Rudy Wiebe in his article, "The Artist as a Critic and a Witness," argues that novels "acquire a life and character of their own, independent of and quite beyond the artist himself" (40). They are self-sufficient. And so he is critical of the personal fallacy school of critics that "sees every work of art as arising directly out of the artist's experience, and assumes that he cannot present any scrap of life which he himself has not directly experienced" ("An Author Speaks about his Novel" 67). Paradoxically, a writer is most fully present in his work when he completely effaces himself, or as he says, "... as a writer, writing, when you are most profoundly yourself you are no longer yourself" (Double Vision x). Hence even when he criticizes the personal fallacy school, he allows room for personal traits to be assimilated and transformed into a well-crafted fiction. Therefore, he is justified in using all his life experiences and researches to give his novels vigorous and complex personalities of their own. So even while his novels have independence, they are suffused with his own passions and preferences.

In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to express and establish Wiebe's passions and preferences. Wiebe having been raised in an ethnic group and having grown up in closeness to forces of nature, a combination of the spiritual and the physical pervades his writing. It links him sympathetically to Indians and Métis, who also
blend these two realms together in their daily life. And Wiebe admits that his aim of writing is “to see situations and people with a coldly understanding, and passionate, discernment” (“A Novelist’s Personal Nofes on Frederick Philip Grove” 218). All his novels bear witness to this fact as they reconstruct parameters “to see situations and people” and to discern the voice of those oppressed and marginalized minorities, whether groups or individuals. In chapters two and three(we) discussed the Mennonite concerns of Wiebe. Mennonites are usually defensive with regard to their history, theology and literature. This is, perhaps, because of their minority feeling and also because of their feeling that they may not be properly understood by outsiders. However, good literature will always tend to transcend its narrow context. And it is true with regard to Mennonite novels of Wiebe. His virtue as a novelist is that “religious questions are always tested in the crucible of personal crisis” (Jeffrey, “A Search for Peace” 180). Wiebe is a secular and modern man, writing out of frustration as each of his Mennonite novels (Peace Shall Destroy Many and The Blue Mountains of China) makes particularly clear. Tutored by a sense of responsibility and personal evaluation which is characteristic of his sub culture, Wiebe despises the moral sloppiness and evident intolerance of the culture at large.

In chapter two(we) discussed Peace Shall Destroy Many which presents a detailed, sympathetic but critical portrait of the Mennonite settlement in Wapiti. Set in 1944; it uses the Second World War to counterpoint the struggle of young Thorn Wiens to understand his
heritage and his place within it. His pacifism and his faith are challenged by the increasingly violent conflicts in his community. Through his own good intentions, Wiens is drawn into the conflict and ironically, even participates in the fight near the end, deliberately set in a manger at Christmas. However, the values he invokes to criticize his community are drawn from his Mennonite faith, which he does not reject but painfully reasserts. Therefore, it is not faith, but Wiens himself who has been tested. As a result, his faith is strengthened. The novel ends with a reaffirmation of Mennonite belief:

Christ's teachings stood clear in the Scriptures; could he but scrape them bare of all their acquired meanings and see them as those first disciples had done, their feet in the dust of Galilee... Only a conquest by love unites the combatants.

And in the heat of this battle lay God's peace. (237-238)

In chapter three we discussed The Blue Mountains of China, which presents an epic of Mennonites who, like the people of Israel, wander and suffer, yet are sustained by the very beliefs which their suffering calls into question. Its varied but interwoven stories of endurance, sacrifice, betrayal, penance and renewal are so evocative that they suggest, not a single choice between alternatives, but a complex destiny. The early Mennonites were persecuted first as heretics and later as a minority or alien group. Wherever they went they had to suffer a lot. The Canadian prairie was also inhospitable, but those who settled there gradually prospered both in wealth and in faith.
And Wiebe extends a challenge to all his fellow Mennonites to live what they profess, to practise what they preach.

As Keith points out, from his own people Wiebe inherited a religious vision, a seriousness of purpose and a painful experience as a minority ethnic group living close to the land. Through creative understanding, he has become a spiritual descendant of Big Bear, Dumont and Riel; he has made the history of Western Canada his own (Epic Fiction 3). This naturally led him to Native and prairie themes which we dealt with in chapters four and five. The same themes recur in chapter six where we saw Wiebe’s concerns regarding oppressed groups and individuals.

The Temptations of Big Bear and The Scorched-Wood People are epics on a vast scale. Wiebe comments about them:

... [T]o touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader’s mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. A poem, a lyric, will not do. 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 artefact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction. (“Passage by Land” 4)

The violence of civilization is the major theme in both the novels. They are complementary volumes about the fate of heroic men who are
tragic and prophetic representatives of their people. Both Big Bear and Louis Riel are visionaries who are overwhelmed by the aggressive material and political forces of the new Canadian nation and finally are tried by a system of justice which they do not accept.

