a reading on the old vacuum of other resources, or the self-defeating way in which other forces worked.

5. For Yoder, Reimer “ignores the components of finitude, sinfulness, and particularity, all three of which undercut the capacity to affirm that one knows what is transcendent ‘eternal unchanging truth’...and pretend[s] to a prelapsarian epistemology” (personal letter).

6. Yoder rejects any sense of “dominion” - “The ideas I played back from Jesus, from the biblical realists, from Barth are not my own and no disciples have been parroting them...To consider any set of ideas as specifically my own, and as dominating any arena, is to be out of touch with social reality” (personal letter).

7. Yoder senses that what Dintaman wants is “not historic orthodoxy but historic pietism” (personal letter).
CHAPTER II

1. See Stephen Prickett’s Words and The Word: Language, poetics and biblical interpretation, particularly his discussion of the “problem of the transparent text” wherein he attacks the assumptions behind modern translations of the Bible (“The text has a ‘meaning’ that is finally independent of our cultural presuppositions” [6]) that enable them to be “quite unanimous in rejecting any ambiguity or oddity perceived in the original” [7]).

CHAPTER III

1. “Flannery O’Connor’s ‘Revelation.’ It seemed to make some sense to follow the pattern of a human life. So again there is a kind of narrative of living, even in the story order. You know I’m very much affected by that; I think that’s the basis of the story, really” (Rudy Wiebe in Struther’s “Living” 17).

2. Michael Lafarque, in his stimulating attempt to show the positive implications of Derrida for Biblical scholarship, while, at the same time, responding to Karl Barth’s challenge to take the biblical text seriously, argues that “no paraphrase can substitute for engagement with the words [of Mark’s Gospel] and their particular background” (“Texts” 354):

The substantive content [which he wishes to substitute for the ambiguous “the meaning of the text”] which we experience in this way may not be something we can encapsulate in any easy formula. It may be something whose depth we never fully
grasp, and whose implications for our lives may require continued reflection. Still, we should not confuse complexity or depth with indeterminacy, nor richness of implications with ambiguity. (354-355)

He adds, further, that “the role of the biblical scholar, as scholar, is to be servant of the biblical text, to guard its otherness, to help make its substantive content something modern people can in some way experience and understand, in its particularity and in its otherness” (355).

The limitation of LaFarque’s discussion, however, despite its sensitivity to the otherness of the text (the words of the text, the “determinate life-world of the text authors” [354], and “the mind-set of the author”), is its insensitivity to the Other, the God who for Mark confronts us in the person of Jesus Christ. LaFarque appears to view God, in Derridean language, as merely “an organizing principle” (Derrida 248) that becomes part of the substantive content of Mark’s Gospel and other texts. Contrary to considerations of God as “a self-contained being standing outside all cultural systems” (349) and assumptions that “terms like ‘God’ are self-evident and unchanging in their meaning,” both of which Mark himself does not endorse, LaFargue wishes to assert that all perceptions of God are very much a part of that system and that the terms of description are forever in flux. At the same time, he appears to deny, by implication, God’s reality and otherness.

CHAPTER IV

1. For some reason critics seem to have missed this utterance by The Almighty Voice. For example, Howells states specifically, “He hears two voices: first the voice of the policeman...and then the death chant of Almighty Voice, himself....” (“Reliable” 101). Part of
the problem rests perhaps in the fact that the capitalized definite pronoun “The” (Almighty Voice) was not part of the text in the story’s original form in Fourteen Stories High (page 121). Despite the increased ambiguity without the pronoun, I would suggest that the sense of the passage remains the same.

2. Contrary to the cited source, Hildebrand insists that this question is italicized (“Theological” 197).

3. Barth, in his preface to the English edition of his The Epistle to the Romans, acknowledges that “No one can, of course, bring out the meaning of the text (auslegen) without at the same time adding something to it (einlegen)” (ix) - “Moreover, no interpreter is rid of the danger of in fact adding more than he extracts.”

CHAPTER VI

1. W.J. Keith has brought to my attention the misquotation or (more likely) typographical error in the statement from Ondaatje’s poem. Ondaatje wrote “falling without words” which would explain the resultant “silence.” The sense of the selection is perhaps maintained, however, through the controlling opening - “There is/ my fear/ of no words” - which is the fear of “silence.”

2. In his “The Words of Silence: Past and Present” (1989), Wiebe enunciates seven words surrounding silence: sound, death, creation, joy, song, stone, and writing. These are all words that voice the silence in My Lovely Enemy. But, as he states at the essay’s conclusion - “To
understand these words we may need more silence than we can find on earth. Undoubtedly that is what heaven is for” (20).

3. In the Neuman interview, reference is made to the influence of Garcia Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude on Wiebe’s The Scorched Wood People (UL 243). Certainly, the ‘magic realism’ present in that book is also present in Kroetsch’s What the Crow Said and in My Lovely Enemy as well.

