

## THE VIBRANT AND SOOTHING CHORDS OF ALMIGHTY'S MAGIC IN RUDY WIEBE'S *THE TEMPTATIONS OF BIG BEAR*

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### ABSTRACT

*Rudy Wiebe's protagonists are typically known for their initiation into the self-transcendence endeavor, their constant suffering, and their brave attempt to overcome unbearable crisis and innumerable odds of life for survival. Their struggle consists of their movement towards affecting a recovery in their troubled lives and their ultimate transformation. In the words of St. John of the Cross:*

*For Soul to attain a state of perception, it has ordinarily, first to pass through two principal kinds of night... the first night of purification is of the sensual part of the soul, and the second is the spiritual part. (20)*

*In the struggle of the protagonists for survival and achieving transcendence, the first night corresponds to their psychological development, while the second one relates to their spiritual growth or their symbolic return to their society and religion. The process of development involves the stage of purgation and purification which, St. John of the Cross calls the 'dark night' of the Soul while in psychological terms, it is called Negredo. Rudy Wiebe's Big Bear goes through the purgation stage as reflected in his extreme suffering, both internal and external, psychic plight, relationship failures, disillusionment and a series of many other painful experiences. The main thrust of the paper is to throw light on the vibrant and soothing chords of Almighty's magic in Big Bear's life amidst his suffering and disillusionment which lights his way and makes him stronger. Beseeking for God's mercy is one aspect that makes Big Bear a deeply religious character.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Purgation, Purification, Dark Night, Negredo, Transformation, Transcendence, Psychic Plight Etc*

### INTRODUCTION

Rudy Wiebe superbly animates a Christian vision in literature. His experience, which is particularly ingrained in Mennonite Christianity, is extremely impressive, but his maturity and talent as a writer comes to the fore through his art of replicating and imitating the conscience of the Canadian West. Symbolism of conviction and belief in the ultimate existence of God is marked in Sweetgrass's gesture of dedicating the treaty to The Only One. He is befooled by the White men regarding their promise of protecting the buffalo. With this, his dream of establishing brotherly relations and understanding with the whites collapses. The bizarre manner of the whites, in acting contrary to their promises, is extremely puzzling to these innocent, gods-like natives. Deceit and treachery, which according to their world view equally belong to all men, are not their survival tools required on this planet. Simple and credulous Sweetgrass say to the Governor Morris

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

Infiltrations and intrusion by the new, "gigantic, devilish men" into a very pious land of "the god's dear-hearted men" spells a doomsday for the latter. Rudy Wiebe remarkably blows the trumpet of modernism to deaden the native tunes and destabilizes their smooth life. Signing the treaty means getting entrapped in the evil designs and stratagem created strategically by the mentally and technologically superior whites. Big Bear has some inkling of their cunning designs and regrets the decision of his people which can not be revoked and altered, "Every man was blind when making the treaty." He says before the advent of White missionaries they were rich and had plenty of land, food and clothing. Although pronouncing the names of the Queen, the Great Spirit and the Governor himself is a deliberate endeavor of the Whites to execute their plans smartly, yet Big Bear fails to understand their tactics.

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

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

The gradual killing of the buffalo has made the land empty. It is also empty because the Indian, his soul and his prayer, is departing. The Indian's readiness to relate their whole existence, each and every act to divinity, is undoubtedly impressive. The land, which was a source of life for him and his band, has been taken from them by the whites. It was on this land that Big Bear used to run buffalo. The benevolent and "Master Creator God" had gifted them the land- the breath and heartbeat of their life, so that they could celebrate the beautiful fragments of life:

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

Tremendously rich understanding of common humanistic ideals and experiences, apart from analyzing the self from different perspectives, pave the way for Rudy Wiebe's protagonists to recover and transform themselves from earlier failures and collapses ultimately achieving the requisite standards for survival. The predicaments of Big Bear resemble the condition of a Christian hero confronting a triad of temptations- to sign the treaty, to take up arms, and finally, to despair, the greatest possible sin in Christian theology- clearly evoking an analogy to the three temptations of Christ in the

wilderness. Wiebe's Indians are no saints; they are sinful men yet capable of redemption.

