

David Williams

**The Indian Our Ancestor:
Three Modes of Vision in Recent Canadian Fiction**

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"I'd like at some point to go to Scotland, to Sutherland, where my people came from," writes Morag Gunn to her friend Ella in the "Rites of Passage" section of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*. "What do I hope to learn there? Don't ask me. But it haunts me, I guess, and maybe I'll have to go."¹ Later, faced with Sutherland just across the firth, Morag tells her lover McRaith (who, in a sense, has been another wraith to her):

"I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't, after all."

"Why would that be?"

"I don't know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here."

"What is that?"

"It's a deep land here, all right," Morag says. "But it's not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."

"What is, then?"

"Christie's real country. Where I was born" (pp. 390-91).

The orphaned Morag's quest for ancestors, turned homeward once more, touches upon that dilemma which is endemic in her home and native land. True homes or "real" countries are not possible without informing myths, and yet Morag's longing for a fatherland lays bare the reluctance of her own country to foster myths. Conversely, one's nativity in a land cannot make one a native so long as the ancestral rights of others gainsay one's own; there must be first a rite by which one's right

is realized. The adoption of forebears, as Morag discovers, is not only possible but necessary.

Adoption does not become possible for Morag, however, before she turns from the ancient fatherland and returns to the deathbed of Christie Logan, the old garbage collector who fostered her with tales of a legendary ancestor. Morag's rite of passage completes its first phase upon the moment Christie is named and "blessed" as her true father. And in an oddly literal sense his tales have made him her real parent. For once upon a time he told her the story of how her father saved the life of his friend, Christie Logan, in the Battle of Bourlon Wood. Morag learns from Prin, however, that the "truth" is reversed: Colin "would cry, and Christie would hold him" (p. 206). The astonishing thing is not that Christie thereby makes possible her very begetting, but that, by writing himself in utter self-effacement into her family history, he has psychologically become her progenitor. The tale of her heroic "father" and the myth of her heroic "ancestor," Piper Gunn, bear alike the Gunn family name though they are stamped with the character of Logan. So with good reason, Morag writes to McRaith, "I don't know why names seem so important to me. Yes, I guess I do know. My own name, and feeling I'd come from nowhere" (p. 289). Christie, the moment she realizes it, has fostered her all along in her own name and place. Her act, then, of naming the father is the reciprocal adoption which the orphan makes.

Morag's naming embraces even more than a parent, however; it is a final acknowledgement of her mythic ancestry. For her true patrimony consists of Christie's telling of "the old tales in his only speech, English, with hardly any trace of a Scots accent, and yet with echoes in his voice that went back and back. Christie, summoning up the ghosts of those who had never been and yet would always be." These echoes of "lost languages, forever lurking inside the ventricles of the hearts of those who had lost them" (p. 244) imply a sort of racial memory, not unlike Jung's collective unconscious; analogously, they bespeak a faith in the vital world of the dead. The ghosts, as Morag realizes, need never to have "lived" to have power. And Christie Logan, by being "gone to his ancestors" (p. 397), appears to have gained their authority; he has been gathered into legends which Morag tells of him, so that her own daughter Pique is not really affected by his death, "because she'd know him only through stories, and in that way, he's never died in her mind" (p. 419). Though Pique ridicules her mother's personal faith in being "gathered to [her] ancestors" as "a new one in euphemism," Mora replies, "It's not euphemism . . . and it's not new either" (p. 450). Th

subject of ancestors for Laurence, then, must be predicated upon some unnamed form of continuance. That form encompassing "those who had never been," obviously transcends blood and biology; but, embracing a need for "diviners" or "the *shaman*" (p. 273) whereby, now and here, the dead are reachable, it must also supersede orthodox Christianity. The world of *The Diviners* belongs ultimately to the cosmos of the pagan myths.

The shaman of this archaic cosmos is the one human being renowned for the power of "*being dead*"² (Eliade's italics) himself. Paradoxically, his ability to "die" represents "an intense desire to 'live'" (p. 494) since the "shaman must so die that he may meet the souls of the dead and receive their teaching; for the dead know everything" (p. 82). The shaman as psychopomp (though "he may also be priest, mystic, and poet"—p. 4) is thus charged with the awesome responsibility of knowing the fate or being the guardian of the soul(s) of his tribe. As such, he is the mediator between tenuous and absolute states of being. For he, through his ecstatic experiences, intercedes with the world of the gods, spirits, and ancestral souls, to restore the reality of the present time. As the communicant between Earth and Sky (or between human and celestial-infernal worlds) he returns to the origins of time, "before the break in communications between heaven and earth" (p. 493). The shaman's desire to share in the spirit condition is then an attempt, in the words of Eliade's dominant insight, to ensure that "historical time is abolished and the mythical time regained" (p. 103).

Rudy Wiebe, speaking of *The Temptations of Big Bear* in a recent interview, indicates that he is as concerned as Laurence with the dead, only his concern seems more with "historical time" than with the "mythical time":

I became aware as an older person that this land was not empty. It had been populated by—by who knows how many hundreds and perhaps thousands of years by people. The only reason we're not aware of it is because we're ignorant; it's not because they weren't there. So that I disagree profoundly with this idea that we have no ghosts—or that it's by the lack of ghosts we're haunted, as Earle Birney has it in one of his poems. That's not true at all. It's by our ignorance of our ghosts that we're haunted.³

Wiebe, if seeking a spirit (or "spirits") of place, announces the difference of his approach when he remarks, "I see that one of the things that white men have to do is to look to their pre-history in terms of the pre-white history. But there's plenty of history there." His ghosts are

summoned up, with or without call number, in the sacred tombs of our archives; history, not myth, is his reality. Strangely however, Wiebe's artistic imagination has been haunted nearly in the sense Laurence means. He says that Big Bear's ancient presence in the place where he himself was born was one of the major discoveries of his life.⁴ His shock of recognition reveals, as it were for the first time, that the total past of a land belongs to its people *in toto*. Since the Indian constitutes the greater part of that indigenous history, we cannot longer deny—or be denied—our spiritual antiquity. The sense of shared place serves then to deepen the past, to make the Cree chief part of the Mennonite's ancestral heritage.