CHAPTER VII

1. “Aritha van Herk...writes me that I should ‘find the north in your own head.’ Where is it? I do not know. But I am moving, and what I encounter here in the North, where I have of necessity come to look, are secrets; enigmas; mysteries. Not mysteries in the fine New Testament sense of a secret once hidden but then inexplicably revealed through the mercy of divine revelation. No, not that; at least not yet” (Wiebe, PD 113).

2. Bakhtin speaks to this point in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. This idea, as I said, is one-sided. Of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely
be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing.

(6-7)

3. Joseph-René Bellot in his Memoirs reports conversations with Hepburn relating to his experiences during the Franklin expedition.

4. The account, allegedly from Richardson’s Journal, of Franklin’s knee being sprained when “a large Indian woman drove her sledge over him” (DOS 144) would appear to be a product of Wiebe’s caprice.

5. While Keskarrah is reported to have a family, the reference to “daughter” is singular; Greywing would appear to be Wiebe’s creation.

6. Wiebe represents the letter as being written shortly after Hood’s death (October 30th to November 4th) while in fact the doctor wrote Bishop Hood after his return to England.

7. In the case of most novels it would be clearly too much to expect the reader to search out the subtle distinctions, but this is an unusual novel in that the detail of Wiebe’s “Acknowledgements” invites and facilitates a perusal of the original documents.

8. In a September 24, 1994 The Globe and Mail interview conducted by Chris Dafoe, Wiebe reports that in the 1970s he heard of people interested in writing about the final Franklin expedition:
"But," he says, talking about these writers’ attraction to the final expedition, “unless you’re interested in the English psyche as it’s dying, there’s really not much there to work with.” ("Arts" [E3])

While Wiebe turned to the first expedition instead for his latest novel, this chapter of _A Discovery of Strangers_ is very much a “prob[ing] of the English psyche as it’s dying.”

9. In 1661 the Church of England introduced a rubric into its service for the Burial of the Dead “directing that the office should not be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves” (Procter and Frere 636).

10. W.J.Keith has drawn my attention to the parallel with L.E.G. Oates’ decision in the closing days (March 1912) of the ill-fated Scott expedition to the Antarctic. Near the end of his own endurance and believing himself a burden to his companions, he disappeared into a blizzard trusting that their chances of survival might then be improved, saying the immortal words “I am just stepping outside. I may not be back for some time.”

11. Rilke’s poem “The Abduction” closes with the following lines in the original German ("Die Entführung" [1908]):

Sie kroch in ihren Mantelkragen

und befühlte ihr Haar, als bliebe es hier,
und horte fremd einen Fremden sagen:
Ich bin bei dir. (New 280)

AFTERWORD

1. In van Toorn’s summary of critical response:

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 descendent of Walter Scott. He groups him with writers such as William Kirby, Gilbert Parker, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Hugh MacLennan, Howard O’Hagan, Peter Such, and Timothy Findley. Leslie Monkman and Terrie 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 postmodernist, 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 J. Thiessen, Magdalene Falk Redekop, Elmer F. Suderman, and Hildegard Thiesen 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 postcolonial aspects of Wiebe’s work, as does John Thieme’s
W.J. Keith places Wiebe in the same category as Tolstoy and other writers of 'epic fiction,' while Patricia Morley regards him as a comedian. (Historicity 199-200)

In compiling this list, which van Toorn admits is "by no means exhaustive" (she has neglected to mention many of the critics to whom we have referred, such as Spriet, Howells, and Davidson), she wishes to show that "Wiebe’s writing...calls into question...the criteria commonly employed to define and order the component parts of the Canadian mosaic" (200).

2. In a conversation with Yoder at Notre Dame in June 1996, I voiced my nagging concerns that the effectiveness of A Discovery of Strangers as an agent of witness is weakened on two grounds, first, that, if my interpretation is correct, it appears to witness to sacrifices only tenuously connected to the prime object of Christian witness, namely the personal sacrifice of Christ, and, second, that my interpretation was reached only after a careful reading and several rereadings of the text, an exercise that can not be expected of most readers. Yoder’s response was informative. First, as long as the given sacrifice was faithful to a reading of the Cross (a sacrifice through pathological victimization, for example, would clearly not qualify), he would not fault the witness of the novel for not being more specifically related to Christ since the context within the novel itself and in Wiebe’s writings generally is sufficient for that connection to be made. Second, if it is sophistication that is required to perceive the novel’s depth then he would tend to perceive it as elitist. As a vehicle of witness the novel may then be effective for a small number of 'intellectuals' but of questionable value to the 'philistines.' It is a moot point, however, whether it is ‘sophistication’ or simply ‘close attention’ that Wiebe’s novels demand. I suspect that Wiebe himself would argue the latter, and would add
that for the novel to be an effective witness, it is not necessary that the reader initially discover all it is "trying to do." As he claimed more than thirty years ago, "a story worth pondering is a story doubly enjoyed."
APPENDIX 1 - THE REPUDIATION OF NEO-KANTIANISM

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) is one of several thinkers we will encounter in this essay who, in one form or another, repudiated the neo-Kantianism that dominated European philosophy at Marburg University up to the beginning of World War I. Their resistance is complex because each, in his own way, was strongly influenced by the reformulation of Immanuel Kant's philosophy, particularly as articulated by Hermann Cohen (1842-1918).

