getting lost — or falling off the edge. So it is with exploration. The territory that these essays leave untouched is huge, and it is still there, an invitation and a challenge to other scholars. What is marked out here is one beginning, a series of excursions into a new land.

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ROMANTIC NATIONALISM
AND THE IMAGE OF NATIVE PEOPLE
IN CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE
MARGERY FEE

Contemporary English-Canadian writers often seem to be using the image of Native people much as Howard O'Hagan’s ludicrous, yet sinister entrepreneur, Dobble, tries to use Tay John. He plans to have Tay John, dressed in full, fake, Native regalia, greet tourists at the train station. He is told “first you’ll have to capture him. Then you’ll have to stuff and frame him.” All literary characters are, of course, “stuffed and framed” as aesthetic products. But the cultural, political, and economic situation of Native people in Canada makes the use of their image especially worth examination. Because of the sympathy for Native people common to much contemporary English-Canadian writing, it seems simplistic to dismiss the almost obsessive literary concern with Native people as mere exploitation. Still, English-Canadian writers do not often suggest that white people should go back to where they came from, or give even a little bit of land back, and to expect them to would be naïve. Leslie Monkmann points out that even the “few dozen works” by English-Canadians that “focus directly on the red man and his culture . . . are governed by the white man’s perspective,” and, of course, they could scarcely be governed by anything else.²

A complicated process, simultaneously a confession and a denial of guilt — an identification and a usurpation — ensues when white writers choose Native people as literary material. The moral unease that marks many contemporary texts is illustrated by Andrew Suknaski’s comment on this difficulty. Suknaski feels a “vaguely
divided... guilt for what happened to the Indian... and guilt [also] because to feel this guilt is a betrayal of what you ethnically are — the son of a homesteader and his wife who must be rightfully honoured in one's mythology." Of course, many writers have noticed, as John Newlove's "The Pride" says, that

...the Indians
are not composed of
the romantic stories
about them.

Yet this awareness is held in tension with the simultaneous translation of Native into stereotype and myth. That writers' main purpose is neither to abolish the myths nor to alter the political situation of the Native people seems clear, since, in most of the works I examine, dead Indians, even whole extinct tribes, work as well as or better than "live," contemporary Indians. In fact, sometimes the Native people are worked into the text by proxy, through something quite remotely connected with them, like a place name or even a season, Indian summer. Often the Native characters or proxies play a marginal role in terms of the amount of text devoted to them, even when their function is central to the plot, characterization, or significance of a work.

Examination of a narrative movement common to a large group of contemporary works reveals the functional importance of the Native characters, even where their appearances are brief. Typically, a white speaker or main character is confused and impelled by a strong desire to know more about the past: personal, familial, native, or national. The confusion is resolved through a relationship with an object, image, plant, animal, or person associated with Native people. Occasionally, the relationship is with a real Native person. The resolution is often a quasi-mystical vision of, or identification with, Natives, although occasionally it simply takes the form of a psychological or creative breakthrough. Initially, the subject is approached rationally, even forensically, but the conclusion is poetic, emotional, and often mythical. The movement from observer to participant, outsider to insider, immigrant to "native," historian to mythmaker, is often commented on specifically.

This general pattern works in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing;* Douglas Barbour's *Visions of My Grandfather;* Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers;* Marian Engel's *Bear;* Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man,* "Stone Hammer Poem," and *Gone Indian;* Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners;* Keith Maillard's *Two Strand River;* W. O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point and Since Daisy Creek;* John Newlove's "The Pride;" Howard O'Hagan's "The Pepee" and *Tay John;* many of Andrew Suknaski's poems; and Rudy Wiebe's "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" It haunts Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook,* Timothy Findley's *The Wars,* and Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow — and this is just a short list. This pattern may be so ubiquitous because it allows for the fulfillment of several ideological functions simultaneously. First, it focuses on the identity quest of the bourgeois individual so crucial to western literature. It allows, through the white character's association with the Native, for a white "literary land claim," analogous to the historical territorial take-over, usually implicit or explicit in the text. And it allows for a therapeutic meditation on the evil of technology and the good of a life close to nature, the latter offering a temporary inoculation against the former.

