

## Examination: April, 1993

Woman. O Woman. I've listened and watched  
For these many years and these fifteen weeks,  
So some of your voices and some of your faces  
I've heard and I've seen,  
And some of your feelings I've felt.

Around this long table, scattered with looks,  
You've flowered your thoughts,  
Some flaming with urgency, some tutored, some wise,  
And I never answered, O Woman, 'till now.  
I'm your veriest enemy, your mate through the ages:  
We fight and we union in everyday living.  
Your power's my weakness, my chance is your threat,  
But not at this table in this fifteen weeks:  
Here I'm fly on the wall  
And hole in the water, seeing and learning.

The course is on gender, you said when we started,  
Understanding gender,  
Which daily we swim through,  
Porpoises in gender.

Though I'm half the definer, in this room I'm disqualified:  
This is your table, your mind and your heart;  
This is your confidence, between Woman and self, internal,  
Exploring, engendering shapes for the future,  
Change from the past.

Here I am suffered if silent (here suffered by me most of all):  
Here we both cringe when we here Man's view and voice.  
Agree or reject, recoil or admire, I cannot be right here.  
Though identical thought is correct when you say it:  
You're okay here, and I am not okay.  
And that is quite okay here, 'till we go from this room.  
Truly, I'm grateful to learn through the silence.

Woman, O Woman: This whole time was one question  
For both you and me,  
For without you there's no Man,  
And without me there's no you.

Ungendered entities may move unencumbered,  
But as Woman and as Man, each defining the other,  
Our question has no separate asking.  
A question in parts, a question on levels:  
Where have we been? And where are we now?  
Why and where should we go, you and I?  
And how can we get there? What means should we use?  
I hear your question's parts; they are no different from my own.  
It's said that answer's implied in the posing;  
We'll see. Perhaps not soon, but we'll see.

Answer, as question, may come through on levels,  
Partial and differing, to reflect asker's viewpoint.  
For individual Woman, her soul and her body,  
For mind and cognition, for heart and for feeling,  
Answer surely must vary to  
Where have we been? and Where are we going?  
For close social ties, intimate joinings, and localized groups,  
And money and benefits, efforts and burdens,  
Answer will change to  
Why and where should we go?  
For polity's rights, matched obligations, duties  
Answer must alter to  
How can we get there?  
Above all, that answer will bend to the time span;  
Where we are, or should go, and using which methods—  
Does that mean this hour?  
Or this year? or in this generation?

Woman, you ask where you are now. O Woman.  
I hear you in fury describe your oppression:  
Physical fear and intimidations that Man does not have  
In bedroom and restaurant, night's street and day's dress.  
Man is the predator, or connives at the menace;  
Woman's the prey, or is prisoned by sex threat.  
Or man thinks you an object, a thing less than human,  
A creature of service,  
A subordinate entity.  
Or Man breaks you to parts, and pleasures by sections,  
By surface not substance, by aspect not whole.

All true. So I do. And so do you, O Woman.  
And man fears, too: the Tyger, in the forest of the night,  
No other than you and me,  
By bright-burning symmetry the most fearful predators

On all the world's beings, including ourselves and each other.  
Age-long predation is genetical habit,  
A trend deep and hard to re-channel for both of us,  
And prey that is larger, more complex  
Than bite-sized  
Must be eaten in pieces.  
So, each of the myriad times that I have preyed on you,  
You've preyed on Man;  
Each of the myriad times Man has used you by parts  
Or loved less than your whole,  
You've enjoyed Man by parts, seen and valued facet not all.  
Know we not, you and I.  
Which is better: part loving or loving whole?  
Right now, there's unfairness, and unequal power and worth:  
Dignity, resources are mostly in Man's hand;  
I am the Haver, and you are the Have-Not, O Woman,  
Succeedings dishonored in general by Man and discounted.  
So, now Woman rises to retake her powers,  
Restate her dignity,  
Equalize resource;  
Though Man will delay and resist, shift must happen,  
Since Woman's as good at predation as Man,  
And is hungrier.  
The fight is on-going, and have-nots stalk haves—  
Movements and strategies, victories, set-backs—  
And gendered 'difference'  
And gendered 'sameness' are brief mentifatures,  
Tools for ad-hoc use  
'Till the gender re-equation  
Comes closer to balance.  
O Woman: Can we get, you and I, where we're going,  
Where we should go, or want to, or must go?  
Conceding for now we may differ on details of goal and sub-goal,  
Of long-term objective, of ends that are proper  
To private, to group, and to social entirety,  
What means may we look to that honor the process?  
What methods, what techniques  
To speed change with least damage?  
It's fastest to say, when your heart's mashed hard by horror,  
When injustice and agony's immobile blue hotness  
Flashes to steam those very same tears  
That could