For Cohen, as for all exponents of neo-Kantianism, the prime feature of Kant's philosophy that attracted his interest was his "formulation of the mind's relation to the world, the innovation that was at the heart of his 'Copernican Revolution'" (Holquist, "Architectonics" xiii). Kant insisted that the ability to make judgments depended on a transcendental synthesis of the two sources of knowledge, sensibility and understanding, physical sensation and the mind's concepts:

a priori concepts...do exist in the mind, but they can be used actively to organize sensations from the world outside the mind. The world, the realm of things-in-themselves, really exists, but so does the mind, the realm of concepts. Thought is the give and take between the two. (xiii)

Cohen effectively undid Kant's epistemological synthesis between sensibility and understanding, between the realm of physical sensations and that of the concepts of the mind. He opposed the potential dualism of Kant's solution to the mind/body question by claiming that "no matter how material [the world] might appear [it] is still always a subject that is
thought" (xiv). By abandoning Kant’s thing-in-itself in his craving for unity, Cohen served to trap the human subject within its own subjectivity.

Bakhtin fell under Cohen’s influence at Nevel' through his good friend Matvei Isaevich Kagan who returned there after studying at Marburg. Although deeply influenced by Cohen’s emphasis on process - the “radical ‘ungivenness’ of experience, with its openness and energy - the loopholes of existence” (xvi), Bakhtin abhorred his claims to oneness based on a ‘logic of pure knowing.’ Holquist describes Bakhtin as “perhaps best understood as a figure who is trying to get back to the other side of Kant’s synthesis, the world” (xv), while rejecting Kant’s transcendental signifier. The unities to which Bakhtin aspires are not those that are given but those that are worked out within the world, in the context of dialogue between the self and the other. For him, to avoid subjectivism, an entrapment within our own consciousness, and to consummate our identity, we must recognize our total dependence on the other. For each of the persons considered here there is a similar obsession with alterity. It will be the other who will be seen as giving meaning to our existence.

For Karl Barth (1886-1968), the attraction that led him to Marburg was not Cohen but the neo-Kantian theologian Wilhelm Hermann, "the theological teacher of his student days" (Barth, How 19). It is known that Barth possessed a copy of Cohen’s 1915 Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie and attended lectures by Cohen and Natorp (another major neo-Kantian figure at Marburg who was Barth’s brother Heinrich’s teacher), but the extent of their particular influence is a matter of debate. Although he asks the rhetorical question in the preface to the fifth edition of his The Epistle to the Romans, “Have [my readers] been presented with what is really no more than a rehash [of Paul Luther, and Calvin] resurrected out of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Cohen?,” Bruce McCormack notes that “Barth had already abandoned Cohenian constructivism around 1920 [prior to his revision of
the Epistle] in favour of a more traditional form of Kantianism which allowed for greater
room for realism” (“Graham” 105). His reformulated Epistle attests to his attempt to escape
the strictures of the human mind in his proclamation of the “Wholly Other.”

The great names of late nineteenth century protestant theology such as De Wette,
Biederman, Ludermann, Harnack (under whom Barth studied in Berlin before going to
Marburg), and even Harmann, all men for whom Barth expressed the greatest respect, were to
become the object of his most intense attack. He asks whether the “most typical spokesmen
[of the theology of that century] were not primarily philosophers and only secondarily
theologians” (Humanity 23), contending that for this theology, “to think about God meant to
think in a scarcely veiled fashion about man, more exactly about the religious, the Christian
religious man” (39):

To speak about God meant to speak in an exalted tone [shades of Kant] but once
again and more than ever about this man - his revelations and wonders, his faith and
his works. There is no question about it: here man was made great at the cost of God
- the divine God who is someone other than man, who sovereignly confronts him, who
immovably and unchangeably stands over against him as the Lord, Creator, and
Redeemer. (39-40)

Influenced by Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Overbeck, but particularly by rereading the
Bible, Barth set out to change the direction of protestant evangelical theology - “If all that
wasn’t a blind alley!” (41) - by proclaiming that “God might actually be other than the God
confined to the musty shell of the Christian-religious self-consciousness and that as such he
might act and speak” (40).
While Barth came to reject the idealist concept of the absolute as a self-made abstraction, an unjustified exaltation of the human mind, he did maintain "a commitment to the epistemological idealism of Marburg anthropology" (Ward, Barth 82), but negatively, in his insistence that our knowledge of both ourselves and our world is mediated "by transcendental a priori which govern and constitute what we perceive and how we understand that perception" (16). The knowledge we achieve, however, is that of God's "hiddenness" (Barth, Church II/1 184). As Ward comments, "[w]hat we know...is a rupture-in-continuity" (Barth 24):

It is a rupture of meaning that places everything in question simply by being other than meaning (though not necessarily other than meaningless). This rupture is read theologically as the judgement under which God places all human knowledge.

