

Quick'n'Dirty'n'Bad

continued from page 3

Writing more than 20,000 words in only 72 hours does require much physical stamina, but if the finished novel is unreadable there is little point to the endeavor. As Truman Capote said of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, "That's not writing, it's typewriting." And *Nothing So Natural*, like other 3-day novel winners, illustrates Capote's point. It is badly written, and highly unlikely that a serious publisher would have given Curry's manuscript a second glance.

Curry's novel is unpolished. The plot and character development is sketchy, and although the writing is clear, it is lacking in richness. There are no descriptive passages to savour and no metaphors which stand out. It is somehow hard to believe the publisher's claim that *Nothing So Natural* is a "searing tragi-comedy." The novel is neither tragic nor comic. Perhaps a more precise word would be dull.

A quote by Tommy, the father of the family, sets the mood for this uninspiring book. "There's nothing more natural than walking. It's the most satisfying state a man can achieve. Except when he's on the can."

This book aims to be funny, but rarely is. What little humour there is tends to be very crude. Witness Tommy, in one of his more amorous moods: "I need tit," he says to his wife. "Come on, Muth, give me one right between the old jowls. Smack one right in here. Whip me one out, Muth..."

Although there are elements in the story that are pathetic, Curry handles his material in such a flat way that the story is ultimately unmoving. Although Tommy's wife is overworked and must put up with an abusive husband, Curry does not make the reader feel sorrow for her. Simply telling us that "poor mom had to work so hard" does not evoke sympathy for the woman.

Death often makes for tragedy, but Curry treats the death of Tommy's daughter Betty in a very casual way. Betty is barely mentioned until the last pages when all of a sudden she commits suicide. Only three pages have been devoted to Betty, and her emotional state is unexplored; her suicide means nothing—no emotions are touched.

Although the other characters are dealt with in greater length, none of them are truly "fleshed out." Tommy, the chronically unemployed, constantly complaining, alcoholic, is the predominant figure in the book. Although Tommy is probably the fullest of the characters, he is still far from "real". Furthermore, Tommy is so unattractive that his unlikableness permeates the book.

Another major flaw in *Nothing So Natural* is lack of direction. The novel moves quickly, bouncing from one scene to the next but aimlessly. It would be helpful if *Nothing So*

Natural had some kind of a plot or theme to hold the story together.

Finally, to tell his story well Curry needed much more than 78 pages. As it stands the novel is so poorly developed that it more resembles an outline than a finished novel. This is another common fault of all 3-day novels so far.

Dr. Tin, 1978 contest winner by Tom Walmsley has many of the same problems as *Nothing So Natural*. But besides being badly written it is also extremely offensive in content. In one section of the book the "hero" goes to dude ranch where the residents participate in sado-masochism. Walmsley glories in describing acts of violent sex and human degradation. The hero, A.J., "has been toilet slave for the entire party (with the exception of the slaves who have been eating each others' shit on stage). A.J. is drenched and dirtied, strapped in an old bathtub..."

Compared to traditional novels, 3-Day novels have a "different flavor", says Calvin Wharton, an editor at Pulp Press. He praises the 3-day novels for their "immediacy" and "roughness". The novels certainly are rough, but it's debatable whether roughness is a desirable trait.

"It is not necessarily true that a novel written in a short space of time is of a lesser quality," says Wharton. To illustrate this point Wharton notes that Voltaire's *Candide* was written in only three days. Perhaps it is true that someone of Voltaire's genius could write a memorable and important work in a very short period of time. But for most people the writing of good fiction requires a great deal of time and care. It's questionable whether Voltaire would approve of a passage like:

Their mouths met, saliva mixing like lava, and they rolled on the bathroom tiles imprisoned by the claws of a greater passion than they ever knew existed. (from *Dr. Tin*)

These novels are so bad it is hard to understand why any company would bother publishing them. Ultimately, the writing contest can only be seen as a cheap form of promotion for Pulp Press. The event offers opportunities to the contest winners, however, Jeff Doran has been awarded a Canada Council grant to write a play, and *Dr. Tin*'s Tom Walmsley went on to become a "famous" playwright.

