"Believing is seeing"[1]: "Re-storying" the Self in Rudy Wiebe's *Sweeter Than All the World*

Maryann Jantzen

> *A story is not simply a story . . . . It acts to create, sustain or alter worlds of social relationships.*[2]
>
> *If you don't know where you are and where you come from, you're more or less like an animal that has no memory . . . .*[3]

In Rudy Wiebe's *Sweeter Than All the World*, world-weary protagonist Adam Wiebe wanders the globe in a parodic imitation of his Anabaptist ancestors' attempt to find a place where they can live out their faith. Adam's wanderings, in contrast to theirs, seem to emerge out of a self-absorbed absence of values to live or die by. In the essay that follows, I will use insights garnered from narrative therapy to argue that Adam's self-absorption results from the subsuming of his multi-storied self-identity, originally formed by the intricate weaving together of diverse identity narratives, into a dominant self-narrative of Western culture, that of the autonomous, often overly individuated self.[4] Gradually, through interaction with ancestral narratives, Adam receives opportunities to "rework dominant notions and practices of self and culture."[5] However, his reactive self-absorbed responses to relational "infringement[s] on his autonomy"[6] threaten to sabotage his explorations of the past, as he continually looks "into mirrors and never [comes] different."[7] Not until story becomes flesh, until his family and ancestral narratives begin to meaningfully inhabit him, can he begin to "think different[ly]" (337).[8] Gradually, through his growing willingness to assume relational accountability that is birthed as he experiences with fresh eyes the embodied experiences of his Anabaptist forebears, Adam's inner "believing" becomes relational "seeing." As a result, Adam begins to balance his individuated autonomous self-story with an alternative self-understanding that allows for "authenticity and voice in relationship."[9]

Narrative therapist Michael White asserts that "the structure of narrative provides the principal frame of intelligibility for people in their day-to-day

lives,"[10] allowing them to "link together the events of life in sequences that unfold through time according to specific themes."[11] White speaks of diverse ways of conceptualizing the narrative self-construction process: narrative identity can be thin or thick, clear or opaque, depending on paradigms of self and reality. For example, he suggests that modernist structuralist thinking often produces "flat monographic descriptions of life [that] champion the norm and render the unexpected invisible."[12] In contrast, a thick multi-storied conception of life seeks the unique so as not to be misled by the norm and provides opportunities to rework and revise "dominant notions and practices of self and of culture."[13] As a result, White asserts, individuals can begin to generate both "alternative" versions of their present realities and new understandings of narratives of the past, resulting in "a linking of stories across time through lives"[14] and the emergence of "shared themes that speak to purposes, values and commitments."[15]

Building on White's work, Mona Fishbane explores the way the contemporary narrative of the self-individuated autonomous self, which she defines as "the dominant narrative of the self in Western culture,"[16] intersects with the Western cultural values of "individualism and competition"[17] to create a construction of self quintessentially about "self-creation and self-determination."[18] The assumptions of this self-narrative, she observes, often clash with "such values as intergenerational loyalty, obligation, or interdependence."[19] This model of the self, when combined with contemporary cultural pre-occupation with materialistic consumerism (what Richard Rohr refers to as a "mass cultural trance . . . like scales over our eye" so that "we see only with the material eye"[20]), can easily conflate the boundaries between self-actualization and self-absorption.

As an alternative to this individuated understanding of self-identity, Fishbane proposes a relational paradigm of self-understanding that links personal autonomy to "capacity for relational accountability"[21] rather than only to differentiation from family members.[22] She seeks to challenge central "Western notions about power and the self"[23] that privilege independence and individualism over interdependence and accountability. According to her identity model, authoring an authentic self-narrative ("being true to oneself"[24]) does not diminish awareness of relational accountability but rather occurs most effectively within a relational context. In her opinion, taking

"responsibility for consequences of one's actions on relational partners"[25] may be the determining characteristic of personal autonomy.

