FROM DOCUMENT TO ART: WIEBE'S HISTORICAL SHORT STORIES AND THEIR SOURCES

W. J. Keith

Ever since he began work on *The Temptations of Big Bear,* Rudy Wiebe has been continuously preoccupied with the relation between historical fact and artistic creation. As he remarked at that time (1971) during an interview with Donald Cameron, "the thing I'm tussling with in this new book is how you present facts."[1] In his novels about Big Bear and Louis Riel, the process is complicated by the mass of widely-scattered and sometimes contradictory material out of which they are formed, not to mention the differing interpretations that can arise from available and accepted facts. But in the last ten years Wiebe has also produced a number of short stories based on historical subjects, and in these the challenge to the writer lies not so much in the creation of a consistent and absorbing story as in his drawing from an existing document the implicit artistic effect which the original writer lacked the necessary imagination or language to reveal. In each case Wiebe is working close to a particular source, and his alterations of the original can tell us a great deal about the complex foundations of his art. In this paper I propose to examine the deviations from his sources in three recent short stories. The first to be discussed, "Games for Queen Victoria," appeared in *Saturday Night* in 1976 but has not yet been collected; the other two, "The Fish Caught in the Battle River" and "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan," were included in *Where is the Voice Coming From?* (1974).

I

In an article entitled "Riel: a possible film treatment," published in 1975, Wiebe lists among the "essential scenes" for such an undertaking one in which "British Captain Wm. Butler shoots

[1]Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists, Part Two* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 150.

billiards while Riel has to wait to ask him about Sir John A's intentions."[2] This scene was not included in *The Scorched-Wood People,* but it did become the focal-point of "Games for Queen Victoria." In this story Wiebe retells the account that William F. Butler presents in his well-known memoir, *The Great Lone Land,* of his curious interview with Riel at Fort Garry just before the arrival of Sir Garnet Wolseley's expedition of 1870. For Butler himself this was only one incident among many in (to quote the subtitle of his book) "a narrative of travel and adventure in the north-west of America." Wiebe's main task was to carve out of Butler's reminiscences the section that has proved historically the most important and intriguing, and to make it both compelling and self-sufficient.

This involves the drastic cutting of certain parts (Butler devotes a whole chapter to his journey from London to Toronto that Wiebe reduces to a single sentence) and the considerable amplification of others. In the original, for instance, Butler succeeds with remarkable speed and ease in persuading Wolseley of his usefulness as a free-wheeling associate on the expedition:

> "My good fellow, there's not a vacant berth for you," [Wolseley] said; "I got your telegram, but the whole army in Canada wanted to get on the Expedition."
>
> "I think, sir, there is one berth still vacant," I answered.
>
> "What is that?"
>
> "You will want to know what they are doing in Minnesota and along the flank of your march, and you have no one to tell you," I said.
>
> "You are right; we do want a man out there. Look now, start for Montreal by first train to-morrow."[3]

Wiebe extends this scene to more than twice its length, dramatizing Butler's canny powers of persuasion and suggesting that an unspoken, conspiratorial understanding developed between the two men. After Butler is made to offer a more detailed list of reasons why he is needed, Wiebe inserts the following:

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[2]Ruby Wiebe, "Riel: a possible film treatment," *NeWest Review,* I (June 1975), 6.
[3]W. F. Butler, *The Great Lone Land* [1872] Sixth impression. (London: Sampson Low, 1874), p. 27. Hereafter cited in text as *GLL.* In Wolseley's *The Story of a Soldier's Life* 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1904), it should be noted, the scene is described rather differently, Wolseley claiming Butler's function on the expedition as his own idea (II, 201).