The novels do more harm than good to Canadian literature, however. The contest cheapens and undermines the Canadian publishing industry and other more worthy Canadian writers.

Whether seriously or in jest, *Globe and Mail* critic, William French, called the 3-Day Novels "a uniquely Canadian contribution to world literature." Whether Canadians can be proud of this gift to the world is debatable.

Masked Media



Encyclopedia Investigations

by David Olie

It may be the political/cultural event of the year in Canada. No, it's not the Queen Mum's latest hat. No, the Pope is not back in town. No, the federal Tories have not decided to change the nation's colours to red, white and blue.

What it is, is Mel Hurtig's new *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

Hurtig is a man with a mission. A mission to bring Canada to Canadians. Despairing over his fellow citizens' basic ignorance of their own country, and loathing the encroachment of American continentalism, Hurtig has laid his own considerable fortune and reputation in the publishing industry on the line to produce *TCE*.

So far, the gamble seems to be paying off. In fact, the response to *TCE* has been so positive that retailers are finding it difficult to keep the three-volume set in stock. This, despite a pricetag of anywhere between \$125 and \$200, says there must be a market out there for resurgent Canadian nationalism.

It would be impossible to go in depth into all 1992 pages of *TCE* in this space. Frankly, though, my first concern with the Hurtig opus was the same as my concern with most things that attempt to address "the essence of Canada". That is, what treatment will the Maritimes get?

(Now, maybe I'm guilty of having a bad attitude here. I mean, should I really be assessing the success or failure of a nationalistic venture on the basis of how well it addresses regionalism? Hmmm. Oh well, onwards.)

The first thing to greet the eyes of the paranoid Maritimer upon opening *TCE* is the frontispiece, paired with a similar illustration in the rear of each volume. These attractive, full-colour prints are clearly intended to represent what Canada, and therefore *TCE*, is all about. Collectively, about three dozen famous Canadians of past and present are shown in the montages, as well as various scenes, objects and landmarks deemed to be uniquely Canadian.

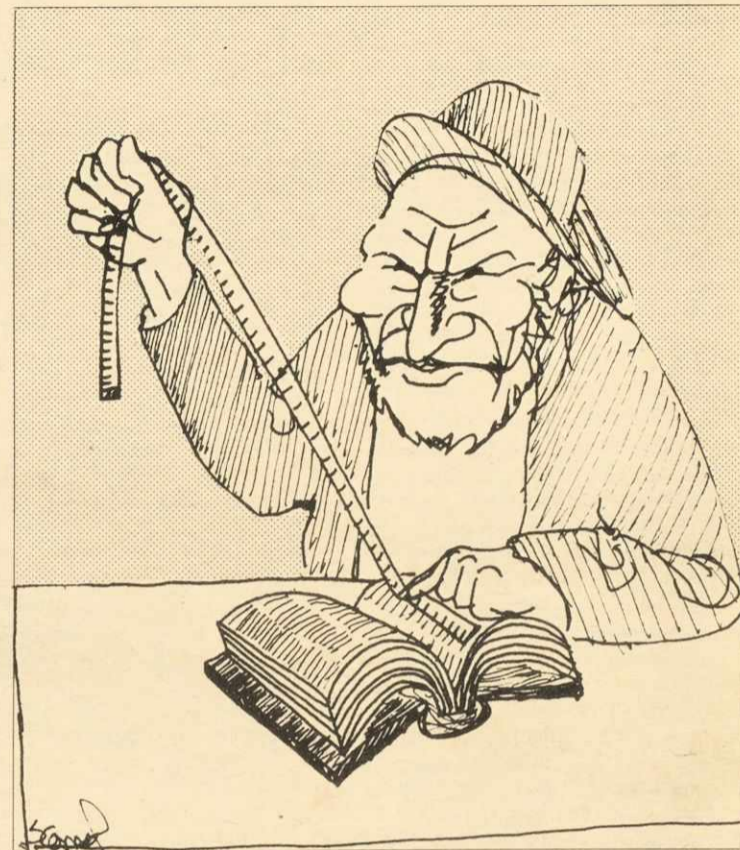
In all that, the only thing representing the entire Atlantic region is, you guessed it, the Bluenose.

