

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

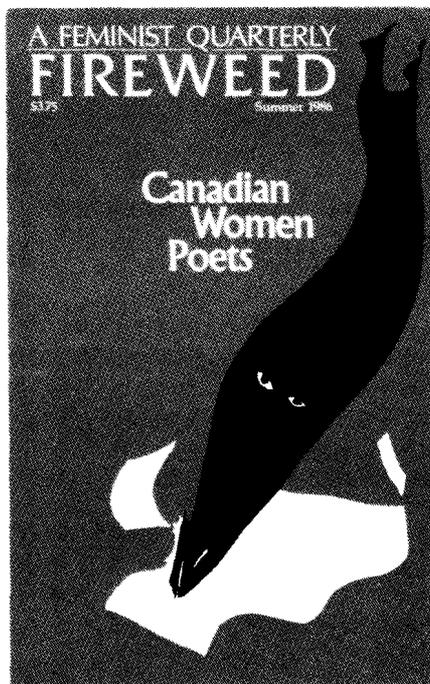
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### Nanci White

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.