



# The Moon Is Always Female: Poems

*Marge Piercy*

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## **The Moon Is Always Female: Poems** Marge Piercy

“The poems in this volume fall into two parts. Hand Games, poems of the first section, is the daily bread of my past two years or so. They are the artifacts of loving in a personal way, of struggles in a wide and a narrower frame, of planting and harvesting in the earth and on paper, of building new friendships and mourning the death of friends. They speak of zucchini and oaks and cats, of jogging and writing, of nuclear power plants and suicide, of fat and of street hassling.

”The Lunar Cycle forms the second part. I first heard of the lunar calendar in my childhood, when I asked why Passover falls on a different date every year and was answered that it falls on Nisan 14, the fourteenth day of the lunar month of Nisan. The next time I came across the moon-month was in reading Robert Graves in search of the old goddess religions. But the lunar calendar has really only been an intimate part of my life since I moved near the ocean and the bay and had to become conscious of the tides; for one thing, to get the sweet Wellfleet oysters.

For more precise understanding I owe a lot to Nancy F. W. Passmore of the Luna Press, who every year produces The Lunar Calendar with thirteen months, their old Celtic names, associations from around the world, time of moon rise and set and all the phases. It tells me at a glance when my period will come and when I can expect to ovulate, and it is the most beautiful calendar I have ever seen, with the months in the form of spirals rather than grids.

”Not being constrained by commerce to produce a calendar to sell by January first, Roman time, I begin when my year opens, in the spring; with Nisan, the first month of the Jewish religious year – although I have used the Celtic names, as does The Lunar Calendar, in homage to that labor of love. Rediscovering the lunar calendar has been a part of rediscovering women’s past, but it has also meant for me a series of doorways to some of the non-rational aspects of being a living woman: Thus The Lunar Cycle, explorations of my last two years.”

## **The Moon Is Always Female: Poems Details**

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## **Andrea says**

Took me a while to warm up to this collection, but it did finally pick up speed. I love the abortion poems, especially those about the clinic workers. It makes the issue real by linking it to real people who don't have any medical stake in what's going on---they're just doing their jobs. Piercy's feminist tone is back again but softened in the decades after *To Be of Use*. Still love her, though!

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## **Patti says**

I am not usually a poetry reader but many of the poems in this book stopped me in my tracks. Marge Piercy knows how to get to the core of the matter and fully describes feelings and experiences I have had.

Here is an excerpt from *Morning Athletes*

"It is not the running I love, thump  
thump with my leaden feet that only  
infrequently are winged and prancing,  
but the light that glints off the cattails  
as the wind furrows them, the rum cherries  
reddening leaf and fruit, the way the pines  
blacken the sunlight on their bristles,  
the hawk flapping three times, then floating  
low over beige grasses,  
and your company  
as we trot, two friendly dogs leaving  
tracks in the sand. The geese call  
on the river wandering lost in sedges  
and we talk and pant, pant and talk  
in the morning early and busy together."

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## **rachel selene says**

"I want to say the names of my mothers  
like the stones of a path I am climbing  
rock by slippery rock into the mists.  
Never even at knife point have I wanted  
or been willing to be or become a man.  
I want only to be myself and free."

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## Michael says

Written at the start of the middle of Piercy's career, *The Moon Is Always Female* includes some of her strongest poems and many of her most meditative. The two-part collection refines the rawness of much of the poet's early work, dialing down its fury a bit and more carefully moving from image to image, poem to poem. It also develops the interest in Jewish identity, rituals, and faith that would come to define Piercy's verse as she aged.

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## Hope says

I came across this book at random at a local used book store. From the title, I expected, fluffly, trite, possibly pagan, probably feminist poetry. A confession - I looked at it to make fun of it. Instead, I found myself moved by the first poem I read. I flipped to another random page, sure that was a fluke. The next poem gripped my heart as well. I repeated that twice more before realizing that if I didn't buy the volume, I was going to sit myself down right there and read it in the store.

I took a long time to read this. I enjoyed being able to give each poem as much time and attention as it needed. I don't think this would be everybody's cup of tea, but I found it powerful, moving, and a joy to read.

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## Antonia says

a strong woman is... that poem alone helped me through a tough mental period, i turn to it every time that i feel that stress coming on again or when i see an other strong woman losing their footing on the world

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## Steven Godin says

A beautiful collection, if a little short, I really felt connected to her inner beliefs, and feelings. Not just as a poet, but as a person. I think she would make a great friend. The poems are a perfect blend of the gutsy and raw, the lyrical and the meditative. Some I felt the need to speak out aloud, I wanted to hear the words not just read them. She also conjures up such imagery and wonder, with a deep and concise mind, a touching human soul. A vast array of emotions was opened up. Very impressive.