A variant of mainstream nationalism uses the First Peoples' position as marginal, yet aboriginal, to make a similar claim-identification for other marginal groups. Those who do not wish to identify with "mainstream" Anglo-Canadian culture, or who are prevented from doing so, can find a prior and superior Canadian culture with which to identify. Thus, directly or indirectly, the Native is connected to the Jew in Mordecai Richler's *The Incomparable Atuk* and Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers,* to the Mennonite visionary in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear,* and to the sexual nonconformist in Timothy Findley's *The Wars,* Marian Engel's *Bear,* and Keith Maillard's *Two Strand River.*

Nationalism, then, is the major ideological drive behind the use of the Indian in contemporary English-Canadian literature. The many New World colonial and post-colonial writers who work within this theory, however, find themselves hampered by the bad fit between Old World Romantic theory and the New World situation. Those closest to the soil are not blood ancestors, their cultural traditions are alien, and to become their mouthpieces in any valid sense is to betray both one's own culture and its claim to the land.

The Indian is an important mythical figure in a powerful literary movement — Romanticism — and its related political ideology — nationalism. The origins of Romanticism and nationalism can be traced to the struggle for German unification, when the native culture was used to justify the creation of a state whose borders followed the cultural borders of language and "race." The intimate
relationship of a people with the soil — a relationship seen as quasi-biological — was used to support the argument that their rulers should come from a local elite rather than a foreign aristocracy. The peasants, because closest to the soil and most uncorrupted by foreign influences, were felt to be most representative of their "race" and nation. Rousseau accorded, at least in terms of natural goodness, an even higher status to the Noble Savage, who lived even closer to nature.

What is enviable in the Native people, then, from a nationalistic point of view, is their autochthonous claim to the land. Native people also possess all the other traits so important, in Romantic terms, to a great literature: an indigenous language and mythology, and a past filled with heroic deeds. Yet for the poet simply to identify with an Indian is rendered problematic by their cultural and "racial" differences. An examination of Robert Kroetsch’s “Stone Hammer Poem” and John Newlove’s “The Pride” illuminates how these difficulties mark their works.

Robert Kroetsch’s “Stone Hammer Poem” focuses on a stone that has passed through the hands of Native people, that was found on his grandfather’s wheat-field, and that he now uses as a paperweight. The stone hammer comes to represent, by means of synecdoche, both the poet's father's wheat-field and a wider "property": the land, the prairies, even Canada. The central paradox of the poem is land ownership:

Now the field is mine because
I gave it
(for a price)

A man who maintains that he owns a piece of land because he has sold it, and only after he has sold it, is certainly talking about an unusual kind of land ownership. The poet rejects several concepts of ownership. At first glance, he seems to agree with the Native view that no one can own the land. The young man did not

notice that the land did not belong

to the Indian who gave it to the Queen
(for a price). 11

But, since the poet eventually claims it himself, he must believe in some form of possession. Yet he does not gain his title by inheritance, since he does not feel he owns the land until he sells it.

Another criterion for ownership is use. Someone who uses something can be said to own it; thus the Indian who lost the hammer cursed because he was deprived of its use value. The grandfather is governed by use value, too, and he curses when he "finds" the stone by running his plough into it, because he sees it as useless. The grandfather is linked with the Indian: both lose the stone maul, presumably for the same reason. Governed by use value, neither perceives its true value.

The poet's father finds the stone hammer because he is looking — for something, if not for it. He is "lonesome / for death," for the past, and for his absent family. Somehow he sees it as a substitute for these, and he singles it out by putting it in a raspberry basket on the porch railing. Here, for the first time, the stone acquires a sentimental value, although it now has no use value. But neither use value nor emotional value alone seems to be enough to determine possession. The poet finds in the hammer both a use value — as a paperweight — and an emotional value: "Sometimes I write / my poems for that stone hammer."

