Classic Poetry Series

Marge Piercy

- poems -

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A Work of Artifice

The bonsai tree
in the attractive pot
could have grown eighty feet tall
on the side of a mountain
till split by lightning.
But a gardener
carefully pruned it.
It is nine inches high.
Every day as he
whittles back the branches
the gardener croons,
It is your nature
to be small and cozy,
domestic and weak;
how lucky, little tree,
to have a pot to grow in.
With living creatures
one must begin very early
to dwarf their growth:
the bound feet,
the crippled brain,
the hair in curlers,
the hands you
love to touch.

Marge Piercy

Always Unsuitable

She wore little teeth of pearls around her neck.
They were grinning politely and evenly at me.
Unsuitable they smirked. It is true

I look a stuffed turkey in a suit. Breasts
too big for the silhouette. She knew
at once that we had sex, lots of it

as if I had strolled into her diningroom
in a dirty negligee smelling gamy
smelling fishy and sporting a strawberry

on my neck. I could never charm
the mothers, although the fathers ogled
me. I was exactly what mothers had warned

their sons against. I was quicksand
I was trouble in the afternoon. I was
the alley cat you don't bring home.

I was the dirty book you don't leave out
for your mother to see. I was the center-
fold you masturbate with then discard.

Where I came from, the nights I had wandered
and survived, scared them, and where
I would go they never imagined.

Ah, what you wanted for your sons
were little ladies hatched from the eggs
of pearls like pink and silver lizards

cool, well behaved and impervious
to desire and weather alike. Mostly
that's who they married and left.

Oh, mamas, I would have been your friend.
I would have cooked for you and held you.
I might have rattled the windows

of your sorry marriages, but I would
have loved you better than you know
how to love yourselves, bitter sisters.

Marge Piercy

Attack of the Squash People

And thus the people every year
in the valley of humid July
did sacrifice themselves
to the long green phallic god
and eat and eat and eat.
They're coming, they're on us,
the long striped gourds, the silky
babies, the hairy adolescents,
the lumpy vast adults
like the trunks of green elephants.
Recite fifty zucchini recipes!

Zucchini tempura; creamed soup;
sauté with olive oil and cumin,
tomatoes, onion; frittata;
casserole of lamb; baked
topped with cheese; marinated;
stuffed; stewed; driven
through the heart like a stake.

Get rid of old friends: they too
have gardens and full trunks.
Look for newcomers: befriend
them in the post office, unload
on them and run. Stop tourists
in the street. Take truckloads
to Boston. Give to your Red Cross.
Beg on the highway: please
take my zucchini, I have a crippled
mother at home with heartburn.

Sneak out before dawn to drop
them in other people's gardens,
in baby buggies at churchdoors.
Shot, smuggling zucchini into
mailboxes, a federal offense.

With a suave reptilian glitter
you bask among your raspy
fronds sudden and huge as
alligators. You give and give
too much, like summer days
limp with heat, thunderstorms
bursting their bags on our heads,
as we salt and freeze and pickle
for the too little to come.

Marge Piercy

Barbie Doll

This girlchild was born as usual
and presented dolls that did pee-pee
and miniature GE stoves and irons
and wee lipsticks the color of cherry candy.
Then in the magic of puberty, a classmate said:
You have a great big nose and fat legs.

She was healthy, tested intelligent,
possessed strong arms and back,
abundant sexual drive and manual dexterity.
She went to and fro apologizing.
Everyone saw a fat nose on thick legs.

She was advised to play coy,
exhorted to come on hearty,
exercise, diet, smile and wheedle.
Her good nature wore out
like a fan belt.
So she cut off her nose and her legs
and offered them up.

In the casket displayed on satin she lay
with the undertaker's cosmetics painted on,
a turned-up putty nose,
dressed in a pink and white nightie.
Doesn't she look pretty? everyone said.
Consummation at last.
To every woman a happy ending.

Anonymous submission.

