

tionship with language, demonstrating with considerable finesse its ability to translate visual experiences and emotional landscapes into words. Key in this endeavour is the poet's invention with space, an obvious fascination. Her mastery here is breathtaking in its power of evocation. She may fly through it, returned from the dead on an electric crane (*Circus Stuff*), paint memory portraits with it (*Absent Space*), speed back and forth in time (*Dreaming of Mister Never*), or study its properties of definition (*The Little Fringes*). Space is the medium she employs to probe life's mysteries, to express her longings, to extol the world's marvels. Witness the joy of the "disguised fairy godmother" lamenting a youth twenty years gone:

*just watch me —  
I'm about to turn  
a million glittering  
cartwheels in milky  
outer skies and I'm  
rolling all the way  
up to eternity and  
I'm singing*

— "Old Age Blues"

Waddington's love poetry, perhaps her

strongest exposition of feminine strength and self-determination, provides some of the best examples of her unique 'translation.' Unabashed delight in sensual pleasures, the pain of unrequited love, and naked longings for departed love are subjects probed with insight and utter lack of pretension. Haunting echoes and remembered images from other works stalk these poems, imparting a spangled texture and depth intensified by the vibrancy of personal experience. These are the poems that disclose the woman with their dizzying sense of passion and underlying current of force. With pure beauty of image and sound the poet celebrates her lover:

*greenman beautiful  
moving across  
human words  
into spaced wides  
of light  
measured through  
forests of people  
in miles  
of branchy veins  
calculated  
by tallnesses  
of air  
greenmanbeautiful*

*beautiful  
beyond the light of western rivers  
torrential*

*freedom towering burst  
of the world's spring  
(moving wound  
in my side) deepness of  
grass riverdarkness*

*wakening*

— "Dream Telescope"

In her most recent works a sombre air prevails as the poet considers of dictates of old age and the inevitability of death in an ever-darkening world. However, her love of life surfaces — personified by the "serious apprentice" (*The Magician*) who asked to learn to fly over rooftops. The joyous spirit of the indomitable woman commands:

*Now lay aside your grief  
and wake the sleepy world,  
old child, infant lady —  
its yawn is purest gold.*

— "Wake-up Song"

*Miriam Waddington Collected Works* is a book about truth, a story of joy and pain, a marvellous gift to us, the poet's kaleidoscope extended.

## HOLDING THE POSE

Sharon Thesen. Toronto: The Coach House Press.

## SECOND NATURE

Libby Scheier. Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1986.

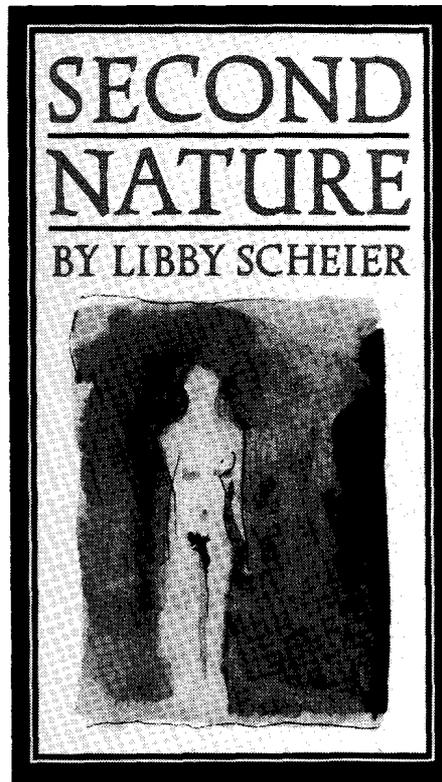
### Gail Fox

Both Libby Scheier and Sharon Thesen are gifted poets. Having read neither of their first books, I was shaken and delighted by Thesen's *Holding the Pose* and Scheier's *Second Nature*. What is so good about both of these poets is not only their keen perception of women dealing with men and vice versa but their use of language which far transcends the usual feminist writing in today's poetry.

In Thesen's poem, "Before Choice":

*Eliot's wasteland  
a busy, elegant stagecraft  
where bumblebees cruise fatly  
around the burning rhododendrons*

or "accordions of moonlit mountains" from "Season of No Bungling" the humour, intensity, and clarity of her imagery bring to mind all the private times I have had with men in which something always eludes me. (Is it my fault or theirs?) Thesen, however, makes such meetings



clearer. She is mainly concerned with the human scene and sums it up nicely:

*there is no sunset only twilight  
all the romance indoors  
all the scenery human.*

To Thesen's new book I owe a debt of gratitude. Not only is it exciting reading,

but it acquaints me somewhat more with "post-modern" poetry and its approach to man and nature.

Whereas Thesen focuses almost only on intimate relationships, Scheier also writes of childhood in McCarthy's America. The last thing, however, that Scheier's poetry is is "a political tract" (from a "Poem About Rape"). Her methods of shaping such events as rape can be summed up in the lines:

*Today the elephants are predominant  
they prance in casual fashion over  
hearts turning to stone.*

(Elephants, I)

Or her description of nature (Woman-kind) in "Five Meditations on Jungles":

*Jungles have intense light  
and intense darkness where beauty  
can exist in total secrecy  
unspoiled by versifiers and image-  
makers.*

*This is how it was intended to be.*

*For what's dark to remain dark.*

*For what's light to dazzle.*

Scheier's tone is angry, savage, then easy, colloquial. "It's great to be four years old and a cowboy." One of her best poems, I feel, is "Ethiopia" where one finds such lines as

*and hundreds of boney children, their  
skin wrapped around their joints like  
Hitler's lampshades.*

And I especially respond to the ending of

the final section:

*It was still morning and Jacob pulled me by the hand to the backyard and showed me that in the patch of soil we had not weeded and turned, morning*

*glories were blooming, bright blue morning glories and Jacob asked me what they were and I said, morning glories. Jacob said, I'm going to shake god's hand for putting all those glories*

*in our garden.*

Scheier is a poet of force and imagination. I am privileged to be in her company.