> "Very good!" the Colonel interrupted, his handsome face almost smiling. "And in the meantime, what are you?"
>
> "Why, I am an English gentleman with private means and sporting intent travelling west along the easiest available U.S. routes. I am particularly interested in the sharp-tailed grouse of the British North-West, but I am also a convivial sort who seems to enjoy hearing locals talk."
>
> Sir Garnet laughed, eyes flashing as he turned on his heel. "Start for Montreal on tomorrow's train . . ."[4]

This artistic adaptation rings truer than the authentic memoir of a participant. Here, as so often, Wiebe is intent on providing a created image of truth in preference to "police-court facts."

Wiebe's chief contribution, then, lies in rigorous selection and judicious amplification of the material. I am discussing "Fames for Queen Victoria" out of chronological order because it seems to me that the difference in overall effect between original document and recreated narrative is least remarkable in this story. Here less than anywhere else in his historical fiction is Wiebe concerned with establishing a "voice" or a new angle of narration. After all, Butler's ably-written account already exists — there is no need to alter the tone and phrasing of the memoir as there is in the other stories I shall be considering. Besides, Wiebe is not at his strongest in reproducing the idiom of a middle-class Victorian Englishman. Butler's own prose is clear, smooth-flowing and workmanlike, occasionally rising into vigour and wit. In this instance, Wiebe's alterations are not invariably improvements on the original. Butler's description of his arrival at Wolseley's headquarters reads as follows: "Thus I encountered those few friends who on such occasions are as certain to offer their pithy condolences as your neighbour at the dinner-table when you are late is sure to tell you that the soup and fish were delicious. At last I met the commander himself' *(GLL,* 27). Wiebe contracts this into a phrase — ". . . until such overly informative condolences stopped perforce at the commander's door" (62). Not only is this stiffer than the original, but "overly" strikes a palpable false note; I very much doubt if the word would have appeared in Butler's vocabulary in the early 1870s.

Similarly, I question whether Butler would have described himself as "playing in the wrong league" (63). This sounds more like

[4]Ruby Wiebe, "Games for Queen Victoria," *Saturday Night,* 91 (March 1976), 62. Subsequent references in text.

twentieth-century North American than nineteenth-century British. None the less, whatever reservations we may have about the appropriateness of the phrase, Wiebe's reasons for introducing it are in this case clear. His title, we recall, is "Games for Queen Victoria," and one of the means he employs to hold the story together is the reiteration of references to game and play. Other examples include "it was time to plan my next play" (63), "back in Canada I had bungled my play" (64), "I had cast my uncomfortable die with that jump ashore" (64), "I had set my line. And Riel took it" (65). When he is proceeding to Fort Garry aboard the *International,* it is Wiebe, not Butler, who introduces the phrase "billiard-table-flat Red River prairie" (63) — an image that consciously anticipates the climactic game for Queen Victoria in the scene where Butler plays pocket billiards during his interview with Riel.

In this culmination of the story Wiebe once again develops the scene to extract from it all the potentiality for drama that exists just beneath the surface of the original. Butler's own account offers hints of dramatic tension but these are strangely muted. Having entered Fort Garry at Riel's invitation, Butler refuses to initiate an interview and waits for a response from the other side:

> There stood in the centre of the apartment a small billiard table, I took up a cue and commenced a game with the only other occupant of the room — the same individual who had on the previous evening acted as messenger to the Indian Settlement. We had played some half a dozen strokes when the door opened, and my friend returned. Following him closely came a short stout man with a large head, a sallow, puffy face, a sharp, restless, intelligent eye, a square-cut massive forehead overhung by a mass of long and thickly clustering hair, and marked with well-cut eyebrows — altogether, a remarkable-looking face, all the more so, perhaps, because it was to be seen in a land where such things were rare sights.
>
> This was M. Louis Riel . . . (*GLL,* 133)

Wiebe alters this considerably. Far from playing "some half a dozen strokes" with his companion, Butler is made by Wiebe to put on an unprecedented, almost magical, virtuoso performance — one that brilliantly suggests the poise and confident expertise that Riel and his Métis found impossible to emulate. And the initial confrontation is skilfully integrated into the "game":