Evidently "place" for Wiebe like "parent" for Laurence is available to adoption, though the two might not be in the former case as fully interchangeable. Because, however, both place and parent have as their common factor the power and pre-eminent Reality which might be conferred by the dead, the spirits, of whatever sort, promise some kind of regeneration. As the Fielding-type narrator of an earlier version of *Big Bear*, coyly distrusting his audience, proclaims: "If one is once willing to understand that he is beyond doubt thoughtlessly treading water on his ancestral past, on the past of his place, and will dare to plunge in, reckless of life and eyes wide open, he finds in that ocean a teeming of wildlife and tamelife and every other kind of life that takes his ordinary breath away . . . he drowns in happiness, into a new life altogether".⁵ Apparently the "profane man" can awaken even by baptism in history into a heightened, more real existence.

Wiebe's man of changed historical perspective anticipates a final kind of perspective shift through which the Canadian novelist has been accomplishing his recent spiritual metamorphosis. W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* explores the naive solipsism of a modern man in order to discover in native culture (and the individual pleasure of the will) a new relation to "the living whole." An ontology which cannot include the dead in *being* and yet holds, paradoxically, that all is dead is now exchanged, by an act of existential affirmation, for a belief in life. Mitchell's protagonist, not unlike those of Laurence and Wiebe, redefines his relationship to past and place and parent through an adoption of his aboriginal inheritance. But if the impulse of these three novelists is similar, their forms of vision and their fictional methods are quite different. Each of the novels, while seeking to graft an alien stalk into the native family tree, does so in terms of a distinct fictional mode: the elegiac, the existential, or the ecstatic.⁶ Only by examining these seemingly contradictory lines of descent might we arrive at a composite picture of the evolving Canadian soul.

The soul of a people, be it first remarked, can only be an expression of "the spirit of place."⁷ Yet this overwhelming importance of place is not separable from the authorizing spirit of the past. The firstcomers to this land, it is generally agreed, sought their *spiritus locus* in the divine (or ghostly) world. In the broader realm of archaic myth, no emigration would ever have been possible without a ritual return to the beginnings. So tribally, the North American Indian has time out of mind legitimized his habitation by imitating in the very form of his camp the pattern of the cosmic world. And the individual who has managed to journey to and return from the other world "is reborn; he is no longer the same person he was before. Having seen for himself the reality of the other world, he now has what William Black called 'the *double* vision,' as opposed to 'the *single* vision' of Newton It is not that the Indian has an older, simpler view of the world, to which we as Newtonian thinkers have added another dimension, but that he has a comprehensive, double view of the world, while we have lost sight of one whole dimension."⁸

The nature of this double vision requires that the other dimension of place be divined (or transported) through myth; while the individual might be carried to the other world on the strength of his own vision, characteristically he "sees" in terms of the myths of his tribe. Nevertheless the story of any diviner, ancient or modern, represents a new mythical history of the tribe since it calls for an individual relation to the ancestral spirits, more than to the Gods of Creation. The soul of the tribe may be renewed and reordained by learning anew the adventures of those Ancestors who received, in the Dream Time, in this place, the first cultural revelations from the Celestial Beings; for the mythical Ancestors "do not create the world . . . they transform it, thereby giving it its present form; they do not create man, they civilize him."⁹ But their ultimate power does not reside in what they once did on Earth; it lies in what, by being dead, they can do now. If their earthly lives contain a dramatic element of tragic death or disappearance, and if they share man's fate if not his ignorance, it is still in their spirit-existence that they possess the divine, creative energy into which man yearns to awaken. The ghosts, in archaic thought, have a causative reality; they hold the power, at any moment, to remake the moment.

The ghosts in Wiebe's historical sense—lacking the same kind of double vision—should constitute quite a different reality. But Wiebe, whose Christian theology presupposes history as the epiphany of God, can still be ambivalent as a novelist. He says, "I don't think in terms of mythic things I think in terms of particular human beings at particular times in particular places. And if that intensive look at their peculiarity

then raises them to somewhat of a mythic level, well, that's what literature does."¹⁰

An intensive look at Big Bear's "peculiarity" perforce involves Wiebe from the outset of his novel in a projection of the mythic spirit. For the reality of the Indian chief's world is founded in a uniquely religious perspective: his power, and hence his very being is derived from Great Parent Bear, "the most powerful spirit helper known to the Cree";¹¹ more particularly it stems from Chief's Son's Hand, that bundle which is a product of Big Bear's vision. Since "Bear was warrior Spirit, the greatest the River People had even in legend," a time comes when "his warrior son [also] longed for the power, longed to be renamed into [Great Parent Bear]". For the Cree, it seems, as for Eliade's archaic man, one becomes human only by resembling a mythical model.