This hermeneutic activity is confronted by a second activity, in which the communication is immediate because it is God who speaks through Jesus Christ and provides his own interpretation through the Holy Spirit. Of the two hermeneutic activities "the latter reveals the former to be an idol, or in terms of linguistics, the endless play of signifiers."

Emmanuel Levinas's contact with Marburg was through Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), his student Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who later taught at Marburg, and Martin Buber (1878-1965). Levinas came to reject the phenomenological system of Husserl because of its reductionist annihilation of difference. The system smacked of neo-Kantian obsession with interiority. Everything is measured by the self which reduces otherness to sameness, and plurality to an intelligible unity or totality. While Levinas applauded Heidegger's rejection of this priority of the thinking subject, inquiring into the historical being that is bracketed in
Husserl's phenomenological epoché, he attacked him for giving ontology pride of place over ethics.

For Levinas, it is the responsibility for the 'other' that should govern and direct all thought and not the meaning of Being. Ethics should receive priority over ontology and is the true subject of first philosophy. Further, what is fundamental to this ethics, what drives it, is the idea of the Infinite which is beyond Being. In clarifying his notion of the Infinite, he distinguishes between the god of western philosophy, a "god adequate to reason, a comprehended god who would not trouble the autonomy of consciousness" (Trace 346) and god, the ἐπεκείνα τῆς οὐσίας of Plato and Plotinus, "other absolutely and not with respect to some relative term...not beyond being because it is buried and hidden...but buried because it is beyond being, wholly other than being" (347).

Levinas's primary relationship with Buber, who incidentally, for a time, was a fellow contributor with Karl Barth to the journal Die Kreature, occurred after Levinas's work on Heidegger. It is then that Levinas came to recognize the negative ontology of Buber's 'Saying Thou' which ties Buber to Barth in an understanding of the encounter with God:

The Thou is located, for Buber as for Barth, in the unfathomable, which can be either the sounding of the nihilistic No or the mystery of God's grace, either void or plenitude. (Ward, Barth, 127)

The nature of the interrelationship between these and many other thinkers we have failed to mention obviously becomes far too complex for a footnote to provide any semblance of justice. What we have attempted to indicate in these brief glimpses is the extent of the debate initiated by Cohen's reformulation of the Kantian synthesis. In a gigantic dialogue which still
continues among contemporary scholars such as Jean-Luc Marion, who shows traces of Levinas, and Graham Ward, who is admittedly influenced by both Levinas and Barth. Bakhtin and his peers make the attempt not simply 'to get back to the other side of Kant's synthesis, the world,' but to escape the priority of the ego which haunts Kant and the neo-Kantians alike, and to proclaim the primacy of the other.

This dialogue which directs us to the other is particularly relevant to our discussion of Wiebe's latest novels since for him the focus is constantly on the other, be it the 'enemy' or the 'stranger,' and beyond him or her on the Other who ruptures our self-certainties by the call to discipleship.
The chapter "Over the Red Line" (BMC) provides a text seemingly designed to illustrate the rich variety of the stylistic device free indirect speech (FIS) through the narrator’s adoption of the experiential field of the character while maintaining an implicit narratorial comment. It gives immediacy to Liesel’s growing sense of alienation from the Mennonites housed in ‘steerage’ on the S.S. Hindenburg and her growing attraction to the glitzy world of first class. It enables the narrator to articulate his own critique of that dour and seemingly joyless sectarian community, and, at the same time, his own assessment of the shallowness of the alluring worldly society. FIS effects both a sympathy for her complaints and attractions, and, through irony, a distancing from her naivety. “Over” in the title reflects the ambiguity of the narratorial overview juxtaposed to Liesel’s passage beyond her Mennonite confines.

In the first paragraph, for example, relating the postponement of a party because of a funeral, indeed, in an interjection in the complexity of the first sentence, the reader is confronted by free indirect speech - “after all, they were the entire steerage and had every right to do exactly as they pleased” (72). While syntactically this interjection is similar to the initial clause (“When Mr. Adolf confirmed Liesel’s apprehension that the party now would have to be postponed one day....”), the move to FIS is flagged by the subjective particle “after all” and the exaggerated claim of the interjection itself. That Liesel, who is only then introduced as coming to a decision, is probably responsible for the claim, her own or a reflection of the sentiment of the steerage community itself, is suggested, again in FIS, in the tone of shocking “silly old funeral,” the hyperbolical “spoil everything,” and the emphatic “again” which colours the report of her decision. The narratorial voice, which Pascal argues
is present in some form in every FIS, lends an ironical twist to the claim of steerage’s power, in undermining the petulant assertions. That voice can be heard challenging the power steerage really has, and by the same token, what power Liesel has in her decision “then and there.” The irony serves to undermine the emphatic “refused to wait” in the next, and by contrast, very brief sentence (“She absolutely refused to wait.”), which in the exaggerated expression “absolutely” also smacks of FIS.