> Finally, I had made a particularly intricate two-bank play that left my cue ball in direct line to drop the 'fourteen' in the top right

> pocket and I was moving easily, perhaps humming a little, to make that unbelievably simple shot when I sensed I must pass two moccasined feet at the corner of the billiard-table. They belonged to a stocky man in formal black trousers and coat, sallow, puffy face and large head, whose square-cut, massive forehead was overhung by thickly clustered hair — altogether a remarkable face driven almost to hypnosis by glaring black eyes. The face, the formal clothes, and the buffalo-hide moccasins on the carpeted floor — I could not for a moment comprehend who this strange, mixed apparition might be, how it had exploded out of nothing into mystery when I had so nearly completed the most perfect billiard game ever to form itself under my hand. (66-7)

These juxtaposed extracts fairly characterize Wiebe's methods. At some points he is remarkably close to the original, incorporating whole phrases into his own prose. But at others he effects a startling transformation. A little later in his description Butler makes the point about the "curious mixture" of Riel's clothing — black frock-coat with moccasins; Wiebe focuses on this apparent anomaly, which can be interpreted as a visible and conscious symbol of the Métis (=mixed) race, by presenting it as the first impression of Riel for both Butler and reader. Even so slight a rearrangement can transmute historical document into achieved art, for in this mixed image of Riel lies the key to Wiebe's whole story. Butler is half hoping to find himself in the presence of a charismatic leader (the possible comparison between Riel and Napoleon is shared by both versions). But Butler cannot detect greatness beneath the unconventional clothing: "to suppose that this half-caste could ever play the part of the greatest man on earth since Alexander, dressed in the garb of a priest and the footwear of a savage, was simply absurd" (67, following closely *GLL,* 135-6).

For the historical Butler, there is no more to be said; the interview closes and he passes on to other adventures. But for Wiebe, interested in this white impression of Riel as he is preparing to offer a full-scale Métis view of him in *The Scorched-Wood People,* the poignancy of what might have been ("he had the youth, the appearance, perhaps the brilliance to create a glorious empire" [67, with no source in *GLL*]) is central. Butler's account ends abruptly: "Then darting quickly from the room [Riel] left me. An hour later I left the dirty ill-kept fort" (*GLL,* 136). Wiebe, however, invokes the artist's privilege and brings his story to a satisfying conclusion by inserting a moment of introspection when even "British Captain Wm.

Butler," on the payroll of the Wolseley expedition, views Riel with sympathy and regret:

> But . . . for a time, I sat, motionless. The sunlight slanted across the billiard table. Ah yes. Yes. (67, ellipsis in original)

II

Much of Wiebe's "story-making" in "Games for Queen Victoria" involved the extraction of a coherent, self-sufficient incident from the larger context of *The Great Lone Land.* "The Fish Caught in the Battle River," on the other hand, is based on a short memoir by Neil Brodie published in pamphlet-form as *Twelve Days with the Indians.*[5] In both cases Wiebe is confined to the details of his sources since the accounts of Butler and Brodie appear to be the only available evidence for these peripheral incidents in the Riel rebellions of 1869-70 and 1885. In the case of Brodie's pamphlet, however, the materials for the short story were already isolated and offered as a separate entity. The artist's chief task here was not selection but rearrangement. Brodie, one of a number of teamsters captured by Poundmaker's Indians, was an old man when he set down his recollections, and they ramble from one incident to another in somewhat desultory fashion. Wiebe maintains the unplanned and spontaneous effect — indeed, he accentuates it — but in his version this rambling, while maintaining the illusion of a genuine memoir, is also artistically purposeful.