Like his tribe, Big Bear also believes in "the Spirits of the Hills," unlike Superintendent Walsh and the white world whom he passively resists. In fact, the land as portrayed in the novel is one of the preeminent realities, not as real estate but as the sacred circle in which man stands "complete" (p. 129). Symbolically, it becomes the Great Ancestor: as Big Bear recalls, "rock was the oldest, eternal grandfather of all things who stayed in his place and you could be certain of him. [But] whites were only certain in changing" (p 101).

Kitty McLean, one of the white captives taken by the Cree, comes closest among non-Indian characters in the novel to understanding Big Bear's mythic view. She is told the story of the man who, wanting to live forever, is transformed into rock. Kitty now confesses to wanting "to be more like you. A Person" (p. 313), and in the symbolic undressing and coupling which follows, she feels "herself becoming again, the farthest tips of her moving out towards fire until she knew herself too complete to comprehend, too enormous, each unknown part of her vastness she could not yet quite feel but which would certainly surround the whole earth bending back under her" (p. 314). In this metaphoric union, she is also joined to the circle of Earth.

The burden of Wiebe's novel is to communicate this vision, to make it comprehensible to modern man. But the apparent nostalgia of *The Temptations of Big Bear* is also for that "round, good Earth," for a world view lost to history. The nostalgia is Wiebe's as much as it is Big Bear's. Since the artist's particular obsession is history, and since the strategy of his narrative is both imaginative and documentary, an unresolved tension overtakes his work. 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.

In this sense, Wiebe's theme is simply elegiac. It is a chorus whose diminuendo is a cry of *Ubi sunt*, a lament nearly as dark and forlorn as that of *Beowulf*:

He was going to say something more to his last son silently facing him, waiting for his word; he was going to say something about Chief's Son's Hand, keep that among the People for they have nothing left, and it seemed that he was actually thinking again those long, long thoughts of power and confederation and of his people living as they would wish, not with buffalo for they were gone, but as People still, somehow, the proud First People. But the bundle given him by Great Parent Bear, the songs that guided him in his long life, where were they all now? (p. 414)

Where, indeed? Where the lived myth depends so closely upon one's living forms of reality, vision cannot survive a change in the outward face of the Earth. Big Bear's way of viewing reality is graphically changed by a competing world view, and Wiebe's outlook skirts the margin of being merely the "song" for what is lost.

But this is to obscure the issue: surely the artist recreates the vision and the "spirit" of what is lost. Or does he? The scene in which Kitty McLean witnesses Big Bear's trial serves as a kind of paradigm of the problem faced by the artist. As Kitty listens to the endless questions and fact-giving of the trial, she becomes aware that "her enormous certainties had somehow leaked between her fingers" (p. 384). She knows that Simpson's lies are not solely responsible for her loss, "though after she thought of it for a time she understood that was where her feeling began." Rather the culprit is the judicial record, history itself as a usurping form of reality, corrupting her certainty. And she understands "at last she could not understand" Big Bear.

By contrast, the artist must presume to understand. He dares to bridge the distance of culture, let alone of history. If, as he admits, the "facts are the invariable tyrants of story . . . as inhibiting as fences and railroads,"¹³ he has still taken "a good deal of liberty with history," attempting to "capture the emotional quality of what was there."¹⁴ He then puts himself largely in the position of Big Bear, singing the deeds of his dead son Twin Wolverine. The Indian is not merely reciting history; he is celebrating the power, renewing the certainties. It is at once an attempt to save the Ancestor (or descendant) from ravelling out into time, and an effort to revalue, if not redeem, the present time.

If it is at all fair to speculate upon another man's imagination, it is worth drawing a broader analogy between the artist and protagonist. The Cree, once he has surrendered to the claims of history by putting his mark upon the treaty, thinks back to a summer encampment near Old Wives Lake. He remembers that "he had to walk well out from the lodges to hear the laughter of the old women killed there long ago, whose spirits still mocked the Blackfeet for falling into their trap. The sound of ancestors under a clear moon rested him more deeply than any sleep" (p. 134). Again, in the courtroom, "Big Bear saw momentarily the camp by the lake where he had last heard the old wives chuckling their endless laughter as they did under each new moon for the right listener" (p. 355). As in Wiebe's story, "Where Is The Voice Coming From," one is left with the impression that what the right listener hears does not proceed from historical data alone. The voice "rises from among the young poplars ripped of their spring bark, from among the dead somewhere lying there, out of the arm-deep pit shorter than a man,"¹⁵ as if finally out of the very earth.

Big Bear, we remember, is metamorphosed into "everlasting, unchanging rock" (p. 415); he is made one with his ancestor, the "grandfather of all being." This is to say he 'thinks in terms of mythic things,' even if his creator prefers not to. Speaking ontologically, then, the Indian believes in Great Parent of Bear while the novelist professes to believe only in the nineteenth-century Big Bear. But the pathos of the dying chief (or perhaps the living writer's perception of him) is that he is a mythic figure divorced from causative reality. He does not become the Great Parent who is able to rehabilitate the present time; he is transformed at best into the "place" of his previous being. Yet here, at least, both artist and protagonist share an imputed belief in the symbolic landscape of the Great Plains. In a way reminiscent of, if opposite to, Whitman's optimistic Self, Big Bear is yet to be found underfoot, waiting "some where" for the right listener. And to Rudy Wiebe, chanting the Song of His Other Self, this sound of ancestors is restful, though its 'double vision' might be gone. Even so, *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a first if self-limiting step toward adoption of our native inheritance.