My reading of Wiebe's novel *Sweeter Than All the World* attempts to apply White's and Fishbane's theoretical understandings of narrative self-construction to protagonist Adam's Wiebe's shifting subjectivities, and asserts that Adam's redevelopment of a relational re-connection with his family and culture of origin is crucial for a healthy sense of self-identity.[26] I also work with the assumption that his re-encounters with ancestral and family narratives work as a catalyst for a "therapeutic"[27] re-interpretation that builds in him the capacity for self-transformation. Eventually, as Adam begins to allow the multiple narratives of his past to inform his present sense of self, he receives new ways of "seeing" and "believing" that "baptize" him into a larger communal story than his own narrow, ultimately self-destroying, overly individuated his-story. As a result, he is able to move out of the relational "blindness" of self-absorption into the authentic "seeing" of relational accountability, and to achieve a new kind of inner "believing" that builds connectedness and interdependence.

At the novel's beginning, we are shown the multi-storied narrative strands mediating Adam Wiebe's self-identity. Growing up in northern Alberta, Adam early learns to hear intuitively the wordless stories of the vast wilderness world around him – nature narratives linked later in the story with aboriginal spirituality – as he goes "alone into the bush, where everything spoke to him" (Wiebe 1) in a "language clear as the water of his memory when he lay . . . listening to the spring mosquitoes" (1). Alongside this nature narrative of place runs the crucial discourse of family stories of loss and longing, filtered through Mennonite tribal and theological understandings of the biblical master narrative. For Adam, in the beginning, "everything spoke and it spoke Low German" (1). In the novel, this cultural narrative of origin, which I will refer to as the discourse of mother-tongue, is identified closely with Adam's memories of his mother, whose "living prayers" (174) follow him through time and space. Later, in elementary school, Adam discovers a world of written words introducing him to the cultural narratives of Western civilization that "allow him to hear human voices speaking from everywhere and every age, saying things both sweet and horrible" (7). Wiebe's description here suggests

that Adam is, at a young age, sensitized to the imaginative power of words, and shaped by foundational Western cultural narratives privileging rationalism and personal autonomy. Held together in creative tension, these blended identity strands of place, mother-tongue, and culture have the potential to create a healthy model of relational self-determination in which the absolutizing force of each narrative is held in check by the ebb and flow of the others. In my reading of the novel, this model of the relational self is closely connected with the character of Susannah, Adam's wife, whom Adam recognizes as having an extraordinary ability to "make connections" (377) and whose complex family history, with its bi-cultural Mennonite and *Englische* strands, and whose vocation as a comparative literature professor, points to the need not only to contrast and compare identity narratives but also to hold them in productive tension. When Adam separates from Susannah, he is symbolically separated also from his relational self; in seeking to reunite with her, he also begins to re-embrace his relational identity. In addition, the author also seems to link both the unassuming but deep spirituality of Adam's mother (the source of "living prayers" [174]) and his depictions of aboriginal spirituality sensitive to the "text" of nature with the relational model of the self.

In the process of growing into adulthood, Adam continues to confront the larger world around him, first the competitive self-individuating world of the Coaldale high school where representatives of twenty different races jockey for position and "the English" consider themselves "the ruling class of the school" (11), and later the context of his medical studies, which firmly ground him in the dominant cultural narratives of western science and rationalism. However, before long, a growing inner dissonance with his multiple self-narratives sends Adam searching for an alternate way of conceptualizing self. Finding the proscriptions of "his parents' bush piety" (246) becoming "a swamp of sin-soaked boredom" (246), he becomes an "*aufjefollna Mennist*" (215). However, he cannot find comfort in the culturally accepted rhythm of relieving academic study with drunken partying, since remnants of mother-tongue – his recurring memories of his mother's bed-time call, "Adam, where are you" (7),[28] for example – still intuitively echo in his consciousness. In response, he turns more and more to the secular world of scientific study.

