

**Myrna's Questions for CONVERSATION WITH RUDY WIEBE: launch of *Where the Truth Lies: Selected Essays***  
**November 30, 2016**

**This is a wonderful selection, a great read, a perfect Christmas present...**

What are the pleasures of short form nonfiction, as in this new collection?

**1. Before we go any further**, I understand that you are the son of the Inspector General of the British Army who settled in Alberta – something like a remittance man – and that you are “racially” English, as you put it, and are only pretending to be Mennonite. Please explain.

**2. Your trickster title:** Where the truth lies. The Polish writer Wladyslaw Bartoszewski – also an Auschwitz survivor, Resistance fighter, and anti-Communist dissident -used to say that ‘the truth does not lie in the middle, the truth lies where it lies’. You enjoy the duplicity of the verb “to lie.” The truth lies, and also lies.

**3. Two of the Epigrams** that you’ve chosen as the opening into your own texts use the **metaphor of a “line”** to describe the act of writing – as in Annie Dillard’s, “When you write, you lay out a line of words.”

This made me think back to an essay in *Playing Dead* (Also NeWest Press back in 1989) in which you tell us that “the Inuit express spatial concepts in two fundamental ways – the wide and the long, or “areal” as in “area,” or “linear,” as in “line.”

**Here’s my question:** can writing something also be “areal”?

**4. You mention “forms of writing”** as one of the influences that shaped you and complain that “the shape of any one form can become so complicated that

writing the next one becomes a continuation of finding the impossible possible.” **This reminded me** of something Margaret Laurence wrote or said about why we do write “the next one” – finally, *this* time, to write that shimmering ideal – Platonic – form that exists perfectly in our mind. It’s right there if only we could get it out and onto paper.

5. On p 16 where you also mention, as one of the influences that have shaped you, **Jesus Christ**: “It sometimes seems to me that his spirit already moved in me while I grew into being in my mother’s womb.” **I immediately thought of:**

**Psalm 139:** *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast....For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made....* That last line, sounds perfectly Wiebian. Do you want to go there?

6. You write: “**Fiction is the narratives** you and I make out of the facts of our lives.” I put it to you that this is true of any prose narrative – your own memoir, *Of This Earth*, for example, or the collaborative reportage with Yvonne Johnson, in *A Stolen Life*, or the personal essay.

I like where you going later when you write that there is a *continuum* between fact, at one extreme, and fantasy at the other.

7. You write about the “**homestead world**” of your memoir, *Of This Earth*, and how, at the beginning of your writing life, there weren’t any stories from or of that world. Now, thanks to your and others’ writing, we do have stories “of this place,” and have taken a kind of ownership of it.

But, at another point, **you are challenged** by a Gitksan elder: “If this is your land, where are your stories?” You recounted this in 2004, and responded that “the land becomes ours as we tell each other our stories.”

**I'm wondering:** is this the correct indeed ethical correction of the sin of cultural appropriation? We tell each other our *own* stories, not others' stories? And this gives us the right "to imagine we own this land"?

[conversation with Greg Scofield]

8. "Mennonite preaching all too often **abjures the body.**" [abjure: to renounce solemnly, to abstain from] This got me to thinking, I admit mischievously, that **Anabaptism** could be responsible for this state of affairs; that if you had been dunked naked in a baptismal fount as an infant, you would have known you had a body.

But **about the physical:** nothing could be more physical than eking out a life in the boreal forest as you describe in your memoir. But you cite a fellow Mennonite who observes that "It seems there is church talk and there is everything else."

You are more hopeful. You say that it is the Mennonite writers who are working on it [living in the body] harder than the theologians, especially **your women poets** such as Di Brandt and Sarah Klassen. Please say more about that.

9. In the last piece, "Look to the Rock," you write from the point of view of a pilgrim to **Tokmak, Ukraine**. Explain, please, "pilgrim" in this context. And where on earth is Tokmak.

In that **homage to your forebears** and kin who were able to flee to the Americas from the Soviet Union, you express the **collective gratitude** for the "peace, much prosperity and above all freedom to practise our faith" they found here. We Ukrainian-Canadians are in the midst of saying pretty much the same thing as we celebrate 125 years of settlement in Canada.

I ask both of our communities: What are we leaving out?

**10.** Finally, from Robert Kroetsch's *Alberta*, the 1993 edition of a **hilarious road trip**, Kroetsch writes:

*Rudy and I stopped beside the road ...to let the landscape stand still while we looked, listened, inhaled, stretched, and strolled. The art of peeing in an open prairie landscape is something that must be learned in childhood.*

Comment?