Rudy Wiebe touches the artistic elegance and maturity in incorporating the uniquely vital and religious elements of life into his books. He voices his serious concern and gives due recognition and prominence to the Indians and the Métis who are considered as Canada's minority cultures. *The Temptations of Big Bear* are unquestionably a commentary on their past and their total dependence on God. Wiebe, referring to the historical saga of Canadian West from 1876 to 1888 from the Indian perspective, portrays magnificently the transformation of the beautiful prairie into such a land which was unsuitable for his people to live. *The Temptations of Big Bear*, from the Whites' point of view, are the magnificent tale of the powerful pioneers and from the Indian point of view, the saga of unfulfilled promises, of hardship and starvation. Throughout the novel, the loud trumpet call of destruction of the native culture also rings ominously.

Big Bear, like a true patriot and a superb representative of the doomed society of Plains Cree Indians, doesn't succumb to sign a treaty, choose a reserve or recognizes white ownership of the land. The Indians don't have the slightest feeling and idea that putting the 'X' marks was a signal of dire and dangerous consequences in the form of crossing out their own native culture and themselves. Big Bear, after taking cognizance of the powers of the white enemies personified as cruel, inhuman and smart colonizers extremely insensitive to the feelings of the natives, strives to achieve his goal by adopting the strategy of resistance, patience and co-operation. He feels their patience is fruitful in the context of surviving the ominous White forces:

Make patience your life's aim; implant it in your mind; this wise you will become a mighty river; not a petty channel. One should endure the hard word even as the elephant in battle endures the arrows shot from the bow; the majority of people are ill-natured.

Good are mules when tamed, so also the horses of good breed and the great elephant of war. Better than those is he who has tamed himself. (Singh, *the Holy Guru Granth Sahib* and *The Holy Gita* 25)

These lines aptly and most befittingly epitomize Big Bear's incredibly heroic character replete with a vital quality of patience. His patience serves as a chief and potent weapon in his strategic planning against his formidable and dangerous "White" troops.

He will wait now; he says waiting has lived with him all his life. And as long as he can wait, he will continue to draw every discontented straggler and perhaps even some treaty chiefs, for all such of any energy had their people on the plains this past summer and will be there as long as a single buffalo is left. (*TOBB* 121)

Big Bear constantly feels tortured and traumatized by the Whites' strange yet properly contrived idea that smells of "smartly planned conspiracy" against "the simple-hearted angels" of his world. The callous offer of signing the treaty - the unacceptable and illogical offer- is shocking and surprising for him as well as for his innocent people. He is surprised to see many strange and devilish - minded white men around him and the feeling of ease and comfort, which he experienced before the arrival of these white men was a thing of the older imaginative world. He feels happy for being the chief of the River People who lived a hard life. So any interference spoiling the serene texture of their wonderful and unique life will spell doom for his sweet-hearted people. Bowing his head before the White Queen and stating plainly that never ever in life he acted foolishly against her wishes like a disobedient child, speaks volumes of his emphatic and grand religiosity emerged out of his devotion and dedication:

I am not a disobedient child. I have always been the friend of the white man, but I was never a Company Chief, or a Missionary Chief. I am chief of the River, the First People. It is a hard life I and my children live. And now I no longer understand and feel as I once understood when I did not see so many white men before me who spoke for so much that none of us ever needed to feel or see before. (TOBB 23)

The magical persona of this superhuman and revered leader of the Crees doesn't leave Kerr-the Clerk who along with other chiefs comes for signing the treaty- untouched making a strong, forceful mark on him. According to his opinion, Big Bear is "the real wild power of the Plains Cree and he'll talk for every Cree and Assiniboine and Young Dog on the south plains doing what they all should be doing, killing buffalo, not sitting here chewing bacon." (TOBB 14)

Big Bear does not succumb and yield to the pressure exerted by Governor Morris to sign the treaty –the treaty that pertains to the beauty and magnificence of his beautiful land. He expresses his unwillingness to understand the crux of the treaty due to its vague and ambiguous promises. In Big Bear's views, the consent of his native people is absolutely essential because he speaks on their behalf symbolizing their powerful voice. All the conditions of the treaty have been laid without taking his people into confidence. His furiousness with other chiefs, who have signed the destructive and life-threatening treaty hurriedly without taking dangerous consequences into consideration, is really acute:

That I do not understand. of course. I come from where my people hunt the buffalo and I am told that the treaty is such and such. I and my people have not heard what the treaty says and already nothing of it can be changed. It is already done, though we never heard of it. I told you what I wish. That there be no hanging. (TOBB 31)

Big Bear, after acknowledging and feeling the presence of God everywhere, accepts that it is the blessings and love of the benevolent Mother Earth that he and his people are comfortably feeding themselves and surviving. He says that his life is the great gift and creation of God who makes grass grow and the rivers run and buffalo feed and drink. "I throw back no man's hand, but I say I am fed by the Mother Earth. The only water I will be touched by comes from above, the rain from above, the Only One who makes the grass grow and the rivers run and the buffalo feed there and drink so that I and my children live. That we have life!" (TOBB 23). It is the belief and strong conviction of Big Bear that whatever happens he accredits it to God's skilful and dexterous plan and unique creation.

Citing a striking example from Arun Joshi's wonderfully artistic creation and memorable piece of fictional writing *The Last Labyrinth* will not be irrelevant here. Like Arun Joshi, Rudy Wiebe emphasizes that the charismatic and powerful aura of God makes impossible and difficult things easier for a person to handle. Som's relationship with Anuradha is powerful enough to bring him face to face with the mysteries of life, love, death and God. She indirectly forces him to take a journey to the mountains where, according to her belief, God lives:

There is a god up their. "In those mountains...."

There is temple their. On a hill lined with lepers.

You must come with me....God will cure you.

- (*The Last Labyrinth* 83)

Big Bear, in defense of his crime, discloses his deepest affections and concern for the white people most of whom were his friends killed at Frog Lake. He painfully realizes his diminishing and deteriorating influence among his people;

especially his extremely young, passionate and impatient people including his own son. He says "My heart sank when those white men at Frog Lake were killed; I had eaten with all of them and some of them were my friends, but when some came to my people with news of the fight at Duck Lake my young men ignored my words." (TOBB 396)

Big Bear's pure intentions of always doing good to other people speak volumes of his great belief in the sovereignty of God's powers since he thinks through such acts he can please The Great One. But after his unjust imprisonment, conviction and subsequent exploitation by the white machinery his grief ascends to its apex;

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

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

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

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

Big Bear, even for a fraction of second, slightly feels that they are not such "children of that Almighty and Omnipotent Creator" of the universe who were "wretched" and "discarded fragments of worthless world" being disowned and treated mercilessly by Him without any fault of theirs. Believing the magnanimity of God's powers, His benign presence, and perpetual blessings that always make him feel that he is not alone in this bloody and absurd world sharing the aura of the magical touch of that supremely powerful Player but considers it his privilege to live life happily on this planet. Big Bear's intuition and understanding, of the powerful presence of "the potent Creator" and "Musician of the world" that can change days into nights and can bring drastic changes in the affairs of the world, has a similar stance to the observations of The St. John of the Cross:

"In the dark night of the soul,

Bright flows the river of God."

God's central existence in the lives of the Mennonites is unquestionably and indisputably evident from their manner and behavior. Referring his indebtedness to God and feeling His powerful presence over his body and soul, Wiebe's hapless protagonist refuses to sign the treaty which is crucial part of his strategic planning to fight the whites: "We have all taken his hand. We all think it is for our good. That is all" (TOBB 24). Big Bear thanks God for providing food and tobacco for their survival. He requests Him to pity all people who are wretched and poor like them. "You First One, Spirit of All, you have given food and tobacco once more, we thank you, Only One, have pity on every human being who is poor like we are." (TOBB 335)

Big Bear regrets the unfulfilled promises made to him and his people which never fructified. In spite of Governor Morris's innumerable promises during the Carlton Treaty he finds his hands empty. He sees only a little piece of land in his hands and sees no justification in Queen's taking away the land from them when The Only One had given them this wonderful land to live peacefully. He appeals to "The Immanent Will" to create such a pleasant and smooth environment in which every man walks freely treading with imposingly proud steps and erects his powerful empire on the earth:

Talking to you I have been trying to understand and make myself understood that I am trying to get hold of the promises which they made to me. I see my hand closing again and again, but nothing seems to be in it ... and all that was promised I can't see the half of it. All I see is the little piece of land I must choose and then never leave unless some Farm Instructor says I can go. What is that, when I must have the mark of such a thing on paper to walk on the land they have borrowed? I feel as if I choked. I love The One Above, I ask That One whom we love to help me. If we respect and honour the Queen because of her great work on the earth, how much more must we honour the Earth? Is this Queen more to us than the Earth? The proper way to live with the Earth is to give each one the right The First One gave everyone man. (TOBB 199-200)

We have given our hand to the Queen mother. (TOBB 61)

The great gusto of Big Bear comes to the fore through his refusal to sign the treaty. He frankly says: "I will not die until my teeth are worn to my gums" (TOBB 62). The saddest part of Big Bear's struggle against the white menace is the non-cooperation and support that he gets from his young warriors that becomes a major factor for the destruction of the Crees. This division within his own community is what the whites take advantage of to give wings to their big mission and empowerment.

The weakness of Big Bear and his own people, specifically his immature, rash, aggressively violent companions, sows the seeds of imminent destruction; People like Sweetgrass and Crowfoot the head chief of the Siksika, expressing satisfaction in the temporary arrangement of the police protecting them from bad men and whisky. Signing the treaty would mean a sort of virtual death and end of life for him and his people. He promises to fight for the rights of Cree People till the last breath. His ardent flame of resolve pertaining to the betterment and goodwill of his people is not diminished and subdued at any stage.

Contrary to what Big Bear opines, Crowfoot, who is the Head Chief of the Siksika; Bearspaw, speaking for the Mountain Stonies; and Redcrew, the head chief of the Bloods show their contentment, extreme satisfaction and readiness in signing the treaty. It is the sincere realization of Crowfoot that they had been protected by White people from Bad Men and Whisky and many other dangers during the period of great starvation that might have brought death with it. Although he acknowledges themselves the children of the plains surviving entirely on buffalo for their food, yet quickly senses the destructive wave working against his wishes. Crowfoot agrees to sign the treaty and gives the solid and logical reason behind the decision:

The plains are large and while we are the children of the plains, it is our home and the buffalo has been food always. If the police had not come to the country, where would we all be now? Bad men and Whisky were killing us so fast that very few, indeed, would be alive today. The Police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frosts of winter. I am satisfied I will sign the treaty. (TOBB 68)



The destruction of the native culture owes a great deal to the disharmonious and conflicting stand of some of the members within their own community as this paves a smooth way for the Whites to stamp their powerful authority and ownership on the land. Had the native community stood together on equal footing for their rights, the Whites' sweet plan of establishing imaginary White Empire would have remained an absolutely utopian dream? The community itself is solely responsible for the ultimate extinction of everything that is always dear and sustained them so marvelously- buffalo, land, food etc. The Whites exploited the land for the use of industrial purposes that strengthened their empire further.

Big Bear thanks God for his blessings and kindness in providing his people with hunting stuff to escape starvation. Unflinching faith in The Main One is an important aspect of their lives that gives them strength to face the hardships of life with courage, grit and determination. Finding themselves under the oppressive wheel of unavoidable starvation, the unfortunate and innocent people of Big Bear's clan ask for food. Leaving no stone unturned, God immediately flourishes their land with cows and buffaloes:

Our father The Main One, I have to name you first. All things belong to you. Look on our hunting. All Spirit Powers, I beg a good life for our people, I beg your blessing on everything. Forgive us for being hungry, I thank you have let us see food again. I ask you for a good running, that we can kill al the eleven cows and four bulls and the calf and the also which I think is female. I cannot ask more now because it is time to hunt. (*TOBB* 126-127)

Although Big Bear defies and rejects the treaty, yet the glimpses of his noble nature comes to the fore through his disapproval of the strategy of violence and cruelty in killing the white prisoners. He even intends to give them some of the things plundered from them. "I pity all these white people that we saved, he says; I don't wish harm should come to one of them. Instead of trying to do harm to them you should be giving them back some of the things you plundered from them" (*TOBB* 379). Wandering Spirit and his young companions pay no heed to Big Bear's words which is an evidence of the latter's diminishing stature among his people and ultimately the humiliation.