None of the famous Canadians were born here or are even associated with the region. No Sir Robert Borden, no Lucy Maude Montgomery, no Joey Smallwood, no Anne Murray; nothing. Hurtig is not off to a good start.

Next, the paranoid Maritimer devises a test. He selects two historical figures: each a newspaper editor turned politician, contemporaries, each having had about equal influence on the development of Canada. One is a Maritimer, Joseph Howe. The other is an Upper Canadian, William Lyon MacKenzie.

The results are surprising. Howe's entry is 280 millimetres long, as compared to MacKenzie's of 268 mm. Each has a photograph of almost identical size. Overall, this seems to be perfectly fair treatment, and the paranoid Maritimer loses a little hostility.

Just by way of comparison, he then looks up the same two men in the old



Encyclopedia Canadiana. Here, Howe gets a whopping 673 mm, leaving MacKenzie behind in a cloud of dust with only 309 mm. Not only that, but Howe gets a portrait sketch, while MacKenzie gets none. Chalk one up for *EC*.

However, there are reasons for this that go beyond Howe's sterling character. The *EC* is a bit long of tooth, as they say, having been first produced more than 25 years ago. In the intervening years, MacKenzie, the old radical, has had his reputation rehabilitated somewhat. In the early sixties MacKenzie was something of an embarrassment; today he's just another wild and crazy Canuck. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* reflects this altered perception in its entry, and the paranoid Maritimer, being something of an old radical himself, is finding it harder and harder to fault Mr. Hurtig.

The differences between *TCE* and *EC* show a major aspect of encyclopedia-writing: its political nature. *Canadiana* comes from a time when it was still rather risqué for Canadians to suggest that *Encyclopedia Americana* and *Encyclopedia Britannica* did not entirely meet their needs. In its time it was a great leap forward. Today it's clearly dated.

Hurtig's venture goes a large step beyond, and does so in progressive fashion. As already suggested, it has a definite political perspective, that of an independent, politically and culturally distinct nation.

While flipping through the pages of *TCE* the not-quite-so-paranoid-anymore Maritimer happens to notice the listing for a politically hot topic: foreign investment. Here comes the Hurtig viewpoint loud and clear:

"FIRA (The Foreign Investment Review Agency) approved about 90% of the proposals it reviewed and was not a significant barrier to the exten-

sion of foreign ownership. It was angrily criticized for its occasional rejections and its slow response to proposals and was dismantled by the Conservative Government in 1984."

Take that, free traders! With a Conservative government in Ottawa being the main force behind the move to closer ties with the U.S., anyone rejecting this move is almost bound to take a progressive stand on the issues. Today, the Canadian nationalists are on the left, or at least in the centre.

As a further example, the listing under "forest economics" makes a strong pitch for greater control and conservation of our forest resources, and then lists a single suggested reading: Jamie Swift's *Cut and Run: The Assault on Canada's Forests*, a radical manifesto for the salvation of our trees.

The progressive slant goes even deeper. There is, for instance, a substantial listing under the heading "Homosexuality". And it is a fine, well researched and written entry, telling in a brief space how Canadians have historically mistreated gays and lesbians, why it's hypocritical and wrong to do so, and making a distinct pitch for change. On this entire topic, of course, *EC* is resolutely silent.

The Canadian Encyclopedia, despite the fears of the paranoid Maritimer, is mainly successful in its efforts to pull Canada together. Sometimes it's the little touches, such as placing the accent marks over Québec and Montréal. Most of the time it seems to be sheer force of will and dedication to the cause. And a cause it is. Hurtig has put together a whole movement, the Council of Canadians, for which his encyclopedia is intended to be the manifesto.

If this isn't the political/cultural event of the year, what is? □

AGM

The annual general meeting of the Gazette Publications Society will take place on October 15, 1985, in the Student Union Building. Time and place to be announced.

All students are members of the Gazette Publications Society.