Liesel’s rebellion eventually leads her to a traumatic experience in first class, a fearful baptism, with a fall into and rescue from the ocean depths until she is secured in her father’s arms. She then sees herself much as she saw her fellow Mennonites, as “a blanketed blot” (85), but in her despair, a vision of her father causes her to clutch at him - “she did not care who was looking” - and his arms surround her “like a cradle” (84), her faced pressed “against his coat rough” (85). Both “cradle” and “rough” are tinged with FIS, suggesting a change in Liesel’s perception. No longer is she attempting to escape from the “cradle” and dependence on a “rough” (as opposed to the smooth silk of the alluring first class) Mennonite world. The horror of her experience appears to temporarily reconcile her to the security of her known community.

The text, then, immediately juxtaposes an appreciation of her mother’s shawl, which is not chic, but in its “hand-made...soft, beautiful, black(ness)” reveals another side to a world she (and, the narrator suggests, her Mennonite community) is about to lose.

The story appears to close without FIS in a mixture of narrative description and dialogue (reported in direct speech), as Liesel comes to understand that the equator is but a “man-made line” (85). But the narrator surely intimates that it is we who repeatedly erect the many boundaries of life, between people, places (promised lands), and even life and death
(“Were you at the funeral too?”); perhaps all lines of demarcation and separation are to be recognized as “man-made.”

The narrator, however, is not finished. Liesel’s self-conscious concerns, which seem to resonate with “the motors throbbing,” reassert themselves - “Oh pappa, now everyone will know!” With the abruptly ambiguous question, “So you understand?”, the narrator dramatically shifts the focus to what has been the shadowy figure of the father, who now becomes prime actor and speaker. Liesel is stilled but not “suspended,” as a challenging of values is mediated through her. Has Liesel, now, so quickly, become “old enough” (72) to comprehend? But what is it she is called to understand? In fact, what do we understand?

Her mother’s black shawl becomes the emblem of a vision. But it is the tone, value-laden and ironic, in the father’s humorous admonition, “And next time, at least leave the shawl” (85), that gives her pause. She is left staring, as her father, who once reflected the refinements of Leningrad, but, more recently for her, was but part of a “long-faced” crowd, points her and the reader beyond the life-denying drabness of steerage and the superficial glitz of first class to expressions of true and lasting value - “We can’t lose everything beautiful at once.” Now, what is of most value is not to be found in the “appearances” Liesel found so beguiling, nor even in the “hand-made” shawl, but simply in Liesel herself. But the father, and the narrator, only point. The father does not “switch on the light,” but stands “at the open door; standing aside, waiting.”

Gradually, though, the light shines more strongly upon him, revealing one of those “scapegoat” figures who inhabit so many of Wiebe’s novels (UL 234). In another FIS, Liesel informs us of his ‘suffering servant’ role - “but for them, some of the biggest yellers with their trachoma and empty pockets and no relatives to help, [he] certainly would not be on this ship,” but he is, “sitting in their in their centre, motionless as stone....” (77). Or, “tall and
gaunt as one of the pillars,” he speaks approvingly of the Epps, “Those Epps are a real family.... Where one has to go, they go all. That’s not like some” (78). As the focus shifts from Liesel to her father, the reader senses that the burdens Liesel bears must be a greater deprivation for her cultured father. In reflection, our appreciation of his sacrifice is mediated through her perceptions. He himself does not “have to go,” but he is there, and “[w]ho didn’t wail on his shoulder? It was absolutely stupid that he was to be yelled at by - by such farmers” (77).

In the closing scene, Helmut Driediger’s question to Liesel echoes Jesus’s question to his disciples about their understanding. The earlier “hint of his problems” (72) would seem to relate to the people’s lack of understanding, particularly concerning the demands their calling places upon them and their sense of ultimate values. When a woman offers to purchase the shawl, he responds, “No.... It’s always been - we have little left” (85). But, as we learn through his later irony, the shawl (which is simply not for sale) is of immeasurably less importance than his family and his discipleship.