Chapter Four demonstrates well Adam's increasing inability to hold his narrative identities in creative tension. Eschewing his complex thick narrative identity, Adam has settled into "a transparent cycle" of "study, study, . . . save and study." He becomes preoccupied with "a deliberate concentration of books and labs and professors and finally cadavers and precise, clear requirements that can be fulfilled exactly if you concentrate and work hard enough." His studies allow him to conveniently evade the increasingly disturbing claims of mother-tongue; for example, he ends his weekend visits home "about the time it is necessary to go to church" because "yes, of course he has to study" (56). And yet his wife-to-be Susannah has begun to permeate his life (50) with "her undemanding or arguing presence like blood beating," hinting of a "possible [relational] happiness" (56). Her presence pushes aside his "ridiculously narrow world" and reconnects him also with "his mother's eternal and unshakable faith in the substance of things hoped for as the evidence of things suddenly seen" (56).

Paralleling these references to relational spirituality are the novel's occasional references to an embodied aboriginal spirituality lived out in close connection with the natural world. Adam's memories of hunting with his friend Napoleon's grandfather are important here. Referring to preparation for the caribou hunt, a physical quest conceptualized also as a spiritual way of being, the aboriginal elder tells Adam that success in the hunt is linked to spiritual awareness: "Power is seeing. There's a way to find everything you need, what you have to do is first see it" (59). However, in the first half of the novel, we increasingly sense Adam's inability to see beyond his own narrow self-interest. As a result he lacks the capacity to "believe" relationally; in other words, he lacks the spiritual vision to understand his self-identity in terms of his relationships to others rather than exclusively according to the needs of his own increasingly individuated and fragmented self-narrative. His increasing psychological imbalance is seen both literally in his physical "vertigo" (42), as he staggers unsteadily while attempting to shoot a caribou that looms before him like a ghost from the past, and metaphorically in the way the remnants of his personal and cultural past continue to haunt him despite his attempts to slay the claims of his culture of origin.

Although never totally able to cut himself off from his childhood narratives of place and mother tongue (as seen in his periodic trips to the

Northwest Territories and his increasing fascination with Mennonite history), Adam seems to succumb more and more to the lure of the absolutizing narrative of the autonomous self, a narrative represented in the novel by his "straight ahead roommate" (54), who, with his "purest Eric logic," encourages Adam to look to the present rather than the past to make meaning of his life. Eric, who later reappears in the novel with his third wife, is described as making "absolute personal decisions, no looking back at possible wreckage left behind" (197) and as seeming to define self-identity wholly in material and self-individuated terms – a good career, a smart and attractive wife, material prosperity. In the face of Eric's assertions that medicine provides "good money . . . with shitloads of respect" (55) and that "mothers are fine, in their place – the past" (53), Adam declares, "Anyways, what can you do with history?" (55), and so verbalizes his self-distancing from his culture of origin. Increasingly, he copes with his diverse identity narratives by compartmentalizing his life and by choosing to dwell only in the material world of science and logic. Significantly, with Susannah, who "pushes aside his ridiculously narrow world" (56), he can temporarily put aside the demands of his all-consuming work. Yet when he lives "hands-on in medicine" (57), she becomes a "dislocated fantasy" (56) that vanishes into "the flat, factual" (57) world of science.

The central part of the novel finds Adam reaping the consequences of his unbalanced immersion in the dominant narrative of the autonomous self until finally his relationship with his wife seems primarily governed by his own self-interest rather than any relational values. Challenged by Susannah, who is close enough for him to smell, "but indecipherably far away," to re-evaluate the twenty-five-year "life sentence" of their marriage, he realizes his carefully compartmentalized world has slipped away "before his very eyes," even while he has been so carefully protecting from her discerning presence what he views as his "secret . . . this-has-nothing-to-do-with-her" (103) world of extra-marital affairs. Susannah, who is leaving to immerse herself in the archives of Europe, is characterized here as aware both of the need to make connections with the past and of Adam's increasing relational paralysis. At the airport, the family of mother, father, son, and daughter is together, "trying one last time . . . to search out . . . themselves . . . trying to feel every bone in every individual body they know they love"(110).[29] But

Adam can say "nothing," prevented by his lack of relational accountability from making meaningful connections. Poignantly, son Joel's words, "If Grandma was here, she'd be saying a long prayer" (110), remind the reader of Adam's need to revisit his mother's relational spirituality; in contrast, however, the final distant words in the chapter, written as if filtered through Adam's emotional stasis, "the woman is leaving" (110), speak of Adam's increasing inability to maintain a relational sense of self.

