

# arts

## A Meeting ...

You'll find Rudy Wiebe's latest book, a collection of his short-stories called *Where Is The Voice Coming From?*, down by the cash register on the lower level of the bookstore, keeping company with Irving Layton and Sinclair Ross and the like. Skip today's sports section and go buy a copy right now, because it's filled with moonlit titles like *Someday Soon, Before Tomorrow*, *Millstone for the Sun's Day*, and *Bluecoats on the Sacred Hill of the Wild Peas*.

titles that tell you little more about the story than that you want to read it. The book is wrapped up in a light blue cover, and looks like a piece of the sky for sale. Maybe it is.

### Literary Beginnings

Rudy Wiebe wrote the first of the stories, *Scrapbook*, nearly twenty years ago in an undergraduate writing class here at U of A. His first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, published

in 1962, was widely acclaimed for its sensitive vision of a Mennonite colony turning to face World War II. He's returned to the University now, lecturing, conducting writing seminars, harnessing bugeyes tyros, putting up with Gateway reporters, and somewhere in between managing to maintain his position as one of Canada's top novelists and story-tellers (plenty of people are publishing books, but there are few capable story-tellers among them). Earlier this year, his 1973 novel *The Temptations of Big Bear*, was awarded the Governor General's Award.

### Pacifism and Violence

Wiebe's head is bubbling with notions of high noons and

thundering midnights, of barefoot boys on flying prairies and concrete hearts in neon cities. His horizons sometimes seem as boundless as those of a man standing in a wheatfield. How does he keep from losing himself? How does he find his way home?

"My basic outlook on life is pacifist, a pacifism based on the kinds of things that Jesus stood for and taught, and that to me is really important.

"On the other hand, when I look at the book it's disconcerting in a way, because there are very many violent stories in there. Almost all of them end in violence of some kind. I thought about that for awhile, why that was. I think the reason is that I'm so concerned with peace and understanding and forgiveness between people. The only place where you can really study that is when it isn't happening. Or when in the midst of violence, you actually see it happening."

### University

So here's a writer who, staring down the Orphan Annie stare of modern literature's rampant nihilism, isn't afraid to speak of God and the gods in nature, who recognizes chaos but is more concerned with ope. What, then, is this fresh air man doing at a musty, mothball University?

"If I didn't have the job here, I would have to make a lot of money somewhere else, because you simply have to have money to live and support your family. And what I've seen of free-lance writers, the tyranny of trying to make money writing is worse than having this kind of job. Besides, I like teaching creative writing, I get a lot of fun out of it, and I get a lot of ideas out of it. Interacting with young writers is good."

Outside the window of his office in the Humanities

Building, the clouds slowly roll over the roaring city skyline. His eyes wander out over the river valley.

"I like it here. I've had a couple of chances to leave this place, to go work someplace else, but this is my kind of country really. I was born straight east of here, in country exactly like this - the poplar, the aspen, and the prairie. And I've never intended to live in Toronto.

"I'd hate to live there, what I've seen of it, it's not my kind of world. Here, I can have the amenities of the city, and in a very short time, I can be out on my farm and far away from this and perfectly alone, walking in the trees....

"The campus used to depress me more than it does now. For me, a physical place like this is not as important as the kind of people there are here, that I work with every day."

More than just the faces of the students have changed in the time he has been on the faculty here.

"I came in the Centennial year, and right after that there was a tremendous difference in the late '60's. Especially students going away. Some of the sharper ones were some of the ones most pressured to leave. A lot of them have actually come back after a couple of years.

### Flower-power trip

"The flower-child thing, that whole kind of trip, hitch-hiking around the world, getting away - you don't really get away, I guess a lot of them discovered, you just sort of carry it all with you anyway. And a lot of them came back, partly because a lot of them didn't want to live a lifetime on welfare or slinging hash in a restaurant or pumping gas or something.

"Right now I think students are much more - well, how can you generalize - but it strikes me they're much more course-conscious. In a healthy way - they want to get a course for what it can do for them, what they can learn.

"I never thought the flower-grass thing was such a hot way to live. It always struck me as rather unnatural to have to do that. You should be able to live within the nature of yourself, be able to feel good when other people are feeling good. I always thought that flower-child stuff was kind of fake. If it was really helpful, some marvellous imaginative things should have come out of it. And they didn't nothing came out of it, except a lot of people who burned their brains out."

I point to the cassette recorder I have used to tape our interview, and ask him if he has any special pronouncement to make. He only laughs away the notion, and suggests that I edit out anything that sounds too ponderous. Because, he says, "every writer's conscious that whatever he's doing that's worth other people knowing about is what he's writing. If I'm doing anything worthwhile knowing about, it's not the kind of person I am, but it's the things I'm making."

Later in the afternoon I see Rudy Wiebe walking and whistling his way to the English Office. And so here, this week, plunk in the middle of mimeographed exams and too many cups of black coffee, is a man whistling down a corridor in the English Department. Helluva thing. Whistling in the Humanities Building.