The Vanishing Point, as its title suggests, is equally concerned with forms of vision, since its ironic protagonist holds to an absurd world view just to the point where his literalism is turned inside out by archaic sensibilities. Carlyle Sinclair, white Agent and schoolteacher to a Stony Reserve, has sensed a possibility of bridging two worlds, then as quickly has rejected the hope. He has taken a twelve-year-old Stony girl, Victoria Rider, on a trip with him to the city where she takes his hand

and holds it as they walk: "For the first time two worlds had merged, and he knew it . . . Yet he was often visited by depression, reminded of the impossibility of ever knowing what happened in their minds and hearts."¹⁶ He immediately slips into solipsism, finding emotion too weak a bridge between all humans, but his sense of alienation remains racial or, more particularly, ancestral. He introduces us, for example, to an older Victoria (now in nursing) by wondering:

Did she still believe in Wendigo, the Wizard, the Witch, the Summer and Winter People? How did he know? How could he ever hope to understand what any of them sheltered secret inside themselves. Alien. After all these years he was still outlander to this valley. It was only theirs. He hadn't stained the dirt—grass—hills—mountains—with himself . . . Goddam coyote! Come on Wizard, change me over . . . contrary the backward . . . No Roman roads—no marble baths—coins—no *civilized* blood spilled to farm this dirt. Just Pile of Rocks there beyond Moon's road (pp. 13-14, Mitchell's italics).

Though he has added eight years of rocks to that pile, he knows they are not his own, that for him this land has not been humanized by his inherited past.

Victoria's disappearance from her hospital leads at once narratively and personally into a quest for that past, but not before Carlyle has sought her up Storm and Misty Canyon, in the "shaman place . . . the seed place where Esau had dreamed of leading his band, to find the happy days they had lost" (p. 108). The trouble with Storm and Misty is that it (or its creek, Beulah) has also vanished; he discovers he must search for girl and valley amidst the storm and mists of his personal history:

The loss of Victoria had shattered something inside him. He knew that now. He knew that he was not trying simply to find her. He knew that he must put back together something he had been trying all his life to keep from being splintered—broken beyond repair. It was something mortally important to him, and it had never—ever—been whole for him really; Aunt Pearl and Old Kacky had seen to that. And his father.

Victoria Rider had grown essential; he must find her and he must do it to save himself as well (p. 323).

Carlyle sets out on his (ironically accurate) "Victoria day" (p. 4), not knowing that he seeks restoration of the dead mother, also a hospital nurse, who has never been real to him. Although, he is "haunted" by his mother to the extent that he tries to create Victoria in her image, his

consciousness of it is blocked by other "ghosts," also dead and gone, who in his childhood prevented his ever becoming whole. These "ghosts" are: his Aunt Pearl, whose anal eroticism, says Dr. Sanders, is "responsible for the whole mechanistic mess we're in" (p. 243); Old Kacky, his formidable teacher, whose principles of art and life have left Carlyle with the despairing conviction that the past is a prairie of events "march[ing] to the horizon . . . [shrinking] and crowd[ing] up to each other closer and closer together till they all were finally sucked down into the vanishing point" (p. 318); and his father, whose inability to touch or love or show emotion have fostered the son's solipsistic thinking.

In view of Carlyle's nigh-ludicrous search for the "*dear little lost lamb, Victoria*," what these three figures hold in common for him is a life (and so death)-denying morality and rationality. Or, as Peter Sanders puts it, Carlyle is, in life matters, a "Puritan bastard" (p. 156). His determination to improve and civilize the girl is also a projection of his demonic inheritance, a spiritual legacy which must resist her eventual "failure"—that pregnancy which Victoria describes as inevitable as "the spring run-off" (p. 364). The quest of Mitchell's protagonist, then, is an ironic reversal of Wiebe's pilgrimage in *Big Bear*: one seeks, out of the age of the Grandmother, to project a lost Indian reality; the other projects, upon present day Indians, the stultifying universe of that Grandmother. It is a projection, as Carlyle understands, whose eclipse is of "mortal importance"; it is nonetheless a viewpoint which will require a radical shift in perspective.

Carlyle's descent into his private past recalls for him two victories over the Victorian ancestor. He had escaped, as a boy, the perversity of Aunt Pearl's funereal toy room, her retentively ordered dresser, and her burnt-string, "little white-dumpling[ed]" bathroom, by sticking his pecker in the magic lantern: "It came clear . . . on the opposite wall, way larger than his father's. When he moved it . . ." (p. 311) But of course Aunt Pearl interrupts him just at this moment and is horrified by the change in perspective. The boy is sent to his father, hardly aware that he has projected onto the time-arrested wall of Aunt Pearl's universe an alien reality: sex, nature, generation. He is not, however, freed from her influence until his recognition, these many years later, that perspective is everything. If, as Peter Sanders says, it is Aunt Pearl who has "sent us all to play in the technological toy room" (p. 243), it is she who is alien, whose view doesn't fit. Or, as Sanders says again, "These Stonys are aliens, but what are they alienated from, huh? From the rest—from the real aliens—that concrete and asphalt doesn't sprout and turn green in spring for them" (p. 185).