As time goes on, haunted by the ghosts of the past, but increasingly locked in an absolutized self-narrative, Adam begins a futile search for meaning that takes him around the globe, first in a self-absorbed exploration of his family history and later in a search for his missing daughter, whose decision to cut herself off from any familial connections mirrors his own relational deficits. Chapter Eleven finds him in Prague with his latest lover Karen, whose narcissistic fixation with the existentialist novelist Franz Kafka seems to mirror Adam's own self-absorbed obsession with the past; for Adam exploring his/story has become a way to avoid the relational commitments of the present. Although sexually passionate, emotionally Adam and Karen are alienated: their "words can never quite find them home . . . search as deep as they may" (178).[30] His criticism of her "middle-class . . . , super-educated, super achieving . . . keyhole vision" (169) mirrors her accusation that he selfishly travels the world seeing nothing but "your past, your ancestors, your self" (176). Relationally, he has become impotent: "he can never decide to go, break and be gone. That first turning away, others always had to do it" (176). While visiting an ancient cloister, a place speaking of spiritual connection with the past, he climbs high onto the bell tower. Suddenly terrified as he comes face-to-face with the danger of falling, realizing "with a jolt of supreme terror, . . . I can only hold on till I fall" (177), he seems for a moment poised on the limits of self-sufficiency as the "wordless memory of Susannah moves through [him] like ancient air" (178). But Adam has not yet realized that his self-absorption will have to fade if his relational self is to rise again.

A turning point comes in a Toronto hotel room (an urban setting, far removed from narratives of nature and mother-tongue), where his sense of self-sufficiency is undercut by an increasing understanding of the culturally constructed wreckage of his life. Here the ubiquitous television set, "presenting

any number of backs, faces, breasts, hands, bunched buttocks . . . all possible human parts" (301), presents him with a fragmented picture of what his life has become and confronts him with his own objectifying sexualization of the hotel maid about whom he has fantasized. For Adam, sex has become an act of self-absorbed ego-fulfillment. Before him in the hotel room lie competing narratives of good and evil: books entitled *The Death of Adolph Hitler* and *The Mind of Norman Bethune*. Reminded by Hitler's life and death of the horror of human evil, he cannot find reassurance in the "book-face of Norman Bethune" (308), a man "vaguely known to some as good, though . . . throughout his life an egotistical bastard" (308). As "the television lumbers on in its unstoppable chronology of bits and pieces" (307), Adam articulates his disorienting fragmentation: "The white noise of twentieth-century indolence ending. Avoid the worst, always, as you can; find void" (307).[31] Adam's thoughts here reveal his growing awareness of the meaningless of his self-absorbed, relationally-alienated way of life, an increasing, intuitive recognition of how his rejection of relational accountability has stripped meaning from his life. His self-fragmentation and self-loathing are also articulated as he thinks about how his friends "cannot imagine what I am become. If, now, I am any more than bits and pieces of something at any given time"(305-6).

However, as Adam confronts the futility of his absorption into the twentieth-century western narrative of self-indulgence and personal gratification, his musings are disrupted by thoughts of Margaret Laurence, the well-known Canadian writer, whose novels, like Wiebe's, often explore the tension between self-interest and relational responsibility.[32] Imaging mentally the relational "community of the tribe" (309) gathered at her memorial service, he rediscovers inner resources that call him to "remember purity and care and enduring compassion and reconciliation with at least the members of your own small family" (308). As his mind fills with the biblical text he imagines having been read at the memorial service – "*How blessed are those who know their need for God, the kingdom of heaven is theirs*" – Adam begins to cling to the awareness that despite the "trapped, unnecessary" world reflected in the "black, silent TV," perhaps it is still possible to find individuals "who believe in responsible actions" and who can "somehow believe with their wavering Greek minds in a vaguely Hebrew god" who can

"help them decide for goodness" (308). Finally, at this crucial stage of the novel, recognizing his lack of spiritual awareness, Adam seems ready to accept himself as "a coward . . . a fucked up weakling about goodness" (297), who has avoided relational responsibility by disappearing into "work or excuses – or hiding; if not in a blank then among the sadly forgettable dead" (298).