An excerpt from the title poem -

"A woman is screaming and I hear her.  
A woman is bleeding and I see her  
bleeding from the mouth, the womb, the breasts  
in a fountain of dark blood of dismal  
daily tedious sorrow quite palatable  
to the taste of the mighty and taken for granted  
that the bread of domesticity be baked

of our flesh, that the hearth be built  
of our bones of animals kept for meat and milk,  
that we open and lie under and weep.  
I want to say over the names of my mothers  
like the stones of a path I am climbing  
rock by slippery rock into the mists.  
Never even at knife point have I wanted  
or been willing to be or become a man.  
I want only to be myself and free".

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### **Alison says**

If someone gives you a Marge Piercy book, it might be because they love you. If you find yourself welling up with tears with each passing page, it might be because you love them back. Thank you, Nammy.

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### **N says**

The title poem is one I've long loved and will continue to do so. I'd return to ten or so of the other poems in the collection. While many contain fine, surprising lines, there is a tendency to err on the overtly rhetorical side, which lessens the overall grace.

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### **Lyn says**

The poems are fantastic. I felt like we were soulmates.

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### **E. G. says**

Nearly every time I've gone to the bookstore, I've ended up with this book.

Our first meeting was a bit of an accident: I'd actually been looking for something by Sylvia Plath but got distracted by Piercy's title. That statement--the absoluteness--was wholly seductive, wholly haunting.

So, instead of buying it, I siphoned bits of its beauty, year after year. For five or so years this went on. No matter what or who I'd intended to buy, I'd come back to this, read enough to satiate myself and bid a fated adieu.

I guess I never bought the book because I enjoyed our clandestine affair. When I'd open it after not having seen it for weeks or months at a time, every word was more final. With just a few words, I'd get full and leave full, like the moon. But it almost felt wrong, buying it--stealing the moon away like that. I wanted to leave it there for someone else to happen upon, just in case.

The other day, though, it happened again. I found it, right where it'd always been, and thought, well.. maybe

it's really been waiting for me this whole time. And there's just no sense putting off the inevitable..

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### **Rhiannon Grant says**

A rich book of often feminist poetry. There's a reason this is a classic - there are some excellent poems here and very few weak ones. It's hard to pick a favourite, but here is the first stanza of 'For the young who want to', a poem to which I think I'll be returning: "Talent is what they say/ you have after the novel/ is published and favorably/ reviewed. Beforehand what/ you have is a tedious/ delusion, a hobby like knitting."

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### **Cynthia Egbert says**

The rating would actually be a 2.5 as the imagery is good. I really expected to love this collection but it was just too focused on the negative and it brought me down. My favourite poetry brings me to a quiet place of thinking and pondering but this brought me to a place of despair and that is not a collection that I am going to keep in my possession and visit again.

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### **Julie Ehlers says**

That's the stuff. So much wisdom and beauty here, and so much... recognition of the way life really is, if you're a woman, anyway. Favorites: "The Inside Chance" and (for more than 20 years now, and probably forever) "Right to Life."

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### **beau says**

To Have Without Holding  
Marge Piercy

Learning to love differently is hard,  
love with the hands wide open, love  
with the doors banging on their hinges,  
the cupboard unlocked, the wind  
roaring and whimpering in the rooms  
rustling the sheets and snapping the blinds  
that thwack like rubber bands  
in an open palm.

It hurts to love wide open  
stretching the muscles that feel  
as if they are made of wet plaster,  
then of blunt knives, then  
of sharp knives.

It hurts to thwart the reflexes  
of grab, of clutch; to love and let  
go again and again. It pesters to remember  
the lover who is not in the bed,  
to hold back what is owed to the work  
that gutters like a candle in a cave  
without air, to love consciously,  
conscientiously, concretely, constructively.

I can't do it, you say it's killing  
me, but you thrive, you glow  
on the street like a neon raspberry,  
You float and sail, a helium balloon  
bright bachelor's button blue and bobbing  
on the cold and hot winds of our breath,  
as we make and unmake in passionate  
diastole and systole the rhythm  
of our unbound bonding, to have  
and not to hold, to love  
with minimized malice, hunger  
and anger moment by moment balanced.

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