Old Kacky's universe is similarly ordered by mechanistic principles. The vanishing point, he exhorts, is located at the centre, or slightly to the left of centre, of your paper. He commands a grid of temporary guiding lines into being, starting "wide apart at the bottom of the page [and] squeezing down to the vanishing point on the horizon" (p. 318). Carlyle "could not get over how doing something so crazy should end up looking just right. Things," he says, "didn't look the way a person thought they did at all" (p. 319). Indeed, they don't. Kacky insists that the picture be empty of all but his inflexible principle. Nothing else: no meadowlarks, no buckbrush, no life. Carlyle gets the strap for attempting to stain the land with something of himself, and as he stands there lonely in Old Kacky's office, he thinks of the others in the classroom busy, and himself vanished even "from himself . . . stepping outside and apart and walking away farther and farther from himself, getting smaller and smaller and smaller . . . dwindling right down to a point. That was crazy enough to scare the shit out of a person! Literally" (p. 322). What he leaves in Old Kacky's bottom drawer should be proof enough, even to Descartes, that he has not vanished. But later, his friend Mate points to the railway tracks to help correct his perspective: "It doesn't come to a point," Mate says, "it only comes almost to a vanishing point" (p. 325).

Both these episodes represent what Mitchell calls "existential victories," not absolute triumphs, but moments of recognition which alter vision. Carlyle's experience nonetheless seems to confirm Old Kacky, not Mate's view. His friend goes away to school by train, disappearing "into the vanishing point [he] claimed didn't exist" (p. 334). Mate's sudden death only re-establishes the sovereignty of the metaphor. Many years later, the "vanishment" of Carlyle's own family leaves him in the position of his father who, upon the death of Carlyle's mother, despaired and died. He admits to the Stonys he has come because of his lost wife and daughter, and that he will do all he can for their children. If he now breaks the ancestral pattern, he seeks more than wife and child; he must first recover the lost mother and father. Carlyle learns gradually just how much like his forbidding ancestors he has been. He meets them all, conjured up in the person of the faith healer Heally Richards. His relation to Victoria and to the other Indians has been a similar kind of "ordering them into a moral box to suit himself only—not them"—p. 354 (in every way analogous to his superior, Fyfe's obsessive orchid-breeding, who remains oblivious to what the orchid wants.). If Carlyle has tried "to keep lighted for her" an inner vision (p. 367), ironically his magic lantern has magnified only her shame. But, as Archie Nicotine says, white People "want it that way" (p. 296).

Merely this insight cannot make Carlyle whole again; he has gotten rid of one inheritance without exchanging it for another. Before, he rightly wondered "if it were really possible to make a decision, then act on it so that a person truly changed the flow of his life" (p. 119). Now Archie Nicotine helps to deny the omnipotence of the old vanishing point by opening the way to "dead" fathers. He proclaims in a public speech:

My grandfather was a chief. God made this land and the mountains too, and that's why I think we are born red and why we belong here. Our blood is in that ground and hills. Our great fathers were buried there, and we want to live here with them. We can't leave these hills, but now without enough land we need we are just like in a sack. We got to untie that sack (P. 378).

Archie thereby bequeaths to Carlyle will enough to come back to the dance tent where "magic-lantern shadows were thrown against the walls" (p. 380). Aunt Pearl's world vanishes in the sudden illumination of this new lantern. And the ritual of the Chicken Dance, which Carlyle has all along resisted as a form of lobotomy, is suddenly put in its proper perspective:

He did belong with them. A wild and distant drum had pulsed for him and for Mate, when they had stood with the total thrust of prairie sun upon their defenceless heads. Together they had discovered that they were both alien from and part of a living whole (p. 384).

His ironic sense of the Indians' closeness "to a living whole," given the deaths every spring of their children from pneumonia, also vanishes in the light of a newly sensed place and time: "Who cared now—who cared now! Only the now remained to them—the now so great that only death or love could strengthen it . . . Only the now—pulsing and placeless—now! Song and dancer and watching band were one, under the bruising drum that shattered time and self and all other things that bound them" (p. 385).

Carlyle's decision to marry Vicki Rider is part of his changed perspective, an acknowledgment of some long "hidden awareness." This time the merging of two worlds promises to "stain the dirt . . . with his own needs and fears" because he has recognized the native will-to-life as his own.¹⁷ The depth of his acceptance is immediately confirmed in another existential victory: his vision of the "little bare-bum shaman" playing in the canal system he has willed out of the spring run-off. For Carlyle now

offers "to mirror you so you may be more nearly true I promise you I won't destroy you with distorted image Let's you and I conjure together" (p. 389). It is a mirroring in which he is himself reflected, if undistorted, by his existential willing to be, by his shift in perspective. It is a shift which is nonetheless mirrored in the land itself; the spring, Beulah, which has dried up from an earth fault bumped by the engineers from the technological toy room, has broken free in a fresh place again. The forces of life in both man and the land break forth wherever they overcome their buried faults—wherever they are changed over by the inner "Wizard"—to revive and re-define Paradise Valley. For Mitchell, then, as for Wiebe, man is an integral part of his 'place', if not of his 'parent.' Mitchell's willed affirmation—his existential mode—merely ensures a more definite inheritance in the Now.

It is Laurence's "River of Now and Then" which offers a final, fuller symbol of the coinherence of past and present, of parent and place. Her outlook does not, on the one hand, make history the only ground of being; on the other, it does not demand an abnegation of racial ancestors. As Morag says of her biological parents, "*I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull*" (p. 19).

In the first instance, *The Diviners* posits an inverse relation of history to art from that dependence assumed in *The Temptations of Big Bear*. For the stories which Christie tells of Morag's non-historical ancestor Piper Gunn conjure up a world which is enabled by art:

If we must live here in this almighty godforsaken land, dreadful with all manner of beasts and ice and the rocks harsher than when we left, says Gunn's woman, at least let's be piped onto it.

