

READING COMPANION

Girldom, by Megan Peak

Sample poem:

Daughters

One paces the floor, footsteps light as salt.
Another stacks stones, builds a pebbled catacomb.
One of them unstrings a necklace and counts
the pearls. One shines like pomegranate flesh
in a storm. There's one the shape of a pistol, and one
like a mouth. There's a girl walking to the window
with a moth in her pocket. You hold one made of copper.
Of sand. Of yellowed cloth. You watch one dive
into a well, her daddy's belt around her waist.
Already there's one leaving home and one without a face.
One hides under the snow's bold dress. Another in a lock
of hair. This girl is a kind of tornado in the spring, gripping
hard the fur of a rabbit's nape. You call to one
who's picking foxglove, who's jumping the fence.
Sometimes you hear one in the attic making spider webs.
Or slipping currants, like dark coins, under her tongue.
There's one who sits in a field – blue grass rising
around her like fever. But you christen the one who burns
through dirt like a steel hoof. The girl who shears
her long braid to fatten the fire. You don't call that one *luna*.
You call her light from a dead, dead place.

Questions to consider:

1. How does naming and the name one is given (or gives to oneself) appear in these poems, and change throughout the book? What is the relationship between the name and the self, in this collection?
2. Many of these poems contain places (cities, bodies of water, the suburbs). What is the significance of these places? Find at least three examples, with different meanings.
3. Does the speaker's view of "girldom" change through the collection? How? Consider a poem from the beginning of the collection, "Once Full of Trees" and a poem toward the end, "Wasp & Nettle."
4. What are some themes in *Girldom*, in addition to coming of age as a female? Which poems highlight these themes?
5. Discuss the change in tone between the beginning of the collection and the end, using the poems "Girldom as Lady Macbeth" and "Riddance:".
6. Why do you think the collection is broken into three sections? Consider especially the first and last poems of each section. What effect does this have on the reader?
7. Where are some of the places in this collection that Peak looks at cycles of birth, death, and rebirth?
8. *Girldom* uses many metaphors for the female body. What are some of the recurring metaphors, and why do you think the poet chose them? How are they related to cultural ideas about girldom, or how do they bring a fresh perspective to girldom?

Writing prompts:

1. Peak uses wasps and the plant stinging nettle repeatedly throughout this collection as metaphors for self. Choose one plant and one animal or insect, and write a portrait of yourself (or someone else) as that plant or animal (see “Self Portrait as Stinging Nettle,” “How the Wasp Girl Nests,” and “Wasp & Nettle”).
2. Using “Suburban Girl Requiem” as a starting-off point, write a requiem to a place (and perhaps a version of self) from your childhood. Include details of the place itself.
3. Begin a poem with these lines from “Before Spring” and see where it takes you: “How unlike me – to confuse / birth with beauty.”
4. Peak has a poem titled “The Version in Which I’m the Bowman.” Using a scene or story you have described before, write a poem telling a different version, “The Version in Which I’m _____”

Other Perugia books that could pair with this collection:

How to Live on Bread and Music, Jennifer K. Sweeney

Lamb, Frannie Lindsay

Red, Melanie Braverman

Two Minutes of Light, Nancy K. Pearson

Areas of study in which to teach this title:

Ethnic & Gender Studies

Women’s Studies

American Studies

Creative Writing/Poetry

Testimonial:

“Through using poems from *Girldom* ahead of Megan’s visit to our campus, I had the best in-class discussion I’ve ever had about poetry ... Megan’s work is life changing. Thanks for putting it out in the world.”

Leah Neilsen, *Associate Professor of Creative Writing*
Westfield State University

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