In the final still, the image of Driediger standing at the cabin door shifts easily into the vision of Revelation 3:20 - “Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” The confusion early in the chapter as to whose voice was being heard leads now to the suggestion that the narratorial voice is fused with that of this present-day Christian disciple. The text suggests that the crossing of the line that we are all called to make is not from one “man-made” position to another, but the spirit-instigated move through the door from indifference or rejection to the faith of serving discipleship.
APPENDIX 3 - A COMPARISON OF A DISCOVERY OF STRANGERS WITH PATRICK WHITE’S VOSS

Given the complexity inherent in Wiebe’s method of indirection, the claim that sacrifice is the focus of A Discovery of Strangers, a personal sacrifice of which the incarnate Christ is always the measure, is perhaps more readily grasped by reference to another writer and another comparable work. Peter Beaton, in his short profile on the Australian novelist, Patrick White, suggests that, if White is a Christian writer, he is definitely not orthodox since he tends to “clothe[] his religious sensibility in garments borrowed from many cultures” (Eye 2). While we are accustomed to Wiebe’s openness to other cultures and his orthodoxy has not to this point been an issue, A Discovery of Strangers will cause some readers to suspect that he, too, is now more aligned with the White of Beaton’s judgment, since his customary forceful Christian witness seems usurped by pervasive judgment on a clearly flawed Christian perception and practice which suffers severely when contrasted to indigenous Indian spirituality and sacrifice.

Beaton does, however, make the further claim that White’s “awareness of the Word made Flesh is at the heart of his novels” (2), adding the later elaboration:

Patrick White’s central subject is not the Hidden God but the Incarnation. His novels are an attempt to inject new and urgent meaning into the almost moribund theological doctrine of ‘the Word made Flesh’....the Word must enter the Flesh, in order that the one may be fulfilled, the other may be redeemed. The soul can only embrace God by embracing the created world. (10-11)
This second claim should alert us to a possible misunderstanding contained in the first, and cause us to recognize definite parallels between these two writers in terms of their Christian witness and specific literary practice. As we have seen, an appreciation of the Incarnation and its role within strict typology has been pivotal to an understanding of Wiebe’s earlier novels. Further, we have noted that Wiebe has increasingly followed a method of indirection in expressing his Christian witness, a method that places increased demands on his readers, and may lead to misreading. In this light, Beaton’s comments on White tantalize with possibility; it may well be the case that a reading of White’s novels, particularly *Voss* (1957), the story of an expedition seeking to cross the Australian continent in the 1840s, which Wiebe mentions in an interview (van Toorn, “Creating” 12) at the time he was writing *A Discovery of Strangers*, can be of assistance in interpreting Wiebe’s novel. (Terrie Goldie has compared two other novels by Wiebe and White - Wiebe’s *The Temptations of Big Bear* and White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* - in his “Contemporary Views of an Aboriginal Past: Rudy Wiebe and Patrick White” in which, among other things, he discusses faithfulness to historical events and underlying literary traditions, the incorporation of Whites into aboriginal life, and the issue of cannibalism, all issues which surface in *A Discovery of Strangers*.)

Where Wiebe’s exploration follows the actual records of the Franklin land expedition, White’s creation is less concretely historical. Although “possibly conceived during the early days of the Blitz, reading Eyre’s Journal in London,” and based on his own lengthy experience in the desert, the common information on Hitler, “the arch-meglomaniac of the day,” A.H. Chisolm’s *Strange New World*, and especially reports of Ludwig Leichardt’s 1840s expeditions through the interior of Australia, *Voss* makes no claims to historicity, being clearly a fictive work. One resulting difference is that, while both novels are concerned with a
discovery of strangers and strangeness, Wiebe’s work probes the possibilities inherent in the ambiguity of the record, and *Voss* fuses the strange and the familiar “to transform the map of Australia and the topography of the inner life into the realm of myth” (Beaton, 1). Wiebe’s characters retain the substance of their verisimilitude, while White’s tend to the allegorical.

What is most striking, however, is the abundance of similarities between the two works. Written against the common background of materialistic societies that, while inherently rationalistic, espouse a ‘fuzzy’ faith in a God of benevolence and power, seemingly created in man’s own image, both novels, among many similar interests, probe the ambiguity of words, explore the non-rational or the unexplainable, challenge the perception and treatment of natives, and emphasize the importance of the flesh. But their most striking bond, and the one that is most central to our interests is the question of sacrifice.

In *Voss*, Palfreyman, an ornithologist, the scientist on Voss’s expedition, like Dr. Richardson a deeply religious man, takes upon himself the role of a suffering servant and eventually surrenders his life while acting as a mediator between the expedition and a hostile group of blacks. Given the opportunity to make amends for past failures (a chance Hood also seeks), to “acquit [himself] truly,” thus “revealing the true condition of a soul” (341), he approaches the hostile natives “at peace and in love with his fellows.” Palfreyman, whom Beaton notes “is no more (and no less) ‘Christ’ than anyone else in the book” (*Eye* 93), in his mediation makes the other members of the expedition “human again” and confronts them with the image of Christ, or, in Beaton’s words, “in his manner of dying he arouses the divine image that has been latent in the memories of the onlookers and makes it potent and unforgettable.”