Kroetsch equates the stone not only with the land, but with the poem. He seems to argue, with Horace, that a poem should both teach and delight: land, to be truly claimed, should be used and appreciated for its beauty. The grandfather uses the land but does not love it; the father only begins to love the land, in retirement, after he has stopped using it. The poet both loves and uses the land as he does the paperweight. For him, the land is the source of his poetry, his inspiration, an analogue of the poem itself, and his audience, rolled into one. It is the foundation of his profession, his work, and, therefore, he is its true owner. Further, there is a sense in which he becomes its creator. The stone, like the land, gains value and meaning only through human creativity and human effort. This the poet bestows.

Although the Native people shaped the stone, they did so for
purely utilitarian reasons, and nothing is said of their spiritual or poetic relation to the stone or the land. The stone

... is a million
years older than
the hand that
chipped stone or
raised slough
water (or blood)\textsuperscript{14} and was lost by those who had shaped and used it as tool or weapon. The Native people, therefore, are seen as temporary owners only. Their loss of the land, if one draws the parallel with the stone hammer, seems the result of their carelessness rather than of dispossession by white people.

Much of what happens in John Newlove's "The Pride" is analogous. Set in a "country crammed / with the ghosts of indians," it attempts to answer the question of "whose land this is / and is to be" with the suggestion that the Native people "become our true forbears" and, thus, that we inherit: "in this land we / are their people, come / back to life again." The pride for the Native people is real horses; for white people it is "the grand poem / of our land / found, / in a line of running verse, / sweating, our pride." Native memory is supposedly short: "nothing is remembered beyond a grandfather's time," while "we seize on / what has happened before" and transform it into a poetic image, a phrase, which allows us to see, sense, and "become them." Again, little is said of the poetic or spiritual side of the Native people, who are depicted as nomadic and ephemeral,

... amused
with the luxuries of war and death,
relieved from the steam of knowledge,
consoled by the stream of blood.\textsuperscript{15}

As in Kroetsch's poem, the Native people are seen as active rather than poetic. They are born to fight and to die. What gives them immortality, paradoxically, is the re-creative identification of the white poet. The fragmentary images and "romantic stories" about the Native people are fused into myth; contingency is frozen into essence: "the unyielding phrase / in tune with the epoch."\textsuperscript{16}

This process has its origins in Romantic theory, which sees the poet as the mouthpiece of the inarticulate and illiterate people. Friedrich von Schlegel, writing in 1815, stresses the centrality of literature to nationhood: "Deeds of prowess and exalted situations cannot, of themselves, command our admiration or determine our judgment; a people that would rank high in our esteem must themselves be conscious of the importance of their own doings and fortunes."\textsuperscript{17} An important distinction is made between the heroic, but inarticulate people and the great poet who provides them with voice, consciousness, and, ultimately, in the form of literary immortality, a soul: "Inasmuch as poets . . . of the highest eminence are rare phenomena in the history of the world, their appearance is deservedly regarded as unerringly indicating the mental elevation of the people to which they belong."\textsuperscript{18} Here, then, is the support for Newlove's conclusion that the white inheritance of Canada can be based on an "unyielding phrase / in tune with the epoch" and Kroetsch's conviction that the poet owns the land because he has transformed it into a poem. The unyielding rock of their poetic myth is the reduction of history to nature or of Indian to dead ancestor.