Chapters Nineteen, Twenty, and Twenty-two, which shift frequently in time and place from the present to the past and from Canada to Russia, reveal Adam tentatively moving toward healing reconciliation with the narratives of his past. Returning to Coaldale, the Mennonite community where he lived as an adolescent, he comes back also to an "antediluvian teen past" lived beside "this slipping silent river he can never forget wherever he searches" (335-36). Chapter Nineteen juxtaposes Adam's experiences at the funeral of his sister Helen with memories of "those Russian stories as ancient as piled stones" (362) that have begun to chisel away at his self-absorption. Here his focus begins to shift from self-absorbed obsession with the "forgettable dead" (298) to re-experiencing "living stories" (371) that begin to help him redefine his sense of self.

Especially significant here are his memories of his visit in Russia with his distant cousin, Elizabeth Katerina. Her stories of suffering during the Russian occupation of Marienberg, Poland are not just disembodied sensational scenes featuring objectified "human parts" (301), but are narratives of relational responsibility lived out at tremendous personal cost. Despite her seemingly meaningless personal suffering, which has included experiencing multiple rapes, the murder of a close friend, and the tragic loss at sea of the elderly patients for whom she earlier sacrificed any attempt to save herself, Elizabeth models for Adam a self-sacrificial selfhood that sharply exposes the emptiness of twentieth-century self-absorption. His encounter with Elizabeth shifts his perspective of the past as "seemingly silent and motionless as a frozen river" to recognizing that its "current is always there under the surface," flowing "relentlessly with time and distance, enduring ancestors." Observing the gnarled old woman, "so strong, bent like curved steel, a gaunt, engraved . . . holy face," he had found himself crying" (356). This emotional reawakening is reaffirmed later in his tearful public tribute at his sister's funeral, where, caught up in the superficial social game of pious religiosity, "no one who actually knew Helen will say one loving word over

her coffin" (360). Despite the censorious faces around him – faces he imagines asking, "why is this crazy uncle" who does "nothing and [is] always running around somewhere in the world . . . interrupting the funeral?" (362) – he is able to move beyond self-preoccupation into relational vulnerability by telling a story about Helen, "the human being she was."

Rather than continuing to view his relationships as infringing upon his personal autonomy, Adam now seems ready to begin to see himself as, in Richard Rohr's words, "a part of a much larger Story, a much larger Self."[33] Chapters Twenty and Twenty-two suggest that Adam is increasingly drawing on his multi-storied past to reconstruct a more healthy relational sense of self. This shift in orientation can be symbolically seen in his public "testimony" to family connectedness at the funeral: a "going-forward" that seems to function as Adam's adult re-enactment of the discourse of conversion (the verbal practice of giving public witness to a private inner self-transformation) that Adam had learned so well during his "churched" childhood. Further evidence of his inner metamorphosis comes in his hard-won decision to remain relationally connected with his older brother John, despite John's simplistic theology and emotional insensitivity. And his reconciliation with Susannah after Helen's funeral (even though tentative[34]) speaks also of relational reconnection, as they mourn together the lengthy disappearance of their daughter Trish.

At Susannah's request, Adam shares with her his translation of the "appalling" but "comforting" words of his cousin "Young Peter" about his difficult sojourn in Siberia, a place of exile "solid as rock" with "the frozen spruce piled up like the dead waiting for spring to be buried," where the "questions come at you at any time of any night" (379). But Peter's living story also speaks of return from exile, a return whereupon he finds the silent faces he had known before his imprisonment still reading the timeless words of Jesus: "they that abide in me and I in them, the same bring forth much fruit, for without me you can do nothing" (380). Here, as Adam and Susannah are reunited, in the sanctity of both spiritual union and physical lovemaking, their story of grief over the loss of daughter Trish merges with the larger communal Russian Mennonite narrative of suffering and loss: Adam and Susannah are momentarily enclosed "in a sadness too enormous to be endured, of bodies sewn together by suffering, by torture, by faith, by hunger, by