So Piper Gunn, he got out his bagpipes and he piped the people onto the new land, that terrible bad land, frozen as sure as hell was, and they built their shacks to the music that man played (p. 84).

The shacks are not built merely with a squaring logic; they are piped up, they come into being through art. Music, not the measurement of the makers, has made their might. And Morag, as she later realizes, is brought into being through Christie's myths just as much as the Sutherlanders in those tales were enlivened by the sound of the Hero's pipes. History is then created out of art, not vice versa.

Although the adult Morag is convinced, "with typical ambiguity . . . that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction" (p. 25), the sober question of the nature of reality is not slighted by either Laurence or her characters. Indeed, Pique confesses to her mother that she doubts the history of the tales in which she has been reared:

"But some of those stories you used to tell me when I was a kid—I never knew if they happened like that or not."

"Some did and some didn't, I guess. It doesn't matter a damn. Don't you see?"

"No," Pique said. "I don't see. I want to know what really happened."

Morag laughed. Unkindly, perhaps.

"You do, eh? Well, so do I. But there's no one version. There just isn't" (p. 350).

Characteristically, Christie has prefaced his tales for Morag with the claim, "I read it all in a book somewheres, so help me, and it is all there in the books, but you don't want to believe everything them books say, for the good christ's sake. We believe what we know" (p. 83). Though even Morag, when she was Pique's age, wasn't sure that she "knew" the stories either. Mortified by Christie's oddity and hoping beyond hope to escape Manawaka altogether, she dismissed Christie as a fraud, then wrote off his legends as "a load of old manure" (p. 162). Only when she comes herself to tell Pique the "Tale of Christie Logan" does Morag admit to a gift of second sight:

When he told me the tales about Piper Gunn, at first I used to believe every word. Then later I didn't believe a word of them, and thought he'd made them up out of whole cloth.

(What means *whole cloth*?)

Out of his head—invented them. But later still, I realized they'd been taken from things that happened, and who's to know what really happened? So I started believing in them again in a different way (p. 367).

Different versions Believing in a different way It is an acceptance of the "double vision" and another dimension of reality.

Even double vision cannot explain, however, the paradox of being "created" by one's own creation. For when Christie, the fatherless and childless man, is "gathered to his ancestors," he in some sense enters the company of those he has helped to make. The only possible solution to this absurdity would be some presumed extra-personal source of art. Morag presumes as much, if darkly, from the moment she and Ella tacitly acknowledge the single impulse behind their art: "Simultaneously, they live every day with the certainty of [aging], and with the fact of their own deaths. They seldom discuss this strange presence. There is no need. They know it from one another's writing" (p. 188). This knowledge is also the face behind the mask of Louis Riel's song which is the first music Pique, the novice diviner, performs: "Mourir, s'il faut mourir/ Chacun meurt à son tour" (p. 243). The shaman, we recall,

brings back his myths from the animating world of the dead; Christie who, by virtue of Morag's stories, has never died in Pique's mind seems also to live on in spirit. Similarly Pique's father Jules Tonnerre, who makes a song for his dead father, concludes, "Lazarus, oh man, you didn't die./ Lazarus, oh man, you didn't die" (p. 428). Evidently the life of the spirit seeks always its continuance in myth. Yet in a strange reversal, Morag discovers that Christie's true burial cannot take place outside the rites of his undying art; death also takes its being, finally, from myth. If, then, the realm of shades enlivens art, paradoxically art enables history, both in life and in death.

Morag, who finally "knows" the sources of creation, thereby realizes that if she "is to have a home, she must create it" (p. 291). Naturally her creation is not *ex nihilo*. Her purchase of a log house near the town of McConnell's Landing, Ontario may supply her with boughten "History, Ancestors" (p. 414), but it is the acquisition in that house of a talisman which at last provides her with her psychological place. The amulet, a plaid pin given her by Jules Tonnerre in exchange for a hunting knife which was his father's, is in Christie's *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland* identified as belonging to the Clanranald Macdonalds. "Clan Gunn, according to this book, as she recalls from years back, did not have a crest or a coat-of-arms. But adoption, as who should know better than Morag, is possible" (p. 432). The clan which Morag adopts is, of course, none other than that of "young Archie Macdonald," the man who led the historical march from the north to Red River, though, as Morag says, "in my mind the piper who played them on will always be that giant of a man, Piper Gunn, who probably never lived in so-called real life but who lives forever. Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand" (p. 418). The fictional hero and the historical leader have, in the dimensions of inner truth, begun to coalesce. For Clanranald Macdonald, so very much a part of Morag's place, is, through the power of the talisman, become a personal possession, the sum of her racial inheritance; but the Macdonalds, through the transforming power of the talisman, have also become the mythical ancestor Gunn, the spirit of her undying parent. The plaid pin given her by Jules is thus the visible sign of Morag's invisible, but nonetheless real home.

The gift from the Métis man also suggests, however, the dual nature of Morag's heritage. Whatever she is herself racially, the song she sang as a child—"The Maple Leaf Forever"—cannot give her her true country so long as she thinks that Skinner Tonnerre, who doesn't sing it, "comes from nowhere. He isn't anybody" (p. 70). Her early sympathy

for Riel in Christie's tale of the Sutherlanders' recapture of Fort Garry might have predisposed her to bridge racial worlds of myth, but she has yet to learn that the Métis tales, like those of Christie which were about "the new land which was HERE" (p. 83), are truer than "THE THIS-TLE SHAMROCK ROSE" entwined and give both her and Jules their place. The myths of Rider Tonnerre and Piper Gunn are true, that is, even though they are at loggerheads over facts. For example, Christie's version of the taking of the fort has Piper Gunn piping out his men to recapture it before the Easterners ever got there (p. 131). Skinner's "Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet" has "the government from Down East" sending "in about ten thousand soldiers, with cannon and like that" (p. 147). The Scots and Métis versions of the same incidents are told each by his own lights, and Skinner would obviously subscribe to Christie's maxim that "We believe what we know."