Several English-Canadian works describe the transfer of something symbolic of the land from Native to white. This transaction, what might be termed a "totem transfer," explains the genealogy of the stone hammer in Kroetsch's poem and of the horses in Newlove's. Sometimes a Native voluntarily hands a totem (often an animal) over to a newcomer, thereby validating the white's land claim and blessing the relationship between old land and new landowner. Hazard Lepage, hero of Robert Kroetsch's The Studhorse Man, rescues a Cree and a colt from drowning. The Cree insists, despite Hazard's pidgin protests — "Me stranger. Me no live here." — that the colt is Hazard's, says "I shall demand nothing," and disappears into a clearing.\textsuperscript{19} Hazard follows, to find only a grave. The Cree has disappeared into the soil, from which, it is implied, he sprang, after handing the totem animal on to his chosen successor. Hazard takes the colt to the nearest shelter, an enormous house with wallpaper patterned in "alternating lions and fleurs-de-lis" — a house whose legal owner is dead and whose will is "a tangle that to this day goes unriddled."\textsuperscript{20} A squatter in a house clearly symbolic of Canada, Hazard begins an odyssey lasting twenty-four years, to ensure the survival of the breed.

In Marian Engel's Bear, Lou receives some succinct advice on how to win the bear's affections from Lucy Leroy, the old Indian woman who looks after him. Then Lucy says, "'Good lady. Take
care of bear' and vanishes as abruptly as the Cree. The similarities between these two totem transfers are obvious. Lucy and the Cree are the magical helpers common in myth and fairy-tale. Yet these particular literary myths are Canadian. Both helpers are Native people, the former rulers of the land (as Lucy Leroy's name indicates); both are described as ancient, and the Quebec fact in Confederation is drawn into the transaction through the French names of Lucy and Hazard. In both cases, the responsibility for the totem animal is accepted with reluctance. This creates the impression that the land was shouldered as a kind of 'white man's burden' rather than grabbed as an economic prize. That Hazard is kicked to death by one of the colt's descendants and Lou clawed by the bear again stresses the difficulties of ownership. Both Hazard and Lou come to love the animals with an obsessive passion but then relinquish them in a move that resembles the poet's selling of the land in "Stone Hammer Poem." Intimate contact with the real object or totem is only necessary until the vision is achieved, the significance internalized. The literary and spiritual possession is what matters, a point stressed by Demeter Proudfoot's biography of Hazard and the transcendent and mythic image which concludes Bear: "It was a brilliant night, all star-shine, and overhead the Great Bear and his thirty-seven thousand virgins kept her company." 

Not all uses of the image of the Indian are as solemn as the account so far implies, however. Kroetsch, for example, satirizes the totem transfer in The Studhorse Man in a way that he does not in "Stone Hammer Poem." The novel is narrated from a dry bathtub in a madhouse by a naked and legally insane Demeter Proudfoot. It is not altogether clear whether Hazard Lepage knows he is on a quest to preserve the colt inherited from the Cree or whether this is a projection, like so much else, of the fantasy of his self-appointed biographer. And the conclusion, where the magnificent breed finds its function reduced to providing urine for the production of birth-control pills, is decidedly irreverent. A similar relationship between Jackie Denham, a narrator of doubtful sobriety and veracity, and the central Native figure of Tay John undermines the mythic seriousness of Howard O'Hagan's Tay John. O'Hagan makes it clear that all the characters in his novel who come into contact with Tay John misuse him by projecting their misconceptions and vicarious wishes onto him; O'Hagan himself then proceeds, undermining himself all the way, to make Tay John into myth. His point is that human beings cannot help making up stories, that these stories are potentially harmful distortions, and that the best we can do is to realize that we distort. As Jackie Denham says, "When we doubt we begin to learn."

O'Hagan's "straight" version of the myth can be found in his story "The Tepee," where the white narrator is allowed to share a Mètis’ wife — a woman who stayed with him "less as a woman than as a place where I had been." The conclusion of this totem transfer is, like Engel’s, set in a brilliant night and written in the high transcendent style:

Then he [the Mètis man] let go, turned, ducked out the tent flap and was gone, having shown me the contempt of his strength and the disdain of his charity. From the doorway I watched him go along the ridge and down it, wading through the willows that in the moonlight rose around him, around his legs, his hips, his shoulders until at last, when against the gleaming river his head dropped from view, it was as though he had walked down among the roots, under the faded grasses, into the earth to which he was closer neighbour than I." 

