

Early Grrrl: The Early Poems of Marge Piercy

Marge Piercy

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Call it “No Byyys Allowed.” In this sampling from four now out-of-print volumes of her poetry, Marge Piercy has dedicated it to “grrrl” power, the we-are-woman roar of the zines and poetry slams generation, that is, for the daughters of the women who read *Fear of Flying*. It is a slender peg for a Pulitzer Prize nominee (for her most recent volume) to hang a collection on. Piercy has a casual potter’s wheel dash to her work. It only looks easy till you try to imitate it, and imitations abound. She has some throwaway lines. Some wobble and collapse with dated polemic (the first poem beginning “the man talks / the woman listens” is women’s collective smug justification). But between her lush gardening metaphors and the rainy skies of Nixon’s Vietnam, she can say something worth musing on:

Total defense

implies a dream of total surrender.

The landscape of poetry already has enough self-promoting billboards on it. For those who cannot live by Jewel’s liner notes alone—or Joni Mitchell’s—making the “I” of verse sing is a necessary thing. Like Margaret Atwood, whose controlled scathing humor she most resembles, and Adrienne Rich, Piercy is still at the battlements of poetry, exhorting and encouraging those to follow her footsteps.

LEETA TAYLOR (March / April 1999)

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