To the blacks, this figure, approaching with the white palms of his hands extended, becomes a source of fascination and fear. As he joins them “at the core of a mystery,” he is
mortally wounded by two of the natives to ward off "the white mysteries." Palfreyman laughs, "because he still did not know what to do" [an interesting alteration of Jesus’s crucifixion words, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do"], and dies, apologizing for yet another failure, "Ah, Lord...if I had been stronger" (343).

The primary focus in Voss, however, rests on the sacrificial relationship between Voss, the German explorer trekking across Australia, and Laura, his betrothed living in Sydney. Their love relationship is, on the surface, significantly dissimilar from that of Hood and Greenstockings; in fact the individual lovers in the two novels appear totally different. Laura, a young social figure in a small Australian town, is initially concerned with matters of doubt and faith:

The keenest torment or exhilaration was, in fact, the most private. Like her recent decision that she could not remain a convinced believer in that God in whose benevolence and power she had received most earnest instruction from a succession of governesses and her good aunt....Yet, here she was become what, she suspected, might be called a rationalist. (9)

Confronted by this German stranger whom she comes to love, but conscious that what she and Voss most share is a misguided confidence in reason and a sense of pride, she is forced to abandon a world of, at worst, uncomfortable speculation, and to enter a process of self-humiliation directed to their mutual redemption that ultimately leads to her personal sacrifice.

Greenstockings, by distinct contrast, appears to live in an alien world. A young but in many ways far more experienced woman than Laura, of a tribe Laura's society would have
considered ‘savage,’ Greenstockings has her known struggle for survival disrupted through the intrusion of a slight English stranger. Their discovery of one another through increasing physical intimacy is itself disrupted through her abduction, and their separation enforced by the Whites who control their existence.

In turn, the men these women love, Voss and Hood, have little in common. Although both are men of science and presumably reason, while Voss is a practical man exuding self-assurance and strength, Hood, of artistic temperament, is perceived even by the woman he loves as “ultimately useless” (DOS 207): “There is no strength in his tears, He is so weak and useless. And stupid” (208). These two would certainly be strangers one to the other.

In the course of his expedition Voss resists Laura’s spiritual claim upon him, her desire for him to become humble, through his apparent strength:

I cannot kill myself quite off, even though you would wish it, my dearest Laura. I am reserved for further struggles, to wrestle with rocks, to bleed if necessary, to ascend. Yes, I do not intend to stop short of the Throne for the pleasure of grovelling on lacerated knees....At the risk of incurring your serious disapproval, I will raise you up to the far more rational position at my side.  (Voss 217)

He judges that the “nurture of faith, on the whole...was an occupation for women, between the serving-pan and the linen press” (48), and despises the selflessness of the humble - “How they merge themselves with the concept of their God, he considered almost with disgust” (48).

The stories that unfold in the two novels are in large measure accounts of the influence these two women effect on their men - despite their physical separation. In Voss, throughout
the course of the expedition, Laura prays for Voss and is mystically enabled to be present to him - a presence that constantly challenges his pride and his conviction of his own divinity. As early as their first meeting in the garden in Sydney he realizes that "it was she who had wrestled with him...trying to throw him by Christian guile, or prayers offered" (144), but throughout the expedition he continues, though often weakened and tempted by her loving care, to contest her petition for his humility. But the time comes, when, to rescue Voss, Laura, recognizing the need for personal sacrifice, is prepared to surrender her adopted child, Mercy:

'If I were to make some big sacrifice,' Laura was saying. 'I cannot enough, that is obvious, but something of a personal nature that will convince a wavering mind. If it is only human sacrifice that will convince man that he is not God....You see, I am willing to give up so much to prove that human truths are also divine. This is the true meaning of Christ.' (370)

In her suffering for Voss, Laura surrenders her own health to the brink of her own death. It is only then that she is finally victorious, and able to grasp some understanding of the Incarnation: "Dear Christ, now at last I understand your suffering" (386). What she recognizes is, first, that it is necessary for God to enter the human plane in the form of man to procure man's salvation; second, that though it all appears "so easy," man is really "so shoddy, so contemptible, greedy, jealous, stubborn, ignorant," even aspiring to divinity himself, that he, in himself, is not lovable; and third, that a recognition of his fallen state is the first step toward his divinization - "when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so" (387). It is not through his own work, even through his own sacrifice, that man
can attain his salvation, but through the sacrifice of Christ for all “shoddy” men, that “[i]n the end, he may ascend” (387).