W.O. Mitchell plays the myth both straight and satirical in his novel Since Daisy Creek, where an obnoxious white Creative Writing student defends his thesis-novel, The Red Messiah, with the assistance of the Native Studies professor, one of the "Rosedale Whytes," who had "turned red rather late in life." The main Native character, Archie Nicotine, guides Colin Dobbs on the bear hunt central to the plot. Nicotine is a non-violent red militant, whose solution to the land-claims problem is to "...trans-kill-size the whites, then net them to take them out of there to where they belong, and that's the whole situation." But Nicotine also saves Dobbs's life by shooting the bear, and it is his gradual revelation of the true circumstances of the shooting that brings Dobbs back to his senses. Dobbs's burden is lifted when he discovers that Nicotine killed the bear to save Dobbs's life and broke a vow to do it. The bear is a very symbolic bear: huge, of a grizzly subspecies thought to be extinct. That Dobbs only begins to hunt her after his divorce, after losing track of his beloved daughter, and after finding himself unable to write or to relate to women adds to the bear's already considerable symbolic and literal weight. That a red man kills her and that an American acquires the skin illegally lets Dobbs off the hook. He goes neither Native nor American and yet manages to have the best of both worlds: Nicotine clearly is a friend prepared
to sacrifice his own cultural interests (the vow) for Dobbs, and Dobbs can feel superior to the American, who had to resort to chicaneiy to get a bear-skin worth displaying to his hunting buddies.

One of the most interesting attempts to use and defuse the myth is Margaret Laurence's in *The Diviners*. She is clearly aware of the dangers of stereotype: its ability to take a human being like Jules Tonnerre, force him into feathers and fringes, and deny him the right to sing his own songs, as do his beer-parlour audiences. Thus, Jules's songs of the Métis past and his father's stories balance the Scottish version provided by Morag's adoptive father Christie. Laurence also attempts the difficult feat of freeing nationalism from racism. She stresses her belief that "(if you go back far enough) all mankind has common ancestors" by detaching culture from blood ancestry: Morag is adopted, and most of the novel's characters find that their "true" parents are not their real ones. True parents provide the vital culture, the myths of identity that seem essential to children, indeed, to human beings. Those who repudiate or are never provided with these, like Brooke Skelton and Jules's sister Pique, are doomed to infertility or despair. Laurence also stresses how these myths fill a psychological need and, therefore, cannot ever be unbiased: "A popular misconception is that we can't change the past — everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer." This comment accords well with what Jackie Denham does, preaching doubt while he stretches his tall tale, his mysterious "gospel," the length of Edmonton.

The simultaneous marginality and ubiquity of the Native people in our literature can be explained to some extent, then, by our desire to naturalize our appropriation of their land. It also explains the general lack of interest in Native culture or history: we want to be them, not to understand them. But Romanticism supplies us with a further explanation: the Indian stands for a dispossession larger than his own.

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

History and ethnography are the reservoirs of symbols and myths, heroes and missions which nationalist elites first mine and then refine in their quest for ethnically unifying and energizing themes.

The sense of loss, of elegiac nostalgia consistently associated with the Native people, comes from the urban individual's loss of community, nature, and a personal sense of the numinous.

This shift also explains, even overdetermines, the marginal quality even of most of the "real live" Indians in literature and why so many appear fleetingly or by proxy. Indians come to represent what is past, lost, almost forgotten. Thus, Newlove's "The Pride" is set in a country "crammed with the ghosts of Indians." Thus, many appear and disappear as if inmaterial visions, like the one remaining Indian family in Atwood's *Surfacing*, "condensing as though from the air, five or six of them in a weatherbeaten canoe . . . and then disappearing around a point or into a bay as though they had never been there." Thus they are, like Tay John or Big Bear, nearly silent. Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, which is, on one level, an account of how the technology evolved by the war irrevocably changed the world, contains this account of the effects of the loss:

Passing through Regina, Robert saw a band of Indians — twelve or fourteen of them — standing by the railroad track . . . One of the Indians sat on a horse. The horse's head was bowed. Even though the wind blew — even though the snow was lifted from the ground and blown around their feet, the Indians did not make any motion to depart. They stood and stared at all the faces — ghosts through the frosted glass. Their eyes were pitchy black. Robert wanted everyone to raise an arm in greeting. Why should the Indians not be greeted standing by the railway track? But nobody moved. Everyone was frozen in their places — staring till the train removed them — slowly tearing them apart like paper torn in half.

Here it is not clear who are the ghosts, because both cultures are dying, irrevocably, ripped apart by the technology symbolized by the train. In this novel, it is Robert — whose hero is Tom Longboat and whose mother describes him once as "just like a savage painted for the wars" — who plays proxy for the Native people by attempting to save the lives of horses trapped by fire. The description of
his horse, with bowed head like the horse in the passage above, recurs at the beginning and the end of the novel. One is reminded of Dave Godfrey's comment that "a Canadian" is "someone forced to choose between being an American and being an Indian." Robert chooses to be an Indian, which is supposed to be the side of childhood, innocence, and nature. But, in choosing, he murders two people and is horribly burned. Perhaps his fate is a message that it is impossible to have both worlds: the innocence of one and the power of the other. Besides, there is no Indian like that left any more, if one ever existed.

If there ever was one, Rudy Wiebe almost convinces us that it was Big Bear. Wiebe has given us our great historical novel about the Indian, a novel that, in its scope and influences, seems more nineteenth- than twentieth-century. In many ways, this is because Wiebe's thought falls firmly into the Romantic tradition, and much of the power of his writing comes from the power of his beliefs. Wiebe believes, as he says in a conversation with Kroetsch, "man is an animal capable of the apprehension of perfection." Kroetsch's reply would be echoed by the majority of contemporary writers: "That's an impossible notion! . . . What is this talk about perfection? You have to stop time to have perfection and the only way to stop time in our world is by death." 

Wiebe's interest in Big Bear, in particular, comes out of Wiebe's desire to know about his own roots, since he grew up in what he calls "Big Bear country, close to Turtle Lake." It also comes out of his nationalism. When Wiebe discovered Big Bear, he was angry: "thanks to our education system, I had been deprived of this knowledge when I was a child; we studied people with history — like Cromwell who removed a king's head, or Lincoln who freed slaves." Thus, Wiebe's search for his own roots incorporated Big Bear and filled in an essential gap in his own, and the national, memory. Like von Schlegel, Wiebe believes that "if you don't know where you are and where you come from, you're more or less like an animal that has no memory, no race memory except in the genes somewhere, and human beings are much more self-conscious than that." Perhaps it is only possible to write an historical novel like this if one believes, as Wiebe does, that "the stories we tell of our past are by no means merely words: they are meaning and life to us as people, as a particular people." 

That Rudy Wiebe put Big Bear at the centre of a novel accords well with several of his strongly held beliefs: "The Indian . . . must become our central, not our fringe figure, exotic, a bit mysterious perhaps, but mostly drunken and prostituted; he must become the center of serious fiction as other small groups have." It is not surprising that Wiebe, as a member of a "fringe" group himself, should espouse this ideological multiculturalism. And it is this ideology that explains Wiebe's form. There are other ideological interconnections that perhaps explain Big Bear's appeal to Wiebe.