He begins, for example, with Brodie's last paragraph, which offers itself, out of order, as an afterthought following his account of being diverted by the North West Mounted Police at the time of Riel's execution at Regina. Wiebe reproduces the incident of the two men carrying the fish almost word for word, but the effect is totally different. Indeed, Wiebe explains Brodie's hidden impulse in remembering and reproducing the detail at all. He grasps at the image, extracts it for his title, and offers it as a significant memory — a Wordsworthian "spot of time" — that catches the essence of the

[5]Neil Brodie, *Twelve Days with the Indians, May 14-May 26, 1885: Being his experience in Poundmaker's camp During the Rebellion of 1885.* Battleford: Saskatchewan Herald, 1932. Hereafter cited in text as *TDI.* (Wiebe's photocopy of this scarce pamphlet is now in the Wiebe papers in the Library of the University of Calgary.)

whole experience. There is something warmly human about the narrator's recalling a sensual detail ("That's what I remember, a long dripping fish or the dust on this girl's ankle where her moccasin was cut through to her brown skin — dust, or grease on the top of long hair" [125, not in *TDI*]),[6] which sums up his experience more vividly than the events that became part of history. Or, rather, the image of the fish symbolizes the historical event. The teamsters are "caught" by the Indians, and later the Indians are themselves taken prisoner. Wiebe (but not Brodie) ends his story with Middleton's interrogation of Poundmaker, and the fish caught in the Battle River may be seen, on one level, as an emblem of the captured Indian leader.[7]

This first paragraph draws attention to another of Wiebe's significant alternations. Though taken out of order the incident is, as I have said, reproduced almost word for word, but one seemingly trivial alteration is in fact of considerable import. Whereas Brodie writes of the fish, "It must have been over five feet' (*TDI,* 9), Wiebe's version reads: "It must of been at least six feet" (125). The slurred vernacular "of" establishes a *speaking* voice while Brodie's written English reflects a deliberate "literary" effect — he seems on his best behaviour, and sacrifices the colloquial vigour that we might expect of someone in his situation. It is typical of Wiebe that he should restore this sense of a personal response, offering the story not as Brodie the eye-witness told it but as he *ought* to have told it. Paradoxically, we are more conscious of the individual behind the created work of art than we are of Brodie in the authentic document.

Having established the fish as the governing emblem of his story, Wiebe takes up the narrative at the point where Brodie begins: the surrounding of the freight-teams by armed Crees on 14 May 1885. But Brodie's account is flat and circumstantial:

> I and twenty others . . . were about twelve miles south of Battleford in the Eagle Hills, where there were small bluffs of poplar, when Poundmaker's warriors surrounded us. We ran our oxen into a circle with the wagons outside and with ten rifles held back the Indians. Suddenly a halfbreed rode out, with his hands high over his head, signalling for a parley. Frank Cox, one of the few who kept all his wits, agreed to go out and talk if

[6]Ruby Wiebe, *Where is the Voice Coming From?* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974). Subsequent references in text.

[7]Brodie gives 23 May as the date of the fish incident; Wiebe alters it to 27 May, the day after Poundmaker's interrogation by Middleton, presumably in order to point up this connection.

> I would protect him. I drew a bead on the halfbreed's breast and Frank, walking out under my rifle, made terms of surrender. (*TDI,* 2)

Wiebe transforms this by recovering the sense of atmosphere and immediacy that Brodie, whether deliberately or inadvertently, has suppressed. In order to catch the element of surprise and the speed of events he pointedly alters one of the historical circumstances (his teamsters are unable to form the traditional wagon-circle), dislocates the standard written syntax that Brodie has been at pains to master, and inserts into the narrative coarsely vivid language that brings the whole scene to life:

> . . . we sure never had time to form circles among the young poplar of the Eagle Hills when these painted feathered-up Indians were sprouting all round us, Bang! without so much as a horse-fart to warn us before they were all over like the grass itch. (125-6)

The seed of Brodie's "Poundmaker's warriors surrounded us" has grown to full flower in Wiebe's dramatic reconstruction.