The Natives all over the world face almost the same predicament. Frank Birbalsingh notices similarities between Big Bear's experience and that of the Maori heroine in *The Maori Girl*, a novel by the New Zealand writer Noel Hilliard and between Big Bear and the hero of *Wild Cat Falling*, a novel by the Australian aboriginal writer Colin Johnson, later known as Mudrooroo Narogin (Birbalsingh 12). These Canadian, New Zealand and Australian writers perceive identical implications in the conflict between indigenous traditions and the European cultures that prevail in their countries. Birbalsingh observes that the experiences of aboriginals are best understood within the context of colonial history, in which aggressively competitive and technologically expansive Western European nations used superior military force to spread themselves all over the world. Along with the various injustices of colonial domination, these nations brought machines and technology, which have led to the establishment of an urban-industrial way of life in all former British colonies and in much of the rest of the world. What the indigenous cultures in the ex-colonies now face is not simply the injustice of colonial domination but indoctrination by a machine based culture that is worldwide in scope and whose influence is irresistible because it offers advantages such as
quicker transportation, medical benefits, labour-saving devices and affluent living standards. Even if the more obvious political, social and economic grievances, including racial discrimination, were relieved, minority aboriginal cultures in North America and the Pacific would still face assimilation into a broadly based, urban-industrial life-style that is nowadays sought by everyone, including people from the poorest developing nations (Birbalsingh 12-13). But the prevalence of this way of life throughout the world should not be regarded as absolute or permanent. While its material advantages are undoubtedly attractive, its alienating effects have been noticed by artists, scientists and other commentators who perceive, along with the growth of material affluence, a decline of spiritual awareness in much of the western world today. And writers like Wiebe have no doubt that this decline may be restored through adoption of aspects of indigenous traditions.

Wiebe searches the Prairie past in order to unravel the layers of time and to reconstruct a crucial part of the Canadian history. He claims the lost voices of the vanquished Plains Cree and the Métis, freeing them to be heard as they tragically never were in their own time. The Native voices created by Wiebe provide insightful criticism of the dominant white society in Canada. More than this, however, he celebrates Native culture in its own right, on its own terms. The portrayal of the richness and resilience of Native culture is the most important legacy of Wiebe. His fiction deconstructs white colonial
consciousness in Canada, revealing the crucial failures to imagine the racial Other. The obsession with possession and mastery, the will to maintain borders and order, to dominate other human beings and nature itself, is integral to the colonial paradigm. These same failures prevail in modern Canada, and at large in the whole world, as the dominant white culture is still reluctant to identify with or imagine the Native world view. And they maintain this position at their peril. To a great extent, Wiebe continues the literary tradition of using Indians to evaluate or measure white culture. Wiebe does not lay simple blames or guilt, for that does not expunge error; instead, he forces non-Native readers to accept their historical responsibility for the displacement and sufferings of a people and perceive what they all have lost in the process (Moss, “Genocide” 259-60). Blodgett remarks that the great value of The Temptations of Big Bear is that Big Bear is a voice that illuminates (Configuration 21.3). Wiebe makes the land breathe with the Natives to force the white to see how they are immersed in the lives of their ancestors of Canadian geography and history.

David L. Jeffrey identifies the essential storyteller's trick in Wiebe's fiction as “its prophetic invitation to activate choices for the future,” and Ina Ferris calls the process a “forced participation “ which allows no retreat from the fictional experience (Jeffrey, “A Search for Peace” 192). Instead of a romantic or elegiac exercise of pining for an irrecoverable past, Wiebe's novels carry immense relevance for the present and the future of Canada. The temptations of Big Bear.
Dumont and Riel to wage violent resistance, succumb to despair or to assimilate, and their hopes for Native unity and meaningful negotiation remain as topical to their progeny today as one century ago as does the reluctance of the dominant white culture to honour Native voices.

Wiebe's reconstruction of the dynamic Native culture, with a unique heritage and heroic leaders such as Big Bear, Dumont and Riel is an important affirmation of Native pride and identity. These novels are an ambitious feat and are not without excesses, but it is rare and much needed vision in Canadian literature. In his relentless subversion of stereotypes, his representational accuracy and his assertion of complex and rich meanings in characters and events and language itself, Wiebe succeeds in articulating the questions and issues at stake a century ago and which linger today. With his fiction Wiebe brings marginalized Native experience into the centre of Canadian consciousness and, as they deconstruct the past and present, builds a future of hope. A central message emerging from him is that although the conflicts and guilt of misunderstanding between whites and Natives at times seem irreconcilable, there is hope for understanding based on a profound belief in shared human values. Given the state of mistrust and lack of understanding between two cultures, this message should not be taken for granted or go unheeded.

