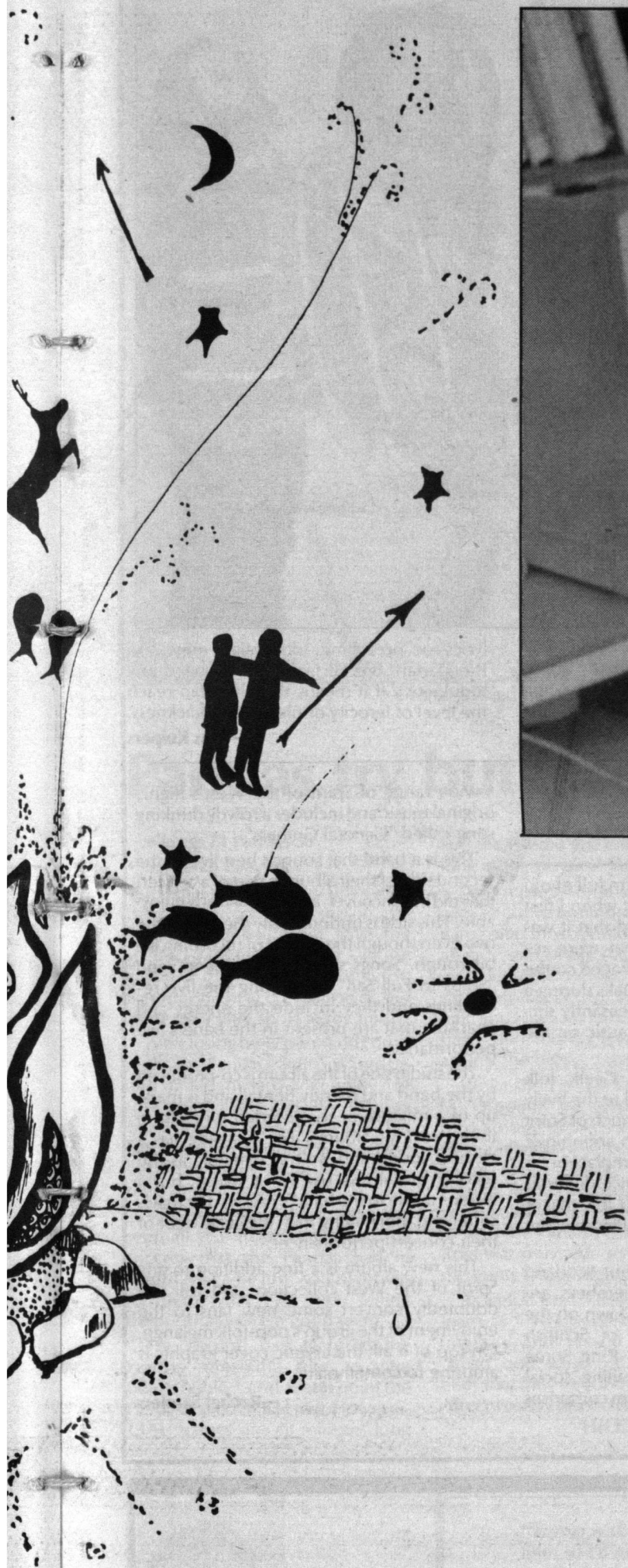
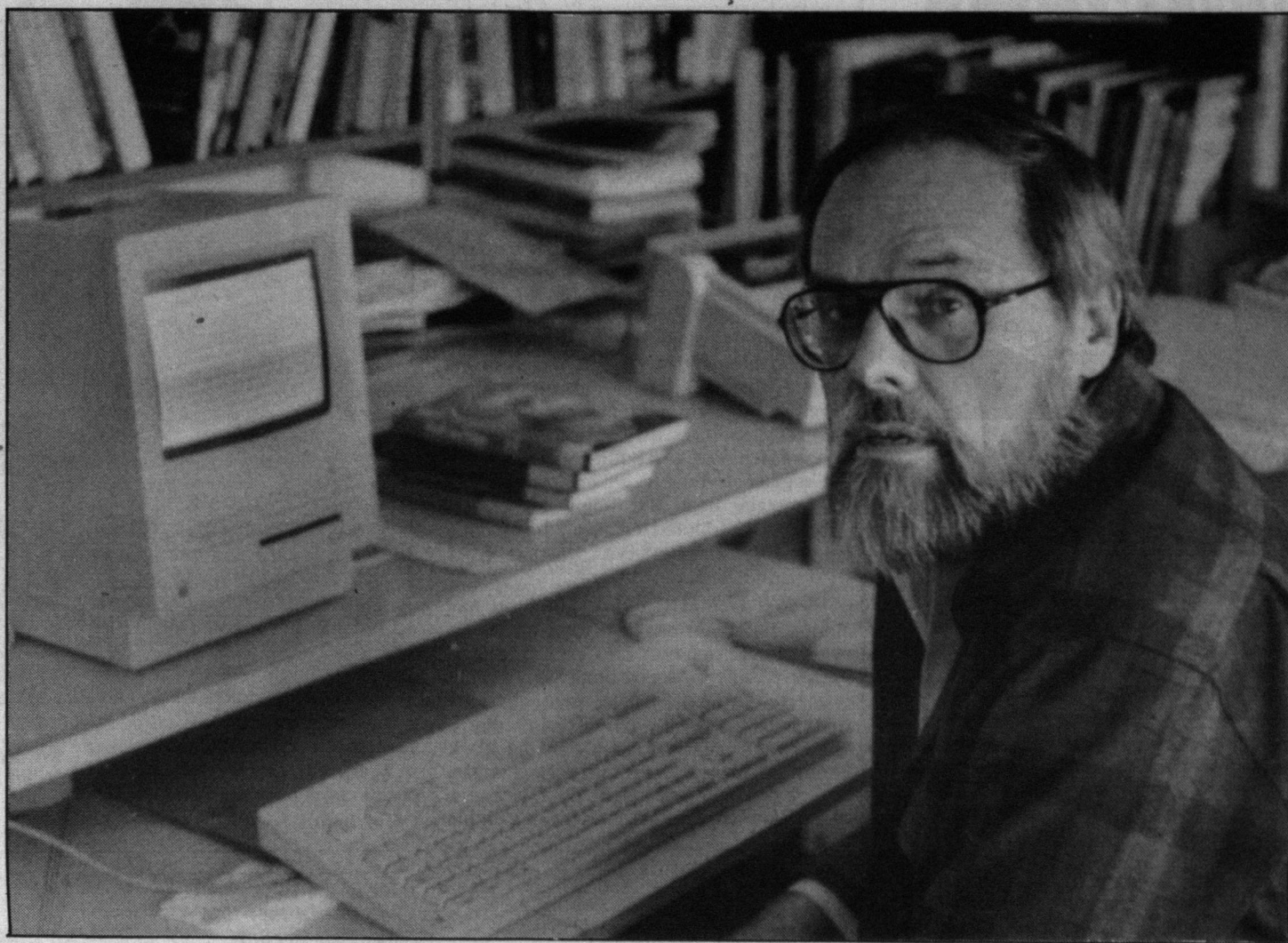


