



fresh grease

new writings
from the
maritimes
1971

fresh grease
new writings from the maritimes
1971
straw books
\$1.50

editors: Bill Templeman
Elizabeth Zimmer
Charlotte Townsend
Designer: Heiner Jacob

by Sheelagh Russell

Fresh Grease, a collection of "new writings from the Maritimes," was issued in May 1971 by Straw Books, a concept funded by the federal government's Opportunities for Youth project. As a concept it should have been successful, for it has been doubly blessed with good writing, excellent editorship, and praiseworthy format. However, one wonders at the ultimate success of a book, whose edition has been limited to 1000 copies, and which restricts its contributors to those in Nova Scotia or on the New Brunswick - Nova Scotia border. Still, this little book makes interesting reading for one who wishes a taste of the variety which exists in Maritime writing today, and the reader cannot help but admire the work which must have gone into this volume. More of this concern in preserving and presenting our regional heritage is necessary if the Maritimes are to retain a place in the contributions to Canadian literature.

The editors are all well qualified for this kind of work, Bill Templeman, "who is a Purcell's Cove, N.S. mailman with an M.A. in English from University of Toronto, Elizabeth Zimmer, who teaches English at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design." And the contributors which they have chosen all exhibit a high degree of skill and professionalism. A quotation from the introduction will point out the purpose of the publication, which is, I think, ably fulfilled: "fresh grease is a meager attempt to show what people are doing here in the maritimes in the field of creative writing... Clearly we are on the side of the 'upstart underdog'; well-known maritime writers like Fred Cogswell and Alden Nowlan were not canvassed for submissions simply because they are well-known and have access to

many publications which would be over our average greaser's head. Clearly too in a publication of this kind there will be a higher degree of experimentalism than would be found in a more established publication. This is especially true in the poems, where design plays as important a part as literary style.

Fresh Grease is collection of short stories and poetry, however, the number of poems heavily outweighs the prose portion, with only four short stories. This may be due to a corresponding lack in contributions. The twenty-five contributors range in age from eleven years to the elderly and display a great diversity. Throughout one sees the influence of the sea, the land, and all the basic ingredients that to an outsider make up the maritime culture.

A good example of this is W.A. Parker's story "Home," where the petty pleasures of civilization, i.e. Pictou County is compared to the free life of Colchester County: "A hen cackled. A cow bawled and not far behind the hovel a fox yapped. The chained dog set up a bedlam of echoes as she drew near the door. She turned on the stoop and lifted her face to the sky and from her moist forehead and sunlight beamed. 'Yeah, ma, I'm home.'"

The poetry is heavily sea-oriented. Among better examples of this are The Phantom Ship of Northumberland Strait by Ethel B. Higgins, which reads like a ballad of an earlier ballad, with mentions of Davy Jones and the fisherfolk., and Norris Perlman's "Of sky and dad and me." An original use of this maritime colour is found in the poem by Gordon Ross, "The Sun is Flickering, Melodious.....":

With no course, no hope but sinking,
sifting aimless on, unguided,
the lame duck, once gleaming,
steaming,
is now bucking, rusted ruin.

But, lest one acquire a too restricted view of Maritime writing, there are poems for women's lib, poems of love, erotic verse, aesthetic verse, mystical and rebellious. Since it is the purpose of the editors to give young writers a chance to be heard "without subjecting (them) to that

invidious species of abdominal dissection known as literary criticism," little will be said on classifying or arranging these poems. Suffice it to say that here may be found writing to suit all tastes.

The small number of short stories make them easier to review. "Late Bloom" by Alberta Anderson concerns the coming, late in life, of love and companionship to a carnival worker. In her treatment of individual characters and her adherence to true and realistic speech, Mrs. Anderson displays as well as a knowledge of her subject, a devotion to her craft. J. Hendrie-Quinn's story I shot an arrow in the air" is a war story set upon an aircraft destroyer. There is a gradual and well-constructed buildup to the final irony in the end. "A Day In Autumn 1970" is a story of a day, a meeting, a girl during a coast-to-coast motorcycle trip. One is left with the correct impression that the journey is not over.

Fresh Grease is a book which is necessary if we are to promote the great literary potential which exists in the Maritimes. As the editors say: "tiny two-bit publications like this one give anyone who is interested the chance to express himself through an activity he finds important and necessary - writing the amateur writer, unlike the pro hockey player is concerned with the act of expression not winning play-off bonuses or being drafted by les Canadiens." Perhaps, then Fresh Grease is more than successful in what it sets out to do - to provide a vehicle for this expression.

Maritime literature is vital art. As Robert Vaison, in his poem "Picturesque Nova Scotia...once was," says it this tradition is not preserved

"enlightenment has come at last, from Ottawa office towers both shiny and drab. We lack industry, incentive, infrastructure. Imagine, But we shall soon be granted such blessings of modernity... Simply how could we have existed But the right future now lies at hand; no more will we be burdened with simple existence.

No more will disillusionment strike us in downtown Toronto; he found close at hand..."