

# Do We Needham?

by GARY DAVIS

It seems incredible, but it's true. The delegation from Dalhousie University to the Regional Conference of Canadian University Press devoted the equivalent of two Brunswickan full pages to Richard Needham.

Who is Needham? He is a columnist for the Toronto Globe and Mail. He has recently published a book, called Needham's Inferno, which was publicised in Time and Maclean's magazine with great gusto. Dalhousie gave coverage about equally to his book and to his secretary, Francie Healy, who Needham nicknames 'Fearless Francie'.

Francie was also at the regional conference. She is a 'very nice girl', for a nineteen-year-old. (She called her Torontonion boy-friend every night during the conference.)

Needham's book is a collection of witty although not always original columns satirizing Toronto's (and hence Canada's) social habits. Most of it is injections of about 800 words, the size of his column for the last year or so.

Needham's articles are entertaining. But not so entertaining that a reader can digest more than a few in a day. Passing the 8000 word mark, the columns become repetitive, pushy, and as a result, tiring.

At the conference, Needham said that when he quit the Globe, the public outcry was so great that he was asked to resume his column, which he did. It would be a mistake to claim that his book was a necessary addition to Canada's cultural reservoir.

His style is unique in this reviewer's experience. This saves Needham from severe denunciation. His material has been read before, perhaps in Thurber, perhaps elsewhere. The Thurber influence is notable although Needham claimed not to have read him. Needham claims women will save mankind. So did Thurber, and with a similar argument (so maybe it's true).

Both Thurber and Needham like one-liners. They both make the absurd more absurd.

Any book worth talking about is worth reading. For this reason I have to recommend that Needham's Inferno be read, if not bought. Warning: don't read it all at once.

Any woman worth talking about is worth meeting. Therefore, if you happen to be in Toronto and are handy with your fists or karate, you should try to meet Francie Healy. After encountering Mr. Needham and

Francie's true love, you will find her very refreshing.

After reading the book and meeting Francie however, you will discover that Needham and she are both very human, not immortal as Dalhousie seems to think. How the Gazette was snowed by that pair is impossible to figure out. His presence, to them, managed to obscure a truly impressive man, Charles Lynch, who the Brunswickan entertained in their quarters. We gave him Scotch, not two full pages.