Morag comes to "know" in later life that Rider's rifle, La Petite, was "in factuality" Gabriel Dumont's, and the story of his horse, Roi du Lac, comes from a Cree legend. "That's okay," she says. "Skinner's grandad had a right to borrow them . . . You wonder how long [those stories] had been passed on" (p. 418). We can only be sure, as Morag says of Christie's tales and Jules' songs, that the echoes go "back and back." They sound finally, in racial "memory," in the subterranean haunts of the Dream Time. Ultimately, for Laurence, the ancestors are within; if in the blood, also in the unconscious as those who never lived in "so-called real life," but who will always be. If they come dressed in the accidents of history, if they make their appearance through the particular time and place of the individual, they nevertheless make over the present in their own image. Thus the Dead live, and through *ecstasis* or intuition, are revealed as the talismans of poetic inspiration and of ultimate reality.

Descendants, that reverse face on the ancestral totem, are curiously left to Laurence for that synthesis which might be both fictional and biological. For Morag's marriage to Dr. Brooke Skelton is significantly childless. That is most likely because her countryless husband, like some new American Adam, loves her for her "mysterious nonexistent past It's as though you were starting life now, newly" (p. 195). She marries him, even though Christie says of her past that "It'll all go along with you, too. That goes without saying" (p. 207). Years later, when Jules helps her do "magic to get away" (p. 273) from Brooke, she feels "as though this journey is being done for other reasons, some debt or answer to the past, some severing of inner chains which have kept her bound and separated from part of herself" (p. 271). Still this union never leads

to marriage: personalistically, that would sentimentalize Jules' antipathy to the town and Morag's part in it; and mythically it would curtail his nomadic divining. For Jules and Morag are engaged, as "valley and mountain"¹⁸ (p. 441) or even as Wachakwa Valley and Hill Street, in an hierogamy, a sacred marriage. Theirs is the archetypal wedlock of Earth and Sky, of celestial and telluric elements which restores the primordial unity, abolishes elemental differences, brings about creation. Here the "echoes" go back and back to the story of Uranos and Gaia, and the mythic beginnings. As such, it is the ultimate shamanic act which restores the lost communication between Heaven and Earth, which ushers in a newly created cosmos.

Since Morag and Jules are racially and mythically opposite, their offspring is also emblematic of a new order of being. Yet Pique, the heir of both races and both sets of legends, is still an orphan like her mother, destined to search for her "fathers." But in her ballad, "There's a valley holds my name," she has begun to discover her mythic identity in the naming of her ancestral land. In lines which would be silly were it not for the story of that valley where her "fathers" lived so long ago, and of the mountain where she hears "the voices that in me would never die," Pique sings:

I came to taste the dust out on a prairie road
 My childhood thoughts were heavy on me like a load
 But I left behind my fear
 When I found those ghosts were near
 Leadin' me back to that home I never knowed (p. 440-41).

The "ghosts" have indeed given her a new being, a new spiritual inheritance. For Pique, once torn between the racial worlds of father and mother, has found these worlds triumphantly united in the hierogamy of mountain and valley.¹⁹ Finally her act of naming restores the broken circuit, makes her one with her ancestors, in fact makes the Ancestors one.

On the personalistic level, *The Diviners* is still tragic; it movingly evokes the fragility and pain of human existence through the lives and deaths of Christie and Prin, of Lazarus, and Piquette and Jules. But as Jules sings of his father, "Lazarus, he kept his life, for life . . . Lazarus, oh man, you didn't die" (p. 425), so too death has no final dominion in the world of *The Diviners*. The novel itself keeps all these lives for life; the living, in the very procession of the generations, are now redeemed by their "ancestors." In truth, the living, like "the light-leaved willows and tall solid maples" beside the River of Now and Then, are "like ancestors, carrying within themselves the land's past" (p. 285). For it is a salient feature of myth that we should, in this time and place, become our own forebears.

Something remains to be said, should D.H. Lawrence haunt all of us, about the essential Canadian soul. Ever since it declined to slay the father, the Canadian psyche has resisted being parentless. Figuratively, it knows it has not conceived itself, nor does it conceive of itself as the New Adam freed from history. It refuses to stand, self-reliant and alone, beyond the usual inheritances of family and race. Time has nonetheless orphaned it, and it finds itself at home among strangers in a stranger land. So its characteristic choice, to a greater or lesser degree, is adoption of its dual heritage. Since the dead 'parents,' by the very fact of their being dead, have the power to remake history in both sense of place and race, henceforth it might rely for its humanity upon the model of ancestors who have no part in its (if any) blood.

The Canadian psyche is not long dissociated, however, from its source in that blood. Our heroes or heroines emerge from their incipient isolation into the company of the other sex, as well as of the other race. For sex is not just the prerequisite to family; it is as vital to the conception of a mythic past as it is to the growth of an historical future. Here, the cultural pair replacing Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg, or Huch and Nigger Jim is Morag and Jules Tonnerre and, to a much lesser extent, Big Bear and Kitty McLean, Carlyle and Vicki Rider. But their union tends, like their male American counterparts, not towards social but towards symbolic realities. Kitty McLean, for example, is wed to Sun and feels her vastness "surround the whole earth bending back under her," while Big Bear is nimbused above her in fire. This coupling is Kitty's first means of encountering immanent realities, of finding, through the repetition of the archetypal gesture, identity with the place. The union of native and white thereby repeats the paradigmatic marriage, inaugurating human life and culture. Except that, as Piquette Tonnerre Gunn discovers, it remains to articulate that primordial unity to give the present its reality.