## FIREWEED: A FEMINIST QUARTERLY

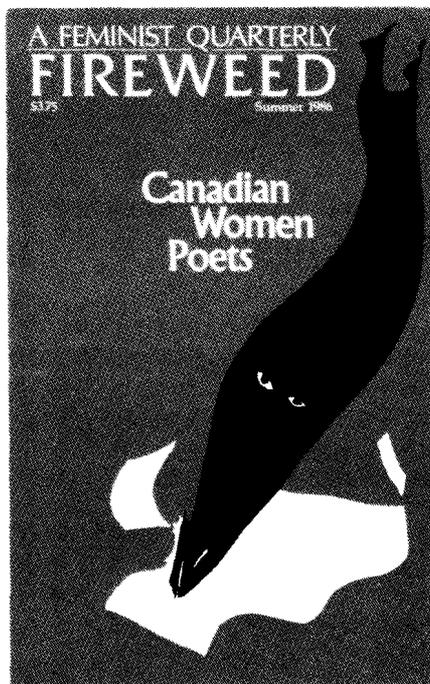
Issue 23 (Summer 1986). Available from Fireweed, P.O. Box 279, Toronto, Canada M5T 2W2.

### Nanci White

Despite the belief held by most of the contributors to this issue, that writing poetry is an intensely personal and individual activity, "that rare and wonderful state of being which I did not choose; yet joyfully, I am," the overall message of their unique feminist visions is one of solidarity. That even as we share with each the shape, obstacles and limits of her own experiences, past and present, there emerges a strong collective sense of the paramount value of action. Risk taking and singularity are seen as the prerequisites for the politically engaged social conscience. By nurturing autonomy they lay claim to dignity and self respect for those others whose circumstances leave them voiceless and faceless. "If I act not for myself, who shall act for me? And if I act for myself alone, what then am I? And if not now, when?"

Within a liberal tradition where moral sanctuary is often achieved by stuffing envelopes with protest literature, these writers emerge as tireless, outspoken critics of acceptable levels of indifference. In questioning their various cultures and backgrounds, with their not so subtle demands for conformity, resemblance and gratitude among women, they reject the easy answer of creating a personal sanctuary for escape. Instead, they tear away at satisfactions gained from struggles for self worth and entitlement, revealing the core of complacency in all of us, the truest enemy of commitment.

Carolyn Smart—responding to the editors' question addressed to the poets, individually, why they as women have chosen to write poetry sees herself as "forging a new tradition, one of strength and honesty." Poetry is the courage to tell, "opening the door and walking out into fresh air" as she phrases it in "What I've



Been Meaning To Say—Seven Years On." Claire Harris, also, rejects with her the notion that poetry is to be used merely as an instrument for revenging oneself or one's sex against the past, what Gwen Hauser calls "the unmaking of patriarchal language." It is the going ahead that requires poetic inspiration and sustenance. Harris asks, "What does it mean to be human? The details of oppression, however brutal or subtle, are not enough." In "Untitled", she observes "ten centuries jostle thinning air convince / of a future / what is human will rise again and again..."

But how adequate to these tasks is the language itself when "the surface commerce of words maintains the "status quo of power, deprivation and economy"? For Erin Mouré, it is women, themselves, "whose arms are the bones of the poem." Jean Yoon, while agreeing that "there are some things that poetry cannot accommodate," is fighting against the mainstream of "watery disconnected poems, heartless constructions, perfect and untouchable, poems that make women into icons..."

Given that the shallowness, discrimination and disorder of society are mirrored

by the superficiality of much current poetic expression, poetry remains a potent weapon for the dissection of self within culture's context. Anne Szumigalski's love for language has been the instrument which has set her imagination free. In her poetry, the ordinary, decent contracts of life, like the one to attend to the growth of living things, lovingly and freely, become heightened by a larger, more encompassing vision: "words after all are nothing more than beetles in the grass looking for a tall stem to climb, so as to see how far they have strayed from home. / quite far enough, they conclude and hasten down again."

On the level of relationships, individual loves and emotions have their pulses checked against a chart of universal psychic health: "I want to get in touch with my feelings," a friend says, in the poem "Departure" by Bronwen Wallace, "as if they lived elsewhere/ as if there were more than this, our real selves/ different from what we make of each other/ what we accept..." Even passion and rage offer opportunities for rare insights into the feminine condition, "the high of you like a cold rag against fever/ and when I stepped outside the house/ I did not rage/ I could perform simple tasks such as drunkenness/ could utter simple phrases such as yes I'm fine."

The poets whose work appears in this issue are united at the most profound level by the biological fact of femaleness. As Lorna Crozier states it: "As a woman I write because each poem is a naming. It discovers itself on the walls of the skull, the four rooms of the heart, the womb's dark curve. It moves onto the page through this woman's body, this way of seeing." Each voice searches out stories never heard as a child. Each gently or ironically reveals those other women whose stories have become a part of theirs. And each struggles with pain, "the one the heart knows, its small gut full of lead," as well as with joy: "So that you may dance my sister/ I build a floor for you."

The necessity for action is apparent, though not simple.