

THE POETICS IN THE NOVELS OF MARGE PIERCY

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Annotation: This thesis analyzes the poetics in the novels of Marge Piercy, with particular attention to how her literary strategies intertwine technology, identity, and social critique. Focusing on *He, She and It* (1991) and *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), the study explores Piercy's engagement with feminist, utopian, and dystopian traditions, as well as her use of cyborg figures as poetic metaphors that destabilize conventional boundaries between human and machine. By situating Piercy's work within the frameworks of feminist theory and posthuman discourse, the article demonstrates that her poetics illuminate both the liberatory and the coercive potentials of technological mediation in modern society.

Keywords: Marge Piercy, poetics, feminist utopia, dystopia, cyborg, posthumanism, identity, technology

Marge Piercy occupies a distinctive position in late twentieth-century American literature as a novelist who bridges political activism, feminist consciousness, and speculative imagination. Her fiction is not only concerned with narrative invention but also with the creation of poetic structures that interrogate power relations, gender roles, and technological transformations. To speak of Piercy's poetics is to recognize how she fuses lyrical imagery, metaphor, and narrative experimentation in order to dramatize tensions between freedom and control, utopia and dystopia, embodiment and technology. Her novels are thus not simply vehicles of speculative fiction but also complex poetic constructions that embed philosophical questions within the texture of language and story.

Woman on the Edge of Time (1976) is a seminal feminist utopian novel that stages a dialogue between dystopian present realities and utopian futures. The protagonist, Connie Ramos, is confined to a psychiatric institution in 1970s America, but through visions—or perhaps time travel—she experiences a future society marked by gender equality, ecological balance, and technological innovation. The poetics of this novel lies in its juxtaposition of registers: Piercy alternates stark, realistic descriptions of institutional control with luminous depictions of the utopian community of Mattapoisett. The lyrical, almost pastoral language used to describe the future contrasts with the bleak, clinical tone of the present, producing a dialectical poetics that conveys both despair and hope. Technology is figured as an ambivalent force: in Mattapoisett it enables freedom, reproductive choice, and collective flourishing, while in Connie's present it is aligned with surveillance, medical coercion, and patriarchal domination. Piercy thus crafts a poetics of contrast, one that forces the reader to recognize how language and imagery shape our perception of possibility.

If *Woman on the Edge of Time* dramatizes the utopian potential of technology, *He, She and It* (1991) provides a more explicitly cybernetic exploration of the human-machine interface. The novel centers

on Yod, a cyborg created to protect a small Jewish community in a near-future dystopia dominated by corporate powers. Piercy uses Yod's character not merely as a speculative device but as a poetic metaphor for the instability of identity and the permeability of the boundary between human and machine.

Piercy's poetics are also profoundly feminist. Her use of cyborg figures aligns with Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), where the cyborg is celebrated as a creature that destabilizes dichotomies such as male/female, natural/artificial, and human/machine. Piercy's fiction enacts this destabilization poetically: her metaphors consistently blur these oppositions, while her narrative voices foreground marginal, silenced, or oppressed perspectives. In both *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It*, female protagonists mediate the reader's experience of technological futures, and their subjectivity is articulated through prose that resists linear, monologic forms. Instead, Piercy often employs fragmented structures, interwoven mythologies, and dialogic exchanges that embody feminist poetics in both form and content.

Central to Piercy's poetic strategies is her attention to language itself as a site of struggle. In her dystopian settings, the language of authority—whether legal, medical, or corporate—is represented as rigid, reductionist, and dehumanizing. Against this, Piercy sets a counter-poetics of memory, storytelling, and metaphor. Connie's visions in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Yod's reflections in *He, She and It* exemplify how narrative can function as resistance, a way of preserving human dignity and imagining alternatives. Piercy demonstrates that language can serve as both a mechanism of domination and a tool for liberation.

In conclusion, her poetics consistently foreground the paradox of technology as both liberating and controlling. In *He, She and It*, Yod embodies this duality: he is at once a protector and a weapon, an individual capable of love and a product of instrumental rationality. Piercy's prose does not resolve this paradox but sustains it, crafting a poetics of ambivalence that mirrors the reader's own uncertainties about technology. Similarly, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the technologies of the utopian community—such as artificial wombs and egalitarian communication networks—invite reflection on how tools might be designed to serve justice rather than domination. Piercy thus situates her poetics at the intersection of hope and critique, insisting that the imagination of alternative futures must always acknowledge the risk of co-optation and control.

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