Marge Piercy

Belly Good

A heap of wheat, says the Song of Songs
but I've never seen wheat in a pile.
Apples, potatoes, cabbages, carrots
make lumpy stacks, but you are sleek
as a seal hauled out in the winter sun.
I can see you as a great goose egg
or a single juicy and fully ripe peach.
You swell like a natural grassy hill.
You are symmetrical as a Hopewell mound,
with the eye of the navel wide open,
the eye of my apple, the pear's port
window. You're not supposed to exist
at all this decade. You're to be flat
as a kitchen table, so children with
roller skates can speed over you
like those sidewalks of my childhood
that each gave a different roar under
my wheels. You're required to show
muscle striations like the ocean
sand at ebb tide, but brick hard.
Clothing is not designed for women
of whose warm and flagrant bodies
you are a swelling part. Yet I confess
I meditate with my hands folded on you,
a maternal cushion radiating comfort.
Even when I have been at my thinnest,
you have never abandoned me but curled
round as a sleeping cat under my skirt.
When I spread out, so do you. You like
to eat, drink and bang on another belly.
In anxiety I clutch you with nervous fingers
as if you were a purse full of calm.
In my grandmother standing in the fierce sun
I see your cauldron that held eleven children
shaped under the tent of her summer dress.
I see you in my mother at thirty
in her flapper gear, skinny legs
and then you knocking on the tight dress.
We hand you down like a prize feather quilt.
You are our female shame and sunburst strength.

Marge Piercy

Colors Passing Through Us

Purple as tulips in May, mauve
into lush velvet, purple
as the stain blackberries leave
on the lips, on the hands,
the purple of ripe grapes
sunlit and warm as flesh.
Every day I will give you a color,
like a new flower in a bud vase
on your desk. Every day
I will paint you, as women
color each other with henna
on hands and on feet.

Red as henna, as cinnamon,
as coals after the fire is banked,
the cardinal in the feeder,
the roses tumbling on the arbor
their weight bending the wood
the red of the syrup I make from petals.

Orange as the perfumed fruit
hanging their globes on the glossy tree,
orange as pumpkins in the field,
orange as butterflyweed and the monarchs
who come to eat it, orange as my
cat running lithe through the high grass.

Yellow as a goat's wise and wicked eyes,
yellow as a hill of daffodils,
yellow as dandelions by the highway,
yellow as butter and egg yolks,
yellow as a school bus stopping you,
yellow as a slicker in a downpour.

Here is my bouquet, here is a sing
song of all the things you make
me think of, here is oblique
praise for the height and depth
of you and the width too.
Here is my box of new crayons at your feet.

Green as mint jelly, green
as a frog on a lily pad twanging,
the green of cos lettuce upright
about to bolt into opulent towers,
green as Grand Chartreuse in a clear
glass, green as wine bottles.

Blue as cornflowers, delphiniums,
bachelors' buttons. Blue as Roquefort,
blue as Saga. Blue as still water.
Blue as the eyes of a Siamese cat.

Blue as shadows on new snow, as a spring
azure sipping from a puddle on the blacktop.

Cobalt as the midnight sky
when day has gone without a trace
and we lie in each other's arms
eyes shut and fingers open
and all the colors of the world
pass through our bodies like strings of fire.

Marge Piercy

For the Young Who Want To

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.

Work is what you have done
after the play is produced
and the audience claps.
Before that friends keep asking
when you are planning to go
out and get a job.

Genius is what they know you
had after the third volume
of remarkable poems. Earlier
they accuse you of withdrawing,
ask why you don't have a baby,
call you a bum.

The reason people want M.F.A.'s,
take workshops with fancy names
when all you can really
learn is a few techniques,
typing instructions and some-
body else's mannerisms

is that every artist lacks
a license to hang on the wall
like your optician, your vet
proving you may be a clumsy sadist
whose fillings fall into the stew
but you're certified a dentist.

The real writer is one
who really writes. Talent
is an invention like phlogiston
after the fact of fire.
Work is its own cure. You have to
like it better than being loved.

Marge Piercy

Implications of One Plus One

Sometimes we collide, tectonic plates merging,
continents shoving, crumpling down into the molten
veins of fire deep in the earth and raising
tons of rock into jagged crests of Sierra.

Sometimes your hands drift on me, milkweed's
airy silk, wingtip's feathery caresses,
our lips grazing, a drift of desires gathering
like fog over warm water, thickening to rain.

Sometimes we go to it heartily, digging,
burrowing, grunting, tossing up covers
like loose earth, nosing into the other's
flesh with hot nozzles and wallowing there.

Sometimes we are kids making out, silly
in the quilt, tickling the xylophone spine,
blowing wet jokes, loud as a whole
slumber party bouncing till the bed breaks.