Big Bear has a personal following of over one thousand, an incredible number among buffalo hunting Crees, yet at Frog Lake this orator has no influence at all over a small group of his own Rattlers, led by his own son. He stands helpless; his great words falling unto nothing as the Whiteman he has personally pledged to protect are disarmed, sported with and slaughtered before his eyes. Thus, to quote Rudy Wiebe: "Big Bear, I found, lived these contradictions, contained these extremes of greatness and pathos." (*A Voice in the Land* 134)

Big Bear's diminishing stature and fading reputation is quite evident in the misdoings of his young, energetic and exuberant Rattlers, who take recourse to violent tactics of killing white people for survival that ultimately ruin their cultural tradition. Although Big Bear takes to the strategy of keeping his patience against the Whites, yet his young Rattlers spearheaded by his own son, Wandering Spirit, can't stick to this tactics for long and kill the white prisoners at Frog Lake thus shattering Big Bear's dream of making harmonious relationships among Indians, Métis and the Whites.

Looking like a cruel mouthpiece of the white people and standing to defend the Crown, Mr. D. L. Scott while accusing Big Bear of treason-felony strongly recommends punishment for the open rebellion against the Government. Irrespective of his pure intentions with regard to his participation in Frog Lake massacre and his sincere efforts to save the lives of the prisoners at Frog Lake on April 2, Big Bear is made the scapegoat and found guilty ultimately trapping him in the web of unsympathetic and cruel law machinery.

You must understand that if he was acting with those parties at that time in open rebellion against the Government, and he continued to act afterwards with them, it is nothing, as far as his offence is concerned, whether he wanted to go the length some of them went; even if he wanted to save the lives of the prisoners, it is then nonetheless the fact that he was in open rebellion against the Government of the country, and ought to be punished for that offence. (*TOBB* 359)

Speaking for the Crown and unjustly convicting Big Bear of treason-felony, D. L. Scott gives a description of innocent Big Bear. The latter describes him as 'the chief of a band of Cree Indians occupying a reserve near Frog Lake. He is the leader of the rebellion that culminated in the destruction of Frog Lake. "The prisoner is a chief of a band of Cree Indians who occupy a reserve near Frog Lake. He is one of three parties whose names stand out prominently in the history of the rebellion as being the leader of it, in the different parts of the country."(*TOBB* 358)

Big Bear is so innocent that he reels under the twin tempting offers of Whiteman's treaty with its lofty promise of reserved land, Police protection, blanket, food and assistance on the one hand, and the way of staunch resistance by Sioux under the powerful and extremely robust Sitting Bull on the other. The magic of these seducing and dangerous enticements force Big Bear to backtrack from his earlier dream of his quasi-Christian faith in the camaraderie and the possibilities of some equitable communal sharing of western prairie by Indian and Whiteman. Big Bear challenges and whole-heartedly defies the whites and their treaties for the longest time but he is aware that white culture is numerically and technologically so powerful that they can not resist for long.

After being unjustly convicted for the Frog Lake massacre, Big Bear puts forth his strong arguments for making his stand clear. He says that neither he had made any words against anybody nor touched the things of others. He had not encouraged young people to take part in the trouble and create havoc at Frog Lake. Further, Big Bear discloses that he was aware that his people would die with their blood swollen in their faces. He had told the Governor that the land was theirs from the Spirit, God. Putting a rope around another man's neck suggests that someday someone will get choked.

Did anyone stand here, can anyone stand here and say I made words against a priest or an agent? Can anyone say I touched his feather or his blanket? It was said here by people. I never did. Long before any white men listening to me now saw this country I had been given to see some things; before I met the Government Morris winters and summers and autumns ago I saw beside their faces and I said to the Governor, when he wanted my mark on his paper giving up the land that was ours from the Spirit Alone. (*TOBB* 396)

Big Bear is silent and does not speak even a single word. His 'fingers whirling under the jury's nose as if such meaningful gestures would finally make them understand.' Kitty Mclean says that the law is same for both the White Man and the Indian. The white man's conduct never comes under scrutiny and he accommodates himself easily everywhere in the country because of the flexibility of the law that protects him as it is conducive for his survival. On the other hand, the Indian doesn't enjoy such flexibility of law and has to depend on his own band for survival.

