



He, She and It

Marge Piercy

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In the middle of the twenty-first century, life as we know it has changed for all time. Shira Shipman's marriage has broken up, and her young son has been taken from her by the corporation that runs her zone, so she has returned to Tikva, the Jewish free town where she grew up. There, she is welcomed by Malkah, the brilliant grandmother who raised her, and meets an extraordinary man who is not a man at all, but a unique cyborg implanted with intelligence, emotions--and the ability to kill....

He, She and It Details

Date : Published January 23rd 1993 by Fawcett (first published 1991)

ISBN : 9780449220603

Author : Marge Piercy

Format : Paperback 448 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