



*OPEN LETTER:*

*Woman Against Violence  
Against Women*

by Sheri-D Wilson

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# OPEN LETTER: Woman Against Violence Against Women

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Sheri-D Wilson's latest book of poetry springs from a performance that she gave at a Calgary gallery exhibition in 2013 called *Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art*. This is in keeping with her international status as a spoken word poet and a social and cultural activist. She's also a fierce feminist, as Wilson makes clear in the first poem, whose title is the same as the book's title. The open letter is addressed to everyone, written by a warrior woman fighting against violence directed at women.

In another poem titled "Touchstone of Yoko Ono", Wilson describes how Ono the performance artist once invited audience members to cut off her clothing until she was sitting naked on the floor. This stunning act symbolized how "we cut, and we are cut / cut away/ washed away, everyday" and how the human race must find a way "to stop / full stop."

As Wilson's poem "Witch-Hunt Elegy" shows, violence against women is centuries old, and the bloody legacy continues in modern times. Other poems in the book mourn for the fourteen female students killed in the École Polytechnique massacre, the missing and murdered women from Vancouver's Eastside, the adolescent girls cyberbullied into suicide, and the assassinated Benazir Bhutto.

Yet women are not simply passive victims. In the touching and somewhat humorous poem "Exhibit C - Resistance", Wilson pays tribute to her Irish grandfather who taught

her how to defend herself in a fighting game called *I'm comin' at ya*. She later uses these skills to her advantage, as described in the autobiographical poems, "Kick Ass Waitress" and "Exhibit G - Hidden in Plain Sight". In the latter poem, her graphic depiction of her own sexual assault and the lingering trauma is painful to read, but in writing the poem, Wilson demonstrates that she's ultimately a survivor. Hopefully, someone reading the poem who's had a similar experience will also see herself in those terms, i.e., as a victor rather than a victim.

Near the end of the book, in a poem titled "Names", Wilson lists names men give to women to humiliate and dehumanize them - strumpet, courtesan, etc. In contrast, she offers this: "She thought, Holy Woman. Teacher. / Wise Woman." What's needed to right these wrongs are radically different ways of approaching gender relations. Only then will "Women heal women, heal women."

This book is an eloquent reminder that violence against women continues to this day, on a global scale. Fortunately, people like Sheri D-Wilson are fighting against it, with strong, moving words that leap off the page into the hearts and minds of readers, there to inspire, influence and stir to action.

Open Letter is recommended reading for fans of Sheri D-Wilson's poetry, as well as for anyone, female or male, who's concerned about women's rights, freedoms and overall well-being in a sometimes hostile world.