Stalin, by God, by hope, by their daughter." They can do "nothing . . . only, they must, move close together" (382). Adam's memory of the green birch forest planted to memorialize the Mennonite dead of Russia also points to the re-growth of his relational sense of self, along with the presence of "Susannah so near him at least" that grows like a tree: "every branch, every root, every twig and family tendril is edging under the beds and around the light bulbs and along the edges of the ceiling, sprouting leaves like pain." At this point Adam draws comfort from knowing "he and Susannah are being wrapped, close, in the green, unstoppable growth of their ancestors' suffering" (380). Resting in the bitter but revitalizing power of this larger story, Adam seems ready to re-embrace the complex interplay of narratives that have shaped his identity.

Chapter Twenty-two ends with the powerful image of Adam and his family reunited, again "trying to feel every bone in every individual body, and feeling at last their hearts beat the conviction of their enduring love" (420), as they welcome Trish back from her self-imposed exile. Her return symbolizes also Adam's own return from relational exile. Earlier in the chapter, an uneasy tension is still apparent between Adam and Susannah, evident in her rage as she rebukes him for his continuing self-absorbed attempts to make sense of the "contradictory" elements of the story of his cousins Heinrich and Peter Loewen. She challenges him instead to let the story live by sharing it with son Joel so he can "make whatever sense he wants" (419) out of it. This scene suggests Adam will need to keep working at escaping the absolutizing impulses of rationalized self-absorption. Earlier, as he returns with son Joel to the northern prairie homestead where Adam was born, he has experienced an inner "contentment; almost as if he can, finally, stop thinking" (408). Walking through the worn-down house he hears once more, in his memory, "the voice of his mother in this waiting air" as she goes about her domestic tasks, her call in the evening air, "Adam, where are you" (7), bringing him home from his wanderings. Here we again see Adam's growing reconnection to the narratives of his past.

In addition, Adam's decision to purchase the northern Alberta homestead on which he was born speaks of his increasing ability to integrate his contemporary self-narrative with his originating narratives of place and mother-tongue. Instead of returning to the "little, dark log room where his

mother has given him birth" (412), he will build "a new log house on the hill" (514-15), a reconstruction speaking also of his enlarged vision of self. This new perspective which overlooks the continental divide simultaneously offers the beauty of connection with the natural world, the grounding of mother-tongue, and room to "look in all directions" from the veranda "facing east so that every day they could look over water that flowed in two directions, north and south . . . continents apart" (415). Adam's vision has been broadened, helping him to realize that he does not have to return to the restricting "log house" of uni-cultural conformity, but that as he builds a relational reality within the house of family, "long and safe," he can construct a multi-storied identity that draws from each of his cultural identity narratives. And Adam's desire to plant "lanes of birch trees . . . like the ones leading back from the Ural River" (415) memorializing "the names of the innocent and weeping dead" (417) demonstrates his determination to continue learning from the lessons of the past. Like the suffering martyrs of Soviet oppression, "who can see what they know is written on the white bark of the tree of life" (417), he has embraced his mother's "eternal and unshakable faith in the substance of things hoped for as the evidence of things suddenly seen" (56). Thus, he has begun to move from self-absorption with the demands and desires of his individuated self into the alternate autonomy of relational self-awakening. Adam's new way of seeing has helped him to believe relationally, to live his life embracing, rather than rejecting, the demands of relational accountability.

Notes

[1] Rudy Wiebe, *Sweeter Than All the World* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2001), 89.
[2] K. J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Surroundings in Social Construction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 247.
[3] Rudy Wiebe and Eli Mandel, "Where the Voice Comes From," *A Voice in the Land: Essays by and about Rudy Wiebe*, ed. W. J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), 150.
[4] Mona DeKoven Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," *Family Process* 40.3 (2001): 273-85. Retrieved 10 Sept. 2002, from Academic Search Premiere, EBSCOHost, 1-17.
[5] Michael White, "An Outline of Narrative Therapy," *The Narrative Therapy Website*, 3. Retrieved 14 Sept. 2002, <http://www.massey.ac.nz>.
[6] Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 6.
[7] Wiebe, *Sweeter Than all the World*, 198.