However, Wiebe can be challenged. With his exhaustive use of historical facts, it would seem that Wiebe is on secure ground. But it must be remembered that no writer has full access to "Truth," and that
what they offer to their readers is imaginative constructs. Wiebe treads a fine line between admiring and idealizing his Native characters, especially Big Bear. In addition, he at times allows his personal Christian world view to intrude perhaps too directly on his non-Christian subject. Still, questions remain unresolved. How can readers determine whether an image is authentic? Who defines cultural identity? Is honouring and celebrating Native heroes and stories an act of appropriation or a profound attempt to mediate between cultures? Is asserting a shared past or a shared present a neo-colonial act of control or a way of redressing past mistakes and reclaiming a shared humanity? Wiebe does not offer simple and easy answers to these complex issues. He is fundamentally non-romantic in direction because his works leave these questions open for the readers to decide. He provokes such questions and enlarges rather than narrows the readers' perspective. And as he shows, perspective is everything.

From the discussion of the novels of Wiebe in earlier chapters it is worth to note that although the subject matter and content of his stories vary greatly at a superficial level, there is an underlying pattern to which his plots invariably conform. The Edenic simplicity of a minority group is disturbed by an external, aggressive, invading and intruding force of a majority. Whether writing about Mennonites or Métis, Inuit or Native Indians, Wiebe is intrigued by that aspect of intrusion by which a closed community is exposed to a wider social world which brings about their own destruction. Wiebe very tactfully
establishes this paradigm in almost all of his works: in chapter one of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the Canadian warplanes penetrate the narrow horizon of Wapiti; in *First and Vital Candle*, white cultural institutions such as schools, banks, air force and the missions break in upon the isolation of Inuit and Ojibwa communities; in *The Blue Mountains of China*, the Communist revolution destroys the moral and religious formulae of the family of Jakob Friesen V; in *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, numerous manifestations of the “White Grandmother’s” voice invade the lives of Cree, Blackfoot and Métis; in *My Lovely Enemy*, where social purview narrows, Gillian Overton invades the boundaries of the nuclear family life; in *The Mad Trapper*, the RCMP forces an individual to total destruction; and in *A Discovery of Strangers*, the voice of “Great King” invades a native heritage.

In general, Wiebe dramatizes imperialism as a wave of alien force penetrating geographical territories and human minds, eradicating or dominating over whatever the colonized people have hitherto considered sacred and natural. In this wave the official historical accounts strategically gloss over or ignore the most sacred beliefs, axiomatic values and time-honoured customs of the indigenous people. In this context, Wiebe’s fiction becomes the voice of the voiceless by indirection. He writes of his own narrative method in his essay, “The Artist as a Critic and a Witness”: “For the artist knows, and this is a fundamental principle of all art, that some of the most important things we as human beings must understand cannot be
gotten directly. They can be seen and shown only by the indirection of art — by metaphor; by symbol, if you like. That is why fiction is so important.” He continues: “The novelist knows that the most important things he would say simply disappear if he attacks them head on and blurts them out. They can only be said by indirection” (44). And at the end of his novels he provides some metaphors or symbols which give a positive hope to the voice of the minorities struggling for dominance.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many* Thom Wiens discovers truth in the image of “the brightest star in the heavens” (239); in *First and Vital Candle* Abe Ross hears “a voice” which seems to come from nowhere (353); in *The Blue Mountains of China* Samuel U. Reimer hears God’s call (in the chapter “The Vietnam call of Samuel U. Reimer”); at the end of *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Big Bear feels the “warm weight” of Chief’s Son’s Hand against his soul (415); in *The Scorched-Wood People* Louis Riel dies reciting the Lord’s Prayer (346); in *My Lovely Enemy* James Dyck’s spiritual reorientation occurs when he sees the link between one of Donne’s holy sonnets and a passage from the New Testament (251-52); in *The Mad Trapper* the RCMP fails to identify the man whom they hunted and killed (189) and in *A Discovery of Strangers* Graenstockings walks away proudly with her child affirming her motherhood (317). Thus Wiebe indirectly points to a futuristic hope.

This point is further highlighted by Geoffrey York in his book *The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada* where he recounts the “fifth generation” prophecy. Starving and demoralized,
with their way of life already disappearing, the Indian chiefs of the prairies signed treaties with the Canadian government in the 1970's. But as they surrendered their land to the white man, they looked into the future and talked about their descendants. They spoke of their "children's children's children's children's children." York states that . . . [T]his vision, which became known as the fifth generation prophecy, has been widely interpreted to mean that the fifth generation would witness the rebirth of the Indian people. The chiefs were looking toward a day when their people would again have strength and a renewed confidence and pride in their identity."

Five generations have now passed and this prophecy is slowly becoming true as a new era is dawning for Native peoples across Canada. They are beginning to recover their cultural values, languages, spiritual beliefs, social traditions and pride. Native voices in Canadian politics can no longer be suppressed and the dominant white culture is beginning to listen and becomes more aware of Native cultures, history and issues. Perhaps, a new era has also arrived in Canadian literature, as Native voices are beginning to receive the attention they deserve. Literature, whether written by Natives or non-Natives, holds great promise for meaningful communication and understanding between these two alienated cultures which have so much to overcome and so much to share. And the contribution of Rudy Wiebe to this effect can never be underestimated as he is, beyond doubt, the trailblazer and the leading pioneer in this direction.