In order to survive the tremendous shocks of adversity, Rudy Wiebe has employed and executed two chief tools for survival- Big Bear's patience and perseverance. Engulfed in deep crises from all quarters by the powerful whites on the one hand and by the impatient, young and courageous warriors on the other, Big Bear still shows no signs of pangs of frustration as he stands tall and rock-solid imposing figure like a true hero. Although the impending doom and destruction of the native Indians is as inevitable as death, yet this stoic and incredibly heroic personality exhibits remarkable patience



and perseverance in the wake of imminent death.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Ex Prime Minister of India, beautifully exhorts the readers to be like a lotus which remains unaffected in water and a duck on the stream. We should not let tribulation outshine heavily on our character but instead face it bravely with patience and perseverance (*Secular and Global Moral and Ethical Values* 36). Although Big Bear loses the real battle of life yet he leaves everlasting marks, perpetual dominance and indelible imprints on the minds of readers thus creating a special niche in their hearts.

Rudy Wiebe shows a superb empathy with the primitive people throughout his fiction. Writing mainly about Indians, Eskimos and rural Mennonites, Wiebe depicts

... a truly admirable feel for the obscure, deep seated drives that motivate people who have not yet made their life experience artificial and alien by conceptualizing and intellectualizing it. He knows what really matters to most people the simple facts of existence from birth to death and beyond. He knows that man is not self sufficient and that he needs to believe in a force above and beyond his control or comprehension if he is to find meaning in life. (*Mennonite Mirror* 28-29)

Retaining the cultural moorings and identity of the ethnic minorities seems to be the principal aim of Rudy Wiebe and he wonderfully depicts these ethnics struggling to retain this important aspect of their life. Big Bear, of all the chiefs, alone represents untiring and vestigial efforts to retain the invaluable precious old ways of native culture. His suffering is caused by what is happening to the Indian and his helplessness and powerlessness to prevent the grinding effects of modern civilization. The white missionaries, traders, government officials, settlers, policemen and soldiers are unable to comprehend Big Bear's tremendous vision of North West in which Indians, Métis and Whites can live together in a mosaic at peace with one another and with the land.

Big Bear's vision of the world, "slit open with unending lines, squares, rectangles..." (*TOBB* 409) emphasizes the inexorable destruction of the Indian culture. Big Bear's gradually diminishing stature among his people also becomes evident. While initially he is an eminent and respected leader, he slowly loses his charismatic influence among his people. His voice is no longer respected in the community councils. "Big Bear becomes, Lear in rags as he walks about wearing only a shabby old blanket" (*A Voice in the Land* 134). Big Bear is not merely an individual but a representative of the River People and his humiliation reflects the decline and annihilation of the culture.

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

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

Thus the least Christian of Wiebe's novels in its overt content is the most powerful in its Christian implications.  
(14)

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

Through the process of their wandering the Jews achieved the conquest of the Promised Land. The same search for a promised land is a quest that the Russian Mennonite immigrants also pursued through their history. The trauma of dislocation, poverty and disease they face all the times. Their trust in God becomes the most viable way to survive against threatening odds. Wiebe in *The Temptations of Big Bear* clearly reveals the pathetic and painful destruction of the native culture, their rituals, their sacred places, beautiful grasslands and the buffalo centered economy. Thus, Big Bear creates for himself a special place among the tragic heroes as he is fully aware that he is fighting a losing battle yet he does not give up.

Through Big Bear's banking upon God's love and grace and by earning the title "an unsung and uncrowned hero", Rudy Wiebe makes the world to witness, read and enjoy an unforgettable and epical chapter in history. The seventeenth century saint Tukaram points out that it is the devotee's privilege to enjoy the bliss of love while the Lord himself is unaware of his own glory:

What does the lotus know of its own fragrance?

It is the bumble bee that enjoys it.

The pearl lie hidden in the heart of the oyster;

Tis others, not the oyster, who get joy from it.

Likewise, my Lord,

Thou dost not know the joy of Thy Name;

We are the ones who experience that bliss.

(Quoted in *Spiritual Link* 30)

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