Although Big Bear's story had an attraction for Wiebe even before he started his research, the subject proved a peculiarly appropriate one. Certainly W. B. Fraser's comment on Big Bear, in an article that Wiebe credits with some of his inspiration to write the novel, must have appealed to him as a Mennonite: "Big Bear . . . was a proponent of the only form of protest that could possibly have benefitted his people: passive resistance." David Williams' comment that " . . . Big Bear's pacifism seems more native to Wiebe's Mennonite world view than to Big Bear's Cree" seems just. Wiebe not only stresses those of Big Bear's documented words and deeds which accord with Fraser's conclusions, but adds fictional incidents that link Big Bear and his chosen successor, his son Kingbird, with pacifism. For example, Wiebe has Big Bear tell this story about himself: "Once, when I took . . . a horse away from one of my young men he was so enraged he beat me with a stick. I let him, and he stood ashamed." Further, as Kroetsch has pointed out, Big Bear becomes a Christ-figure.

Critics have noted that Wiebe valorizes speech over writing, connecting the former with Big Bear and Native people, the latter with white culture. Robert Lecker comments that " . . . the police and soldiers . . . live in the realms of the written word, and as we learn, 'that's the way words are; power'. . . . In contrast to the Whites, the Indians share a symbolic vocabulary. They never write, and when they do speak they communicate verbally through shared image associations. This is why Big Bear insists that 'you can't talk without pictures.'"

In the novel, words, especially written words, are consistently associated with duplicity. Big Bear, asked by Dewdney if he can read Cree syllabics, replies, "when I looked at the paper it always said only what the missionaries said, so I forgot them." The first sentence in the book is "Sweetgrass had signed the treaty," and even Lieutenant-Governor Morris, complacent at the thought of having "extinguished . . . all native rights," admits to himself that the Indians have been coerced: "Who would sign away such land? As if they had a choice." The trial scene reinforces this point: Big Bear cannot comprehend the charges against him, as the best inter-
preparation of "treason-felony" is "throwing sticks at the Queen's hat."

Again Wiebe's ideas can be connected to Romantic theory. The novel contains a paradox implicit in Rousseau's First Discourse, which is "a learned essay on the danger of learned essays." Rousseau himself pointed it out in his conclusion: "without envying the glory of those famous men who are immortalised in the republic of letters, let us try to put between them and us that glorious distinction noted between two great peoples [Rome and Sparta] long ago: that the one knew how to speak well, the other to act well." Jacques Derrida, in Of Grammatology, deconstructs the wall—erected by Rousseau and preserved in Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Wiebe—between peoples with and without writing, noting that "the violence of writing does not befall an innocent language. There is an originary violence of writing because language is first... writing. 'Usurpation' has always already begun." Perceptively, David Williams has analysed this paradox in Wiebe:

The Regina trial transcripts, the newspaper clippings, the letter of Edgar Dewdney, and the matter-of-fact historical sub-chapters become so many surveyor stakes, the same steel rails which have destroyed the round, good world. So art, intentionally or not, lends formal justification to the historical process: mechanical surveys in both realms bring about the end of myth. The work's tone, then, is inconsistent with its form; historical fiction becomes that art drawn out along the iron road of history, despite whatever piloting of the engineer."

On the same issue of language, Leslie Monkman comments that Big Bear asks for his words to be printed so that history can judge and "recognizes that words, oral or written, offer the only hope for freedom." Although this is correct, since Big Bear realizes that, if he is to deal with whites, he must use their written language, Monkman overlooks the distinction Wiebe consistently makes between oral and written language. According to Wiebe, the Native culture is irrevocably changed by two technological developments: the railway and writing.

Despite his great attention to red culture and to historical fact, Wiebe is, ultimately, inevitably, both criticizing white exploitation and re-enacting it. Kroetsch quotes him in "Seed Catalogue":

"...You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build a giant artifact. No song can do that..." Writing is, as much as railway building, an act of conquest. Wiebe himself again makes the connection in his introduction to Stories from Western Canada: "The story-teller, like the engineer, is a maker of new things out of old. The difference is, he does it without violence to the origins." This would be a stronger defence if he had not said elsewhere that "every society, small or large, is created and destroyed by myth." Unlike O'Hagan, whose Tay John constantly affirms the violence of the letter, asserting that to tell a story is to have "merely assaulted the surrounding solitude," Wiebe sometimes forgets that language at its most beautiful is at its most duplicitous.