Similarly, Brodie's "signalling for a parley" is transformed from abstract cliché to a vividly particularized scene of crisis:

> One of our leaders he still had his head on straight and he got up with a white handkerchief — white as it was two hundred ox miles from Swift Current — on a stick while I covered him. I guess I could of gotten one or maybe two if Frank — yeah, that's his name, Frank — and lots of good it would be done him too, but he says,
>
> "Cover me, Dan,"
>
> and I guess that's the way it's supposed to be done, but eight hundred Indians, what the hell. (126)

The detail of the near-white handkerchief has an emblematic quality comparable to that of the fish, and Dan's jerky recollections create the illusion of actual speech. Brodie's written account, "recollected in tranquillity," pales into insignificance when set against the immediacy of Wiebe's lived experience.

I claimed earlier that Wiebe's dislocation of chronological order was purposeful. An example is to be found in his interruption of Brodie's account which is continuous at this point:

> We started with an escort of about twenty horsemen, we hanging on to the stirrup-straps as we ran. We ran for about a

> mile when another small band of Indians, about twenty in number, rode us down and demanded that we return to camp or die here. (*TDI,* 2)

Wiebe paraphrases both these sentences, but between them he inserts a paragraph that goes back in time to fill in historical details and is based on material that Brodie offers rather lamely towards the end of his pamphlet (*TDI,* 8). By interrupting the account at this point, Wiebe rivets our attention on the picture of the teamsters hanging on to the stirrup-straps and running beside the mounted Indians. Once again a visual image assumes an artistic significance out of all proportion to the historical importance of the immediate scene that it describes.

The rest of the story proceeds according to the principles already illustrated. Wiebe is concerned here, as in his historical novels, to catch the essence of history rather than merely reproduce the exact record. To take but one further example: according to Brodie, when asked by one of his comrades, "How long have we to live?," he would reply, "Perhaps five minutes; perhaps we might live to be old men" (*TDI,* 5). In context this is moving — especially since we know that Brodie lives to write his account as an old man. But Wiebe desires another effect and makes him answer, "Maybe five minutes, maybe till our teeth rot" (131). Yet again, even if this is not what Brodie said, it is what we feel he ought to have said.

Wiebe "makes" this story by allowing it to find the appropriate form which Brodie was unable to recognize. All the basic information is derived from Brodie's pamphlet, but Wiebe omits some inessential details that detract from the artistic structure and also inserts occasional passages that invariably add life to the whole. Sometimes a satiric effect is introduced ("Any Christian could tell them that's no way to run a war" [127]), but more often the interpolations involve descriptive passages that heighten atmosphere. One example must suffice. Brodie recounts a night crisis when the Indians think some of the whites have escaped and threaten to kill the rest. At last, however, "the men were found and all was peace again" (*TDI,* 5). Brodie moves into a digression at this point but Wiebe's imagination has been stimulated by the final phrase and he continues:

> Of course no Indian camp is ever all asleep. There's always something moving, a dog snarls sniffing around, a child stands up to take a leak, horses snuffle. There are night birds too, little night hawks that seem to split over your head a whirr — enough

> to really scare you with ghosts if you don't know what they are. There's just a shadow over your face and at the same time whirrrr . . . (130)

Neil Brodie published his account almost fifty years after the event, two years before Wiebe himself was born. But the artist, "born out of due time," can create the moment-by-moment reality of the past scene with a power beyond the capacity of the eye-witness.

III

Wiebe's contribution as story-maker to "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan" is both less obvious and more subtle. The source here, alluded to somewhat vaguely in the subtitle-epigraph, is a first-hand account of Indian warfare given by Little Bear (cousin of Ap-pi-no-kom-mit, the main figure in the story) to Sergeant-Major F. W. Spicer of the North West Mounted Police. It first appeared in print in John Hawkes's *The Story of Saskatchewan and its People* (1924). In introducing the account Hawkes writes:

> We claim for the subjoined that it is a prose epic with few equals in the English language. It tells a story of courage and endurance which would reflect credit on members of the highest civilization. There is horror, but there is heroism, and we do not know where the man living is to be found who could tell a story with the simple, picturesque power that Little Bear displays in his narrative.[8]

If we ignore the condescending tone, this is, I think, an accurate assessment of the effect of the story. Wiebe must have thought the same.