We eventually learn that Voss, captured and tortured by a hostile tribe of blacks, is, surprisingly, perhaps not all that different from Hood. Despite his scepticism and derision of those with faith and humility, Voss gives increasing evidence that his resistance is equivocal. He might disdainfully reject “the feminine men” of faith, yet he confesses to their implicit attraction - “he remembered with longing the eyes of Palfreyman...from...whom he must always hold himself aloof” (48). He admits, further, that the selflessness of Palfreyman and Laura “was a terrible temptation”:

At times he could have touched their gentle devotion, which had the soft, glossy coat of a dog. At other moments, they were folded inside him, wing to wing, waiting for him to soar with them. But he would not be tempted. (290)

Laura who is mystically present with Voss in his captivity, is brought to a realization of what he experiences before his death - “at last he was truly humbled” (389):

He himself, he realized had always been most abominably frightened, even at the height of his divine power, a frail god upon a rickety throne, afraid of opening letters, of making decisions, afraid of the instinctive knowledge in the eyes of mules, of the innocent eyes of good men, of the elastic nature of the passions, even of the devotion he had received from some men, and one woman, and dogs. Now, at last, reduced to the bones of manhood, he could admit all this and listen to his teeth rattling in the darkness. ‘O Jesus,’ he cried, ‘rette mich nur! Du lieber!’ (390)
The role of the flesh is key to an understanding of both *A Discovery of Strangers* and *Voss*, particularly in terms of the message of the Incarnation. Messages generally imply words, but the thrust of these novels is that words are so fraught with mystery that their meaning seems fulfilled only in the flesh. In *Voss*, Ralph Angus, one of the members of the expedition, reads the burial service for Palfreyman, but is compelled to correct himself “time and again” (344): “for the meaning of the words was too great for him to grasp.” By contrast, we are reminded of Palfreyman’s sacrifice and the effect on his comrades. Statements about the Incarnation may no longer penetrate their surfeited ears, but in his mediation on their behalf

All remembered the face of Christ that they had seen at some point in their lives, either in churches or visions, before retreating from what they had not understood, the paradox of man in Christ, and Christ in man. (342)

Similarly, the relationship between Voss and Laura which had been limited to the verbal expression of their thoughts and feelings is completed only in her mysterious presence on the expedition trail. As she rode with him and tended to his wounds

Then they were drifting together. They were sharing the same hell, in their common flesh, which he had attempted to repudiate. (364)

It is in the mystery of this meeting wrought through the faithfulness and fervency of her prayers that Voss is finally transformed and humbled.
Although the roles are played out by diverse casts in diverse narratives and in diverse manners, love and sacrifice are at the heart of both White’s *Voss* and Wiebe’s *A Discovery of Strangers*. While in both novels the heroics of the men, the discoverers, receive major attention, it is the women, Laura and Greenstockings, apparently cast in lesser roles, who are the primary agents of transformation. Laura Trevelyon, abandoning her musings on agnosticism, enters a relationship of intense commitment to Voss, and is prepared to sacrifice all she holds dear, her child Mercy and even life itself, in a constant outpouring of her love for him. Greenstockings, who engulfs a spiritually-wizened Robert Hood in the fullness of her love, is instrumental in awakening his recognition that he has lived too long in “the confident, simple world of English games” (251), and must assume his personal responsibilities.

Both *A Discovery of Strangers* and *Voss* are texts designed to challenge deceptive claims to certainty, revealing the limitation of our vision of a world that far exceeds our expectations. Further, as much as both novels celebrate the power of human love, both provide unequivocal portraits of human fallibility, pointing beyond to a greater source of sustenance. While White is more specific than Wiebe in the acknowledgement of the limitations of human love and sacrifice, the explicit statement of the one helps reveal the implicit message of the other. *Voss* is more like *The Blue Mountains of China* in its concluding explication of its inherent message, while *A Discovery of Strangers* maintains its mode of indirection throughout. Although the self-sacrifice of both Laura Trevelyon and Robert Hood is enacted in the context of the Christian faith, she openly proclaims the subservience of her sacrifice to the sacrifice of Christ himself, while for Hood that enunciation must be gleaned from the Biblical texts that flood his mind, and from his recitation of the prayer of the Princess Elizabeth of France.
WORKS CITED

Primary Texts:


-------. “A Novelist’s Personal Notes on Frederick Philip Grove.” University of Toronto Quarterly, 47/3 (Spring 1978): 189-199.


Secondary Texts:


Howells, Coral Ann. “‘If I had a reliable interpreter who would make a reliable interpretation’: Language, Screams and Silence in Rudy Wiebe’s “Where is the Voice Coming From?” Recherches Anglaises et Americanes, 16 (1983): 95-104.


------. "The Revelation of the Holy Other as the Wholly Other: Between Barth's Theology of
the Word and Levinas's Philosophy of Saying." Modern Theology, 9/2 (April 1993):
159-180.

------. "Why is Derrida Important for Theology?" Theology, xcv/766 (July-August 1992):
263-270.


Wells, Joel. "Off the Cuff." In Conversations with Flannery O'Connor. Ed. Rosemary M.

481-487.

Wenger, John C. The Doctrines of the Mennonites. Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing
House, 1952.

Whaley, Susan. "Rudy Wiebe." In Canadian Writers and Their Works (Fiction Series).
313-375.


--------. Personal Interviews (June 1995 and June 1996).

--------. Personal Letter (June 25, 1996).