I go round and round you sometimes, scouting,
blundering, seeking a way in, the high boxwood
maze I penetrate running lungs bursting
toward the fountain of green fire at the heart.

Sometimes you open wide as cathedral doors
and yank me inside. Sometimes you slither
into me like a snake into its burrow.
Sometimes you march in with a brass band.

Ten years of fitting our bodies together
and still they sing wild songs in new keys.
It is more and less than love: timing,
chemistry, magic and will and luck.

One plus one equal one, unknowable except
in the moment, not convertible into words,
not explicable or philosophically interesting.
But it is. And it is. And it is. Amen.

Marge Piercy

My Mother's Body

1.

The dark socket of the year
the pit, the cave where the sun lies down
and threatens never to rise,
when despair descends softly as the snow
covering all paths and choking roads:

then hawkfaced pain seized you
threw you so you fell with a sharp
cry, a knife tearing a bolt of silk.
My father heard the crash but paid
no mind, napping after lunch

yet fifteen hundred miles north
I heard and dropped a dish.
Your pain sunk talons in my skull
and crouched there cawing, heavy
as a great vessel filled with water,

oil or blood, till suddenly next day
the weight lifted and I knew your mind
had guttered out like the Chanukah
candles that burn so fast, weeping
veils of wax down the chanukiya.

Those candles were laid out,
friends invited, ingredients bought
for latkes and apple pancakes,
that holiday for liberation
and the winter solstice

when tops turn like little planets.
Shall you have all or nothing
take half or pass by untouched?
Nothing you got, Nun said the dreydl
as the room stopped spinning.

The angel folded you up like laundry
your body thin as an empty dress.
Your clothes were curtains
hanging on the window of what had
been your flesh and now was glass.

Outside in Florida shopping plazas
loudspeakers blared Christmas carols
and palm trees were decked with blinking
lights. Except by the tourist
hotels, the beaches were empty.

Pelicans with pregnant pouches
flapped overhead like pterodactyls.

In my mind I felt you die.
First the pain lifted and then
you flickered and went out.

2.

I walk through the rooms of memory.
Sometimes everything is shrouded in dropcloths,
every chair ghostly and muted.

Other times memory lights up from within
bustling scenes acted just the other side
of a scrim through which surely I could reach

my fingers tearing at the flimsy curtain
of time which is and isn't and will be
the stuff of which we're made and unmade.

In sleep the other night I met you, seventeen
your first nasty marriage just annulled,
thin from your abortion, clutching a book

against your cheek and trying to look
older, trying to took middle class,
trying for a job at Wanamaker's,

dressing for parties in cast off
stage costumes of your sisters. Your eyes
were hazy with dreams. You did not

notice me waving as you wandered
past and I saw your slip was showing.
You stood still while I fixed your clothes,

as if I were your mother. Remember me
combing your springy black hair, ringlets
that seemed metallic, glittering;

remember me dressing you, my seventy year
old mother who was my last dollbaby,
giving you too late what your youth had wanted.

3.

What is this mask of skin we wear,
what is this dress of flesh,
this coat of few colors and little hair?

This voluptuous seething heap of desires
and fears, squeaking mice turned up

in a steaming haystack with their babies?

This coat has been handed down, an heirloom
this coat of black hair and ample flesh,
this coat of pale slightly ruddy skin.

This set of hips and thighs, these buttocks
they provided cushioning for my grandmother
Hannah, for my mother Bert and for me

and we all sat on them in turn, those major
muscles on which we walk and walk and walk
over the earth in search of peace and plenty.

My mother is my mirror and I am hers.
What do we see? Our face grown young again,
our breasts grown firm, legs lean and elegant.

Our arms quivering with fat, eyes
set in the bark of wrinkles, hands puffy,
our belly seamed with childbearing,

Give me your dress that I might try it on.
Oh it will not fit you mother, you are too fat.
I will not fit you mother.

I will not be the bride you can dress,
the obedient dutiful daughter you would chew,
a dog's leather bone to sharpen your teeth.

You strike me sometimes just to hear the sound.
Loneliness turns your fingers into hooks
barbed and drawing blood with their caress.

My twin, my sister, my lost love,
I carry you in me like an embryo
as once you carried me.

4.