In terms of artistic adaptation, the case is different from that of either "Games for Queen Victoria" or "The Fish Caught in the Battle River." Little Bear's account is complete in itself and is already offered as a brief "prose epic." The story, we might say, has already been "made"; and Wiebe closely follows not only the facts of the narrative but the ordering of the source. At first, then, the story looks no more than a paraphrase of the original; indeed, I can imagine an incautious reader mistaking it for a plagiarism. Why, it must be asked, would this be an unwarranted conclusion?

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[8]John Hawkes, *The Story of Saskatchewan and its People* 3 vols. (Chicago-Regina: S. E. Clarke, 1924), I, 110. Hereafter cited in text as *SS*.

We should remember, first of all, that the account reproduced in Hawkes's book is Spicer's translated rendition. The voice purports to be Little Bear's but it comes to us at second remove in the words of Spicer who, for all his interest in and sympathy with Indian ways, was a soldier, a policeman and a white. In addition, while he was by birth an American, his attitudes and language, though intelligently independent, must inevitably have been influenced by the Victorian conventions and presuppositions that surrounded him. None the less, it should be emphasized that Spicer was himself acutely conscious of possible distortion. He asserts his intention to repeat the story "as nearly as I can in his own words," and hopes that it will prove interesting "on account of the incidents it records." And he continues:

> If it is not so, blame me and not Little Bear, for his story was well and graphically told. But I feel that the work of translating, and editing, is more than I have a right to undertake, with all my failings and inexperience. I claim nothing for myself . . . ; if the story pleases you give credit to Little Bear. (*SS*, I, 113)

Wiebe, himself white and without the benefit of knowing or hearing Little Bear, has the inestimable advantage of being a creative artist. What he attempts in "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan" is to purge Spicer's account of its Victorian accretions (in particular, a tendency towards melodramatic and sentimental cliché) and to restore the account to a state closer (in his view — this can never, of course, be conclusively demonstrated) to the original as Little Bear rather than Spicer told it.

Perhaps the most convenient passage for stylistic comparison is that recounting the attack on the Cree camp and the sudden, disastrous arrival of the main body of Cree warriors. Extensive quotation is in this case essential. Spicer's version runs as follows:

> On the wild rush, the roar of our voices, the great joy of it all; forth from the tepees rush our foes to meet us. A flight of arrows; if some fell we knew it not; then hand to hand we force them back, not man to man, but ten to one; they are as but flies that bar our onward rush; though bravely they fought with spear, axe and knife. Oh the fierce joy as we saw them backward borne, and heard our brothers' voices from the other side, and knew that the day was nearly won.
>
> But hush! listen! What sound is that that rises above the battle's road? Look! Look! Back! Back for your lives; to the

> coulee; back; take cover. With maddened desperate voice each cries to all. One glance enough! With mighty roar a thousand horsemen onward rush. Tell us, that death is by us. (*SS*, I, 115-6)

And this is Wiebe's reworking of the same scene:

> . . . our voices thunder in the joy of it as lodges split themselves before our sharp knives and the enemy staggers out, snatching at weapons and falling, snatching and falling and trying to stand zipp! Arrows hiss some of us down but who sees that, we are forcing them back, they are summer flies, their clubs and knives just flies brushed aside and crushed I yo ho the joy of knife thudding in bone and blood spray I yo ho I am here now! and we hear our brothers' voices bellowing towards us above the screams and smoke and know that we will meet them soon to grasp their bloody hands a-a- ha he ha.
>
> But listen! There is a far sound above the roar, the screams, there, between the lodges, the white dust of snow rising with the thunder of hooves down the valley, back back! Back! Each desperate voice cries to each, back! for the open jaws of horses swirl up towards us through the snow of their running with spears and knives and war-cries of our enemies bristling above them, shout to your brother that death is running us, back. (116)[9]

