

# Words for Women: A Response

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## Job Equality

Their look at each other promises connection  
Beyond the gates they are approaching  
Huddled together against the cold of technology  
Which turned into code after the steel lost weight.  
Bright, open with wisdom and understanding  
They hold down their jobs against the zeros and ones  
They have, they look of access

That my own mother, ten years their senior,  
Obediently resigned  
But as I pass a second wave of early arrivals  
Quietly pointing to the casualness of real brotherhood  
I reconsider:  
That single group of well-groomed women  
Tidy up what casualness has reconfigured to demand



## Natural Mothers (To My Sister)

Your body didn't like giving birth  
Tired from the nine months and thirty-six hours of producing life  
It crashed you down in protest  
Recoiling at the prospect of bearing food  
It sent bacteria from one to the other of your breasts

And so yours joined those maternal bodies  
Who didn't like a sentence of natural eternity;  
Those on beds, permanently slowed down  
Those in beds, scratching at red inflammations and  
Those hiding faces under duvets, turned against the wall.

I remember picturing your husband  
Sweat pearling off his forehead, indecision  
How to spread himself between the need for care  
By one that he loved and one that was 'his'  
We did not know this person yet  
So my worry was for you.



## **Blaming the Feminists**

Bent over, her hands crumpled with water  
Burdened by the endless litany of work:  
You must, you have to, your duty

In the confessional space of doing the dishes  
She glances up sharply, eyes darting  
It's your fault, she says, believing the papers

Demanding my right to work  
See that I can never stop now.

## **Man Hating**

I am not going to hate you  
You are the water that quenches my thirst  
You offer the bed on which I may rest my head  
Your company provides the comfort in which to be.  
I am not going to hate you.  
And thus rejecting the words:  
All Men Are Pigs  
I embrace your modern rejection  
Of outdated masculinities.

## **On Hearing What the Judge Thought (Experiencing Violence)**

The verdict slapped me, left me  
Wordless, except one: Guilty  
I am – Guilty.  
Like asthma on my chest  
He held me down with silence  
My arms my hands something  
Struggling limply against darkening dawn  
It was beyond ability to consent  
And yet – it is my fault; I am guilty.  
No sign of force  
But I  
Was drunk and  
Wore a skirt  
And had agreed  
To me him.  
And so the verdict rings  
The shrill sound of a gaoler's bell:  
I am guilty myself.



**My Desire  
(Commodified Femininity)**

Noticing the red, I need  
Pretty like her, the dark hair  
Colour, hair colour, I want  
Cheek bones, Botox me

In the full-length mirror  
My frame is scarcely  
More than skeletal  
But I hear the voice

We all want  
I am too fat  
Lose weight  
Gain muscle  
Free your true self.

I recognise  
My desire does not  
Belong to me

My desire is his  
The shielded man  
He who has money  
I want

I want the red  
I recognise is not  
Mine and yet  
My desires are not.

**Magazine Speak  
(A Response)**

Despite what  
You seem  
To think  
This  
**Is not**  
What I  
Am