ounters unique Canadian mysteries



characters to search for deeper questions. He explains this point in discussing *The Scorched-Wood People*: "Everybody knows that Riel was hanged — the most famous hanging in Canadian history. So there's nothing to be told about that. There's no drama: will he make it or won't he? So the more intriguing question is, why is it the most important hanging in Canadian history, if it is? Or in Western Canadian history, as it certainly is. And why is there still the same clash with the Metis people or the Indian people about land in the West when we fixed it up once? We hanged their leader once, and finished it all off, so why is it still here? That's a different kind of question, and that can only be explored with more perception and imagination than just to tell the story."

In the end, Wiebe claims that he tries to focus on "the human complexity of the story... trying to get deeper and deeper into that complexity." For Wiebe this means "trusting your imagination" and continually trying for "a happy conjunction of skill and the story you want to tell."

At one point in the interview Wiebe describes the Arctic ice, and though he did not intend it as such, the image he conjures can stand as a metaphor for his writing: "The Arctic ice is not a smooth flat pond, you know. It's full of pressure ridges. Its fields of ice pans, jammed up over each other, that could hide a ship! And the other thing is, of course, that it doesn't stand still. It moves. It always moves under the influence of the wind."

"...until we realize imaginatively... that North is the true nature of our world... we will always go whoring after the mocking palm trees and beaches of the Caribbean..."

profound secrets and mysteries such as those surrounding Albert Johnson, or the Franklin expeditions, or the Inuit language and culture. Wiebe looks beyond the clear-cut facts and obvious adventure of so many stories from the North in an attempt to "drive this whole experience of the Arctic and the landscape and the people there a couple of notches farther into the humanity of it than just straight adventure."

This attempt to see the larger picture and to ask the less apparent, more complex questions is something that Rudy Wiebe does continually feature in his fiction. Whether it is the Cree Indian chief Big Bear in *The Temptations of Big Bear*, or Louis Riel in *The Scorched-Wood People*, or Albert Johnson in the short story "The Naming of Albert Johnson", Wiebe consistently avoids the obvious adventure story of these historical

Wiebe persists in asking these different kinds of questions. He is not interested in fiction that simplifies and reduces questions in order to make them more palatable to the public. I asked him if he saw himself as a writer looking from the periphery or writing from an alien vision. He claims that "a writer is always a fringe character... The writers that are important are distinctive. I don't think that any really superb writer is at the center of anything." When asked about how his particular Christian vision relates to this notion of writing from the fringe, Wiebe says, "having an ideology at all, other than a kind of black irony, is perhaps rather strange. It's not that with-it to be a Christian writer. But I wouldn't mind being seen as a Christian writer, say, the way T.S. Eliot or William Faulkner or Tolstoy would be seen as Christian writers. I would like to stand in that kind of tradition, which is, I think, one of the great ways of seeing reality that has developed in the world. At the same time I'm troubled by some of the things Christianity seems to advocate."



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