What is it we turn from, what is it we fear?
Did I truly think you could put me back inside?
Did I think I would fall into you as into a molten
furnace and be recast, that I would become you?

What did you fear in me, the child who wore
your hair, the woman who let that black hair
grow long as a banner of darkness, when you
a proper flapper wore yours cropped?

You pushed and you pulled on my rubbery

flesh, you kneaded me like a ball of dough.
Rise, rise, and then you pounded me flat.
Secretly the bones formed in the bread.

I became willful, private as a cat.
You never knew what alleys I had wandered.
You called me bad and I posed like a gutter
queen in a dress sewn of knives.

All I feared was being stuck in a box
with a lid. A good woman appeared to me
indistinguishable from a dead one
except that she worked all the time.

Your payday never came. Your dreams ran
with bright colors like Mexican cottons
that bled onto the drab sheets of the day
and would not bleach with scrubbing.

My dear, what you said was one thing
but what you sang was another, sweetly
subversive and dark as blackberries
and I became the daughter of your dream.

This body is your body, ashes now
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,
my throat, my thighs. You run in me
a tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,

you sing in my mind like wine. What you
did not dare in your life you dare in mine.

Marge Piercy

The Cat's Song

Mine, says the cat, putting out his paw of darkness.
My lover, my friend, my slave, my toy, says
the cat making on your chest his gesture of drawing
milk from his mother's forgotten breasts.

Let us walk in the woods, says the cat.
I'll teach you to read the tabloid of scents,
to fade into shadow, wait like a trap, to hunt.
Now I lay this plump warm mouse on your mat.

You feed me, I try to feed you, we are friends,
says the cat, although I am more equal than you.
Can you leap twenty times the height of your body?
Can you run up and down trees? Jump between roofs?

Let us rub our bodies together and talk of touch.
My emotions are pure as salt crystals and as hard.
My lusts glow like my eyes. I sing to you in the mornings
walking round and round your bed and into your face.

Come I will teach you to dance as naturally
as falling asleep and waking and stretching long, long.
I speak greed with my paws and fear with my whiskers.
Envy lashes my tail. Love speaks me entire, a word

of fur. I will teach you to be still as an egg
and to slip like the ghost of wind through the grass.

Marge Piercy

The Friend

We sat across the table.
he said, cut off your hands.
they are always poking at things.
they might touch me.
I said yes.

Food grew cold on the table.
he said, burn your body.
it is not clean and smells like sex.
it rubs my mind sore.
I said yes.

I love you, I said.
That's very nice, he said
I like to be loved,
that makes me happy.
Have you cut off your hands yet?

Marge Piercy

The Morning Half-Life Blues

Girls buck the wind in the grooves toward work
in fuzzy coats promised to be warm as fur.
The shop windows snicker
flashing them hurrying over dresses they cannot afford:
you are not pretty enough, not pretty enough.

Blown with yesterday's papers through the boiled coffee morning
we dream of the stop on the subway without a name,
the door in the heart of the grove of skyscrapers,
that garden where we nestle to the teats of a furry world,
lie in mounds of peony eating grapes,
and need barter ourselves for nothing.
not by the hour, not by the pound, not by the skinful,
that party to which no one will give or sell us the key
though we have all thought briefly we found it
drunk or in bed.

Black girls with thin legs and high necks stalking like herons,
plump girls with blue legs and green eyelids and
strawberry breasts,
swept off to be frozen in fluorescent cubes,
the vacuum of your jobs sucks your brains dry
and fills you with the ooze of melted comics.
Living is later. This is your rented death.
You grasp at hard commodities and vague lusts
to make up, to pay for each day
which opens like a can and is empty, and then another,
afternoons like dinosaur eggs stuffed with glue.

Girls of the dirty morning, ticketed and spent,
you will be less at forty than at twenty.
Your living is a waste product of somebody's mill.
I would fix you like buds to a city where people work
to make and do things necessary and good,
where work is real as bread and babies and trees in parks
where we would all blossom slowly and ripen to sound fruit.

Anonymous submission.

Marge Piercy

The Neighbor

Man stomping over my bed in boots
carrying a large bronze church bell
which you occasionally drop:
gross man with iron heels
who drags coffins to and fro at four in the morning,
who hammers on scaffolding all night long,
who entertains sumo wrestlers and fat acrobats--
I pass you on the steps, we smile and nod.
Rage swells in me like gas.
Now rage too keeps me awake.