A whole article could be written on the differences between these two passages. Spicer's unexceptional "forth from the tepees rush our foes to meet us" is dazzlingly transformed: "as lodges split themselves before our sharp knives and the enemy staggers out, snatching at weapons and falling, snatching and falling and trying to stand zipp!" Action is not recounted; it is recreated in the rhythms and modulations of the prose. Wiebe pries out the kernel of image and implication barely discernible in the original. Sometimes a single word suffices to achieve a startling effect: "Arrows *hiss* some of us down"; "we hear our brothers' voices *bellowing* towards us"; "death is *running* us" — the verb used in its traditional Indian sense as in "running buffalo." Again, "they are as but flies that bar our onward rush" is conventional and uninspired compared with Wiebe's "they are summer flies, their clubs and knives just flies brushed aside and crushed," where the clanging assonances conjure up the harsh cruelty of battle. In Spicer's version the Blackfeet hear their brothers'

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[9]References to this story in text are also from *Where is Voice Coming From?*

war-whoops and "knew that the day was nearly won." The irony of immediate reversal, from triumph to crushing defeat, just saves the effect, but Wiebe's version, in which they know what they "will meet soon to grasp their bloody hands" succeeds in recreating a far more authentic primitive zest. In the second paragraph, Wiebe cuts out the varied exclamations and adventure-story excitement to insert impressionistic details: "the white dust of snow rising with the thunder of hooves down the valley"; "the open jaws of horses swirl up towards us through the snow." In terms of subject-matter, there is little to distinguish the two accounts; in terms of artistry, the difference is between talent and genius.

Throughout the narrative Wiebe continually alters and improves the original when it falls back on a weak or conventional phrase. This is most often achieved by substituting imagistic for literal expressions. So, when Little Bear goes to the assistance of his leader, Spicer writes: "By his side I sling the axe, making clear the road" (*SS,* I, 119). Wiebe's version is indisputably the more forceful: "We stood side by side, and I helped him to chop our path through Cree" (118). Sometimes Wiebe tightens the prose by effective contraction. "No hope for the weak or wounded," writes Spicer; "they must fall and die, no matter how much we loved them" (*SS,* I, 120). Wiebe substitutes a simple, eloquent question: "Would our wounded need us after one night of this cold?" (119). Little Bear's anguished cry in the chief's lodge at the end of the story is another notable instance. Spicer's version is movingly simple but extended and close to cliché: "My heart is broke, and how can I tell them that he too will never come to those he loved, and how can these lips he kissed with his dying breath speak the word that must break their hearts?" (*SS,* I, 122). Wiebe's adaptation loses nothing of substance but gains considerably in emotional impact: "How can I say his last word beside the dead fire!" (122).

The alterations are often minute. Twice, for example, the adjective "poor" is simply omitted in references to Little Bear's mother, yet this makes all the difference between sentimental convention and genuine emotional power. Inconspicuously, the artist points up effects implicit in the original that Spicer has not quite succeeded in communicating. According to Spicer, Little Bear merely observed that the incident took place "before the white men came to us" (*SS,* I, 113); by altering this to "Before whites *dared* to come to *our country*" (113, my italics), Wiebe expresses what must have

been at the back of the Indian's mind even if he suppressed the implication for "Sergeant-Major F. W. Spicer of the North West Mounted Police." Above all, the truly memorable phrases — including the supremely simple opening sentence, "This is long ago," and the elegiac summing-up close to the end, "That was our life then" — are generally Wiebe's insertions. The "prose epic" that Hawkes so fortunately preserved in 1924 received half a century later the appropriate epic language that it so richly deserved.

University College,
University of Toronto