If they fell  
Bring a scalding relief,  
It's fastest to say then 'By *any* means necessary!'  
And who cares for the consequence.  
It's tempting to beat down, when you're rebuilding idea-space,  
Any wording or thinking that does not congrue:  
'Politically correct' or 'He just doesn't get it' —  
We've both heard the batterings  
That fall on expressions that impede installation  
Of new form and relations.  
More, there's near insult: 'Your consciousness is false  
Or needs raising; mine is true or advanced.'  
Individuals' knowing develops and changes (who doubts that),  
But no one says good growth ever came from a battering —  
Repression only,  
With resentment and furied reaction to follow.  
Bittered accusings and hardened assaults  
From the sharp extremities of discourse  
Reflect and refract that menace sent and received.  
We cannot resolve, you and I, in such barbed-steel fights,  
Because there is no common ground,  
Just burned out clay,  
Where dragons' teeth will grow in renewed conflict.  
Power differentials have always been, we know, in every polity;  
Ours provides mechanisms for this fight  
Between Woman and Man,  
And other fights as well, before and to come.  
If we bend the jungle bars today,  
Shattering glass in the sand-box, breaking the swings,  
Then where will our children play tomorrow, O Woman?  
Civility in argument, or rules for war, makes goal's attainment  
More effective and more permanent:  
Loser agrees and owns the change,  
As fairly, lawfully won  
(We are thus governed by our own consent);  
But deep embitterments at victory un-ruled  
Will drive the unconciliated to guerilla,  
Smoldering beneath winner's proud turf  
Until careful policing drowns.  
And, whoever's in the playground, some group of them will rule —  
Perhaps to benefit the many, more likely not:  
Rulers' power's used to advantage soon or late themselves.

Though rulers and their groups are regularly displaced,  
The fact of rulership and its self-serving use endures;  
So our higher playground rule effectuates a limit

On the ruler's use of power, sometimes by reserving  
From the ruling group's infringement substantial rights  
(As instance, the freedom to believe and speak),  
Sometimes by requiring due procedure  
In punishment and deprivation.

If you politicize such substantive and process rights,  
O Woman, to tilt the legal ground,  
Redress oppressions quickly, and oust the present ruler,  
Then you undermine the limits  
On next ruler's use of power.

Woman, O Woman, dearest enemy in tears and laughter,  
And fullest partner by definition:

Where have we been? And where are we now?

Why and what should we do, you and I?

And how can we do it? What means should we use?

Is answer implied in the question? Or is that an ancient fib?

I don't know,

But I feel surer now than I did fifteen weeks ago,

Because I was privileged to listen

To some of the voices

That speak across your heart,

A true substrate,

Which I do not understand

To be different from my own.

Anonymous

S. ELIZABETH MOORE

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Managing Committee  
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Dear Madame or Sir:

I am S. Elizabeth Moore, a third year law student at the University of New Mexico School of Law, Albuquerque, N.M. I saw your request for submissions to your journal and initially thought of sending in a paper I had written for class. However, something happened around the middle of July and I realized that the paper did not say what I wanted to share with the readers of your journal. I am a large framed African-American woman and I am all woman.

An Anglo-American woman in this community wrote a story and claimed that the story focused on an Anglo-American woman putting her life back together after she was raped by an African-American man. I read the story and tried to explain to a discussion group how this story merely embraced racism born from violence. Few of the Anglo-American women understood what I was saying, and one assaulted me in such a way I will never forget. When I spoke my voice wavered and tears filled my eyes; this thin, small-framed Anglo-American woman looked at me and said she was afraid of me. I was in shock. I asked why? She said because you sound so angry. I said this is not anger, this is the sound of pain—deep, deep pain. She then continued to say that “we” are such angry people and if “we” weren’t like that she wouldn’t be afraid. I asked if I were laying on the ground raped, beaten and bleeding would you be afraid of me then? Because that is the physical equivalent of what has happened to me.

What I want to say is that the inequality I suffer is so often at the hands of Anglo-American women. These women believe the lies of seemingly powerful Anglo-American men and discriminate against me out of fear.

Thank you for this opportunity to publish a very personal and important piece of work. Even if this piece does not get in I am glad there is a forum for “alternative” forms of expression.

Sincerely,

S. Elizabeth Moore