[8] Through Susannah Wiebe's reply – "They used to say thinking different was conversion" (337) – to Adam's comment, "I'm trying to think different," Wiebe clearly alludes to the concept of conversion, of radical new ways of inner "seeing" (The "born again" model of conversion was widespread among Canadian Mennonite communities by the mid-20th century, partially due to the influence of American and Canadian fundamentalist radio evangelists such as Charles Templeton, Bob Simpson, Billy Graham, and Ernest C. Manning (see Wiebe, 339).) Wiebe makes use of this "born again" conversion concept in the "seeing is believing" motif that runs throughout the novel, a concept that he mentions as early as 1990, in reference to conceptualizing reality, in a taped interview with Penny Van Toorn.
[9] Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 3.
[10] White, "An Outline of Narrative Therapy," 2.
[11] *Ibid*., 2.
[12] *Ibid*., 3.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid*., 4
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 1.
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] *Ibid*., 3.
[20] Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (Crossroads: New York: 1999), 32.
[21] Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 3.
[22] J. Grunebaum, cited in Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 3.
[23] Fishbane, "Relational Narratives of the Self," EBSCO, 12.
[24] *Ibid*., 3.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid*., 4.
[27] Kenneth Womack, "'It is All a Darkness': Death, Narrative Therapy and Ford Maddox Ford's *The Good Soldier*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 38.3 (Summer 2002): 319. Retrieved Sept. 12, 2002 from Academic Search Premiere, EBSCOHost.
[28] Wiebe's obvious allusion here to God's call to the first Adam in the Garden of Eden, who is hiding from God's presence, reinforces our understanding of both Adam Wiebe's early immersion in the biblical master narrative and the inescapable spiritual dimension of the relational reality that he tries to avoid for so long.
[29] In juxtaposing the phrase "trying to feel every bone in every individual body they know they love" with Adam's apparent inability to "feel," Wiebe powerfully emphasizes Adam and Susannah's emotional and physical alienation; significantly, this exact phrase reappears in the scene of family reconciliation near the end of the novel (420), when together Adam, Susannah, and son Joel welcome daughter Trish back from her self-imposed exile: here the physicality of their connection becomes a powerful metaphor for psychic connectedness.
[30] Wiebe may be signalling an assumption that no matter how physically satisfying a sexual relationship may be, outside the context of relational accountability, it is likely to become alienating and, ultimately, self-destroying.

[31] Here, in my opinion, we find a narratorial intrusion sharply critical of Western cultural self-indulgence and self-referentiality, reminiscent of (though not as overt as) Wiebe's polemic in *The Blue Mountains of China* against the pretentiousness and meaninglessness of much 20th-century intellectual posturing generated, for example, by the so-called "'great' poets and novelists of the western world" who "[muck] around wading and parading their own mighty organs and viscera . . . shooting themselves off at the moon . . . ." (*The Blue Mountains of China*, 196-97).

[32] For example, in *The Stone Angel*, Hagar's pride and self-sufficiency prevent her from establishing meaningful healing connections with her socially inferior husband and her sons and daughter-in-law. Significantly, Adam is clearly linked to Hagar on page 309, when Wiebe writes, "like Laurence's Hagar [Adam] thinks: *Someone really ought to know these things*" (the vague "*These things*" seems to refer to gaining a transforming understanding of the responsibilities of relational accountability).

[33] Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 24.

[34] Wiebe's decision to keep Adam and Susannah's reconciliation incomplete may be cautioning readers that while relational accountability is necessary to constructing a healthy self-narrative, relational connectedness is not sufficient in and of itself; it may also become an absolutizing self-narrative requiring a balancing self-individuation: ultimately, it is Adam (not Adam in the context of his relationship to Susannah) who must bear the burden of shaping his/story.

Other Works Consulted

Beesley, A.C. "Foucault and the Turn to Narrative Therapy." *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 30.2 (2002): 126-43. Retrieved from EBSCOHost 15 Sept. 2002.

Gergen, K.J. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).