—Frank Moher

# rudy wiebe

## An Open Letter ...

Dear Mr. Wiebe:

In your new collection of short stories you write that "The problem is to make the story." With all due respect I suggest that the sentence should read "The problem is to make the story understandable."

You seem to enjoy making ample use of random thoughts, half-finished sentences and scattered incidents, all of which lead up to an unexplained conclusion. In reading selections from *Where Is The Voice Coming From* I often got the feeling that you were leading up to a key message - leading up to but never actually reaching it! If your intent is to confuse and to vex rather than to entertain, then you have succeeded.

As an English professor perhaps you have acquired that trait peculiar to said profession - that of deep analytical reading. This school of thought purports that the less obvious the meaning, the better the piece of literature.

However, I cannot help holding the opinion that in doing so you have undermined your own work. By refusing to validate your conclusions the message is lost to the reader.

One area of concern which I cannot pass over is that of your amazing preoccupation with death. You involve at least one death in nine out of thirteen stories; including Indian warfare,

gun battles, sickness, murders, a religious sacrifice, death by freezing, starvation, suicide and even cannibalism! While you might thrive on such a consistently grisly diet I think the majority of your readers will not.

I also question the relevance of two stories in particular - those of *Did Jesus Ever Laugh* and *Millstone For the Sun's Day*. The one involves an insane murderer, the other a ritualistic sacrifice. But what is your reason for writing these stories? If it was either to entertain or to inform, your intent is lost on me. All I experienced was a sense of vexation, and I can't help thinking that you are merely toying with words.

In reading, re-reading and backtracking through your collection of disjointed narrations and awkward dialogue I felt like a guinea pig in an experiment in which you tested your skill at putting meaning into bizarre situations.

But in all truth and honesty I am thankful that what I have just said can only be applied to the first half of the book. As you moved away from the young-boy-on-the-prairies type of story and into the more meaningful portrayals of frontier life, your redeeming qualities as a writer began to come into focus. The stories of Indians and

Indian life in Canadian history come alive with force and emotion. They are powerful and very well presented, almost as if you and some special insight into the people and events discussed. Here you show a knowledge of human emotion and circumstance which is related in a manner that can only be described as skillful.

In short, you managed at last to present your characters in a believable, realistic way. In reading the story entitled *Where is the Voice Coming From* you persuaded me to feel the fierceness and the pride of a defeated nation...a dying people. The last voice of a struggling race is clearly heard. The pace and tension in *The Naming of Albert Johnson* is related in poignant and moving terms. Your use of intricate description in this story falls nothing short of excellent; and it is perhaps in this instance that your style of narration serves you best. In this saga you cause one to feel the desperate passions that churned in the mind of the mad Rat River Trapper.

These last stories certainly deserve merit and are well worth reading. I only wish that this level of talent which you are capable of had been kept throughout the collection.

Sincerely,  
Kim St. Clair



## Unfortunate headline misleading

In the Oct. 29 *Gateway* there appeared a review of *Mr. Arcularis* that had a misleading headline. This play was produced by the Committee for Elizabeth Haynes Theatre Event with the aid of the provincial Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation and E.P.S.B.

The cast included: Walter Kaasa, Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Recreation; Mr. Ray Phipps, Supervisor of Drama, E.P.S.B.; Mr. Don Pimm, Head of the Department of Drama at Victoria C.H.S.; and other prominent Edmontonians. My apologies for the ambiguity.

Brian McCullough

## Stevie Wonder does not reach fullfillingness

Stevie Wonder  
Fullfillingness First Finale  
Tamla Motown T 6 33251

While his previous work *Inner Vision* is still selling in large quantities after sixteen months, Motown's wonderboy Stevie has come up with a slightly disappointing follow-up *Fullfillingness First Finale*.

It's not that the album is bad - it's far superior to a lot of albums in many ways. Nevertheless one must feel disappointed because it appears that Stevie's musical career is slightly stagnating.

If you've never heard one of Stevie's last three releases *Music of my Mind*, *Talking Book* and

*Innervisions*, this album is just perfect.

If you're, however, more familiar with his music, you'll come to regard *You Haven't Done Nothing* as yet another *Superstition* stomper or *Birds of Beauty* as part two of *Don't You Worry About a Thing*.

There are some excellent songs on this album like the gospel-influenced *They Won't Go When I Go*, *You haven't Done Nothing* or *Heaven is 10 Zillion Light Years Away*.

Other tunes, however, seem to lack something which is hard to define. Maybe it's the melody, maybe the vocals are too cool but *Please Don't Go* or

*Creepin'* each just don't work out.

Looking at Stevie's past record, one does not have to indicate that production and instrumentalization are superb as usual. Paul Anka and Jackson Five are among the guests appearing on the album.

Stevie is still light years ahead of most other people but it's time for a change. Maybe I'm just expecting a little too much, but I don't consider Stevie as the everyday superstar and he should try something new to reach fullfillingness the next time around.

Harold Kuckertz  
Courtesy of SU Records  
HUB Mall