Finally, there *is* one sense in which the essential Canadian soul is a victim, not a killer. Our search for ancestors has tragic implications; the Great Ones disappear, they are realized only through death. Yet in the profoundest sense, their demise is a gift of life to the tribe, the sacrifice of the culture-giver to being. Since the archetype demands periodic repetition in history to confirm its immanence, the deaths of Big Bear, the Stony fathers, Christie Logan, and Jules Tonnerre are to some degree transfigured in its light. The depth of each metamorphosis depends only upon the artist's mode of perception. At the very least we are given the "endless chuckling" of the Cree Old Wives who, by their tragic ruse, literally gave life to the tribe. At most, their laughter would

prove "more restful than sleep" should it be heard from the Dream Time, from the place beyond sleep. In this context, our collective psyche is victim in the mystic sense: by way of re-joining its truest Self, of being redeemed into the archetype.

Notes

1. *The Diviners* (1974; rpt. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 331.
2. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series LXXXVI (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 84.
3. Permission to quote from an interview broadcast in 1976 by CJUM-FM, with Rudy Wiebe and David Arnason, has been granted by the participants and is gratefully acknowledged.
4. Rudy Wiebe, CJUM-FM interview.
5. Rudy Wiebe, "On The Trail of Big Bear," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, III, 2 (1974), p. 47.
6. Among recent Canadian novels, at least two others project the Indian as Ancestor, though in a more promiscuous fashion. Peter Such's *Riverrun* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1973) and Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian* (Toronto: New Press, 1973) both use, to a certain extent, the figure of the shaman and the fictional mode of ecstasy. Such explains his obsession with writing about the Beothuks by saying "it is a kind of debt I owe to. . . Shannadithit [among others] . . . to whom I was first introduced through the pages of history—and to Osnahanut and the other persons in this book whom I met in dreams (p. ix). While the artist himself thereby becomes one of "the seers into the darkness" —p. 40), it is also the artist as paleontologist who hearkens to the cry of Osnahanut: "If all the People die with no children there will be no one to remember our spirits. We will disappear in the ages like birchbark in the fire" (p. 128); and so he sings the elegy of an otherwise lost People. Kroetsch's protagonist, whose "Columbus Quest" for "my America . . . my Newfoundland" ends somewhat like Donne's elegy in a vulvic mythology, is helped on his way by a Blackfoot woman's shamanic dream and by a snowmobile named for the Norse god Odin's horse, Sleipnir who carried the souls of the dead to Valhalla. Jeremy Sadness' journey into "WORLDS END" is nonetheless left ambiguous; while he may be metamorphosed like Grey Owl or may escape the rationalism of his patronym (Jeremy Bentham), he may also succeed the Winter King, Roger Dorck, only in death and thereby translate nothing from the world of the dead into the land of the living. Since *Gone Indian* (originally entitled *Funeral Games*) is like its Blackfoot and Norse analogues the shapechanger, engendering a tragi-comic hybrid of myth, I have selected as being more typical of their modes the three novels dealt with in the text.
7. D.J. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 1f.
8. *Teachings From the American Earth*, ed. Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock (New York: Liveright, 1975), p. xx.
9. Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1958; rpt. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), p. 40.
10. Rudy Wiebe, CJUM-FM interview.
11. *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), p. 113.
12. See my review of *The Temptations of Big Bear* in *Queen's Quarterly* (Spring 1974), 140-42.
13. Wiebe, "On the Trail," p. 45.
14. Rudy Wiebe, CJUM-FM interview.
15. Rudy Wiebe, "Where is the Voice Coming From," in *Modern Stories in English*, ed. W.H. New and H.J. Rosengarten (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975), p. 423.
16. *The Vanishing Point* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 216.
17. The Stonys have, on their side, demonstrated the possibility for cultural synthesis from the time that Carlyle hears Ezra Powderface preach from Saint Mark, Chapter Five, on how Jesus drove the Wendigo out of the wild man:

Then—like the Bible says—that herd pigs stampeded—'way they went in a cloud dust through buck brush an' jack-pine—down the draws and over the side hills with Jesus an' His apostles hard after them till they come to this cut bank at the edge the Sea Galilee. Hundred-foot drop right down into that sea. Over sent the lead pig and into the water below—CHUH-MUCK! And after him come the next one—CHUH-MUCK! (p. 159)

Ezra Powderface here answers the question, had Carlyle listened to him of whether Victoria remained alien to him in her belief in the Wendigo. Evidently even Jesus Christ becomes in Ezra's sermon one of the Stony ancestors or "spirits" of place.

18. The mountain is traditionally "'charged' with a celestial symbolism" (*Shamanism*, p. 355).
19. "The valley and the mountain hold my name" is one echo of a different sort, recalling Ernest Buckler's novel of Annapolis country, *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952); it is one of several devices by which Laurence seeks, though not with unqualified success, to integrate the regions of Canada in her myth. For a discussion of the Jungian "echoes" and their *modus operandi* in literature, see my *Faulkner's Women: The Myth and the Muse* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1977), esp. pp. 6-27.