Marge Piercy

The Woman in the Ordinary

The woman in the ordinary pudgy downcast girl
is crouching with eyes and muscles clenched.
Round and pebble smooth she effaces herself
under ripples of conversation and debate.
The woman in the block of ivory soap
has massive thighs that neigh,
great breasts that blare and strong arms that trumpet.
The woman of the golden fleece
laughs uproariously from the belly
inside the girl who imitates
a Christmas card virgin with glued hands,
who fishes for herself in other's eyes,
who stoops and creeps to make herself smaller.
In her bottled up is a woman peppery as curry,
a yam of a woman of butter and brass,
compounded of acid and sweet like a pineapple,
like a handgrenade set to explode,
like goldenrod ready to bloom.

Marge Piercy

To Be of Use

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

Marge Piercy

To the Pay Toilet

You strop my anger, especially
when I find you in restaurant or bar
and pay for the same liquid, coming and going.
In bus depots and airports and turnpike plazas
some woman is dragging in with three kids hung off her
shrieking their simple urgency like gulls.
She's supposed to pay for each of them
and the privilege of not dirtying the corporate floor.
Sometimes a woman in a uniform's on duty
black or whatever the prevailing bottom is
getting thirty cents an hour to make sure
no woman sneaks her full bladder under a door.
Most blatantly you shout that waste of resources
for the greatest good of the smallest number
where twenty pay toilets line up glinty clean
and at the end of the row one free toilet
oozes from under its crooked door,
while a row of weary women carrying packages and babies
wait and wait and wait to do
what only the dead find unnecessary.

Marge Piercy

Toad Dreams

That afternoon the dream of the toads
rang through the elms by Little River
and affected the thoughts of men,
though they were not conscious that
they heard it.--Henry Thoreau

The dream of toads: we rarely
credit what we consider lesser
life with emotions big as ours,
but we are easily distracted,
abstracted. People sit nibbling
before television's flicker watching
ghosts chase balls and each other
while the skunk is out risking grisly
death to cross the highway to mate;
while the fox scales the wire fence
where it knows the shotgun lurks
to taste the sweet blood of a hen.
Birds are greedy little bombs
bursting to give voice to appetite.
I had a cat who died of love.
Dogs trail their masters across con-
tinents. We are far too busy
to be starkly simple in passion.
We will never dream the intense
wet spring lust of the toads.

Marge Piercy

Traveling Dream

I am packing to go to the airport
but somehow I am never packed.
I keep remembering more things
I keep forgetting.

Secretly the clock is bolting
forward ten minutes at a click
instead of one. Each time
I look away, it jumps.

Now I remember I have to find
the cats. I have four cats
even when I am asleep.
One is on the bed and I slip

her into the suitcase.
One is under the sofa. I
drag him out. But the tabby
in the suitcase has vanished.

Now my tickets have run away.
Maybe the cat has my tickets.
I can only find one cat.
My purse has gone into hiding.

Now it is time to get packed.
I take the suitcase down.
There is a cat in it but no clothes.
My tickets are floating in the bath

tub full of water. I dry them.
One cat is in my purse
but my wallet has dissolved.
The tickets are still dripping.

I look at the clock as it leaps
forward and see I have missed
my plane. My bed is gone now.
There is one cat the size of a sofa.

Marge Piercy

Visiting a Dead Man on a Summer Day

In flat America, in Chicago,
Graceland cemetery on the German North Side.
Forty feet of Corinthian candle
celebrate Pullman embedded
lonely raisin in a cake of concrete.
The Potter Palmers float
in an island parthenon.
Barons of hogfat, railroads and wheat
are postmarked with angels and lambs.

But the Getty tomb: white, snow patterned
in a triangle of trees swims dappled with leaf shadow,
sketched light arch within arch
delicate as fingernail moons.

The green doors should not be locked.
Doors of fern and flower should not be shut.
Louis Sullivan, I sit on your grave.
It is not now good weather for prophets.
Sun eddies on the steelsmoke air like sinking honey.

On the inner green door of the Getty tomb
(a thighbone's throw from your stone)
a marvel of growing, blooming, thrusting into seed:
how all living wreathe and insinuate
in the circlet of repetition that never repeats:
ever new birth never rebirth.
Each tide pool microcosm spiraling from your hand.

Sullivan, you had another five years
when your society would give you work.
Thirty years with want crackling in your hands.
Thirty after years with cities
flowering and turning grey in your beard.

All poets are unemployed nowadays.
My country marches in its sleep.
The past structures a heavy mausoleum
hiding its iron frame in masonry.
Men burn like grass
while armies grow.

Thirty years in the vast rumbling gut
of this society you stormed
to be used, screamed
no louder than any other breaking voice.
The waste of a good man
bleeds the future that's come
in Chicago, in flat America,
where the poor still bleed from the teeth,
housed in sewers and filing cabinets,
where prophets may spit into the wind

till anger sleets their eyes shut,
where this house that dances the seasons
and the braid of all living
and the joy of a man making his new good thing
is strange, irrelevant as a meteor,
in Chicago, in flat America
in this year of our burning.

Marge Piercy

What Are Big Girls Made Of?

The construction of a woman:
a woman is not made of flesh
of bone and sinew
belly and breasts, elbows and liver and toe.
She is manufactured like a sports sedan.
She is retooled, refitted and redesigned
every decade.
Cecile had been seduction itself in college.
She wriggled through bars like a satin eel,
her hips and ass promising, her mouth pursed
in the dark red lipstick of desire.

She visited in '68 still wearing skirts
tight to the knees, dark red lipstick,
while I danced through Manhattan in mini skirt,
lipstick pale as apricot milk,
hair loose as a horse's mane. Oh dear,
I thought in my superiority of the moment,
whatever has happened to poor Cecile?
She was out of fashion, out of the game,
disqualified, disdained, dis-
membered from the club of desire.

Look at pictures in French fashion
magazines of the 18th century:
century of the ultimate lady
fantasy wrought of silk and corseting.
Paniers bring her hips out three feet
each way, while the waist is pinched
and the belly flattened under wood.
The breasts are stuffed up and out
offered like apples in a bowl.
The tiny foot is encased in a slipper
never meant for walking.
On top is a grandiose headache:
hair like a museum piece, daily
ornamented with ribbons, vases,
grottoes, mountains, frigates in full
sail, balloons, baboons, the fancy
of a hairdresser turned loose.
The hats were rococo wedding cakes
that would dim the Las Vegas strip.
Here is a woman forced into shape
rigid exoskeleton torturing flesh:
a woman made of pain.

How superior we are now: see the modern woman
thin as a blade of scissors.
She runs on a treadmill every morning,
fits herself into machines of weights
and pulleys to heave and grunt,
an image in her mind she can never

approximate, a body of rosy
glass that never wrinkles,
never grows, never fades. She
sits at the table closing her eyes to food
hungry, always hungry:
a woman made of pain.

A cat or dog approaches another,
they sniff noses. They sniff asses.
They bristle or lick. They fall
in love as often as we do,
as passionately. But they fall
in love or lust with furry flesh,
not hoop skirts or push up bras
rib removal or liposuction.
It is not for male or female dogs
that poodles are clipped
to topiary hedges.

If only we could like each other raw.
If only we could love ourselves
like healthy babies burbling in our arms.
If only we were not programmed and reprogrammed
to need what is sold us.
Why should we want to live inside ads?
Why should we want to scourge our softness
to straight lines like a Mondrian painting?
Why should we punish each other with scorn
as if to have a large ass
were worse than being greedy or mean?

When will women not be compelled
to view their bodies as science projects,
gardens to be weeded,
dogs to be trained?
When will a woman cease
to be made of pain?

Marge Piercy

Winter Promises

Tomatoes rosy as perfect baby's buttocks,
eggplants glossy as waxed fenders,
purple neon flawless glistening
peppers, pole beans fecund and fast
growing as Jack's Viagra-sped stalk,
big as truck tire zinnias that mildew
will never wilt, roses weighing down
a bush never touched by black spot,
brave little fruit trees shouldering up
their spotless ornaments of glass fruit:

I lie on the couch under a blanket
of seed catalogs ordering far
too much. Sleet slides down
the windows, a wind edged
with ice knifes through every crack.
Lie to me, sweet garden-mongers:
I want to believe every promise,
to trust in five pound tomatoes
and dahlias brighter than the sun
that was eaten by frost last week.

Marge Piercy