Native people, then, are so rarely depicted as individuals, because they must bear the burden of the Other—of representing all that the modern person has lost. The white turns to nature in order to assuage a hunger: the Indian becomes the guide, helper, or shaman. And, after a therapeutic sojourn in nature, the white characters usually go back to the city; Lou leaves the bear with Lucy, the narrator of Surfacing goes back to Joe, Colin Dobbs relinquishes his bear skin and returns to love and work.

What they return to seems far less interesting than what they found, which perhaps explains why these novels end with the main character either still in nature, just poised for the return to civilization, or just beginning to see a new potential in civilized life. These endings have little of the unreality of "...they all lived happily ever after," at least for the white characters. One ideological function of these works, which explains their widespread appeal, is that they do for the reader what nature and the Indian do for their characters. They provide, for a brief spell, a return to what is being actively destroyed around us. Nowhere in reality is there an escape from our unrelenting process of self-dispossession—not even for Native people.

Writers who do not want to allow their readers to escape must force them out of either identifying with the Native characters or reducing Indians to the exotic. Through satire, authorial self-doubt, the use of unreliable narration, even didacticism, some English-Canadian writers have attempted to face the disquieting potential of the twentieth century. But it is difficult to kill off the literary Indian for good: like Tay John or Big Bear, he appears to metamorphose into the land, rather than die, as if to be available when needed. One explanation for his stubborn immortality here
may be that many of the techniques that might kill him off — I am thinking here of the techniques of post-modernism in particular — come from cultures where nationalism is not an issue, not because nationalism has been transcended, but because it is an unthreatened fact. These techniques do not suit Canada, which is a marginal culture, albeit at a rather high level. True, Mordecai Richler killed off the literary Native quite effectively in *The Incomparable Atuk*, but he had to kill off nationalism to do it. Marginal cultures can rarely afford to be cynical about nationalism: we are afraid that if we don’t believe in Indians, we will have to become Americans.

**NOTES**

6. Margaret Atwood may have been thinking of this pattern when she wrote “an imported white man looks at a form of natural or native life alien to himself and appropriates it for symbolic purposes.” *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1972), p. 91.
Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man, pp. 67–68. One of my students tells me that the word Kis-see-wus-kut-i-a-o that the Indian repeats during the transaction is Saulteaux for stomach cramps or birth pangs, both of which seem appropriate.

Kroetsch, The Studhorse Man, pp. 11, 69.

Engel, pp. 48–49.

Engel, p. 141. The novel has parodic overtones pointed out to me by Robert Lecker. Tom Thornbury pointed out to me the parallel between this passage and the conclusion to Pope’s The Rape of the Lock.


Mitchell, Since Daisy Creek, p. 223.

Mitchell, Since Daisy Creek, p. 17.


Laurence, p. 49.


Atwood, Surfacing, pp. 85–86.

Findley, pp. 45–46.

Dave Godfrey, I Ching Kanada (Erin, Ont.: Porcupic, 1976), n. pag.


David Williams, rev. of The Temptations of Big Bear, Queen’s Quarterly, 81, No. 1 (Spring 1974), 143.

Wiebe, The Temptations of Big Bear, p. 143.

Neuman, p. 234.

Robert Lecker, “Trusting the Quintuplet Senses: Time and Form in The Temptations of Big Bear,” English Studies in Canada, 8, No. 3 (Sept. 1982), 337.

Wiebe, The Temptations of Big Bear, p. 144.

Wiebe, The Temptations of Big Bear, pp. 9, 11.


Williams, p. 143.

Monkman, p. 118.


Rudy Wiebe, “In the West, Sir John A. is a Bastard and Riel a Saint. Ever Ask Why?” in A Voice in the Land, p. 211.


Others bear this burden too, for example, women. Fairchild points out connections between children, poets, peasants, and the Indian.