

Johnson was convinced that the Congressmen who opposed him on the war were being fed speeches by the Russian embassy.

When Goldman began writing this book, he intended (he says) to make it a brief one. It's unfortunate that this first plan did not prevail. He had about 100 pages—not 531—of fresh, interesting material to give us. The rest is worth very little.

Breaking Camp

MARDGE PIERCY

Wesleyan University Press, \$2 paper

RICHARD M. ELMAN

It takes courage to break camp. As the pun implies, not only must one make a hopeful new departure, but one must also put a finish to easy cool, the cynical, the modish, to believe anew in language as thought and feeling, in metaphor as possibility. Breaking camp, in short, affirms poetry and, by extension, life.

Mardge Piercy's are courageous poems. Although they know that words like Peace lie "like a smooth turd/on the tongues of politicians ordering/the sweet flesh seared on the staring bone," they affirm—through metaphor—the human need (hope) lurking behind such manipulated vagueries. "We are fat and busy as maggots," they declare, without a hint of smug celebration to such a declaration. Intense, pained, they express the wonderment that "in my name they are stealing from people with nothing/their slim bodies. When did I hire these assassins?"

These lines appear in an unpatriotic ode entitled "The Peaceable Kingdom" which is inspired by the 19th-century primitive American painting of animals

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and men on a landscape by Edward Hicks that hangs in the Brooklyn Museum. In Mardge Piercy's poem the men have turned vicious, the gentle animals have died off, and the landscape stinks of death and waste:

We glitter and spark righteousness.

We are blinding as a new car in the sunshine.

Gasoline rains from our fluffy clouds.

Everywhere our evil froths polluting the waters—

in what streams on what mountain

do you miss the telltale redbrown

sludge and rim of suds?

"When did I hire these killers?" the poet asks again. "Eating steak in a suave restaurant? . . . sweating like a melon in bed?" Punctuated by such phrases, her poem is alive to anger; its verbal beauty illuminates—like a flare—the dark squalors of a moribund social order bent on its own destruction. Perhaps the poem could not have been written, if not for Vietnam, but its judgments are aware of a larger, darker history; it takes account of what went on before and what may come to be: "This nation is founded on blood like a city on swamps/yet its dream has been beautiful and sometimes just/that now grows brutal and heavy like a burned out star."

The strength of such a statement doesn't mean that Mardge Piercy is only capable of riding the hobby-horse of her indignation. For a first collection the range of these poems is wide, the means varied: poems about love, trust, comradeship; celebrations of animals, objects as parts of the real world she inhabits; they are in short and long lines, free and regular meters, using internal rhymes, or no rhymes at all. Where others seem intolerant, she is compassionate. Where others give way to a fashionable despair, she hopes by doing and observing. To her mathematician husband, Mrs. Piercy writes: "In the living room you are someplace else like a cat./You go fathoms down into abstraction/where the pressure and the cold would squeeze the juice from my tissues." "The young are mirror sleek," she declares, in *Girl Watching II*. "They pass through each other unspashing/

where you or I would be flattened like
a dried skate/hung up for sale." And,
in a memorial to a poet friend, she dis-
plays wit and wisdom:

Loss of control smashes.

Skill looks organic.

But poems do not

(outside of Gaelic)

Kill: or save.

Mardge Piercy's poetry begins with
despair because it is concerned with
making revolutionary statements. It
speaks for the revolution of courage
and concern, recognizing that self-love
is best bestowed through action. Or, as
she puts it, in a poem entitled the
184th Demonstration:

What we do is not beautiful

hurts no one makes no one desperate

we do not break the panes of safety

glass

stretching between people on the

street

and the deaths they hire

Tomorrow is the 185th

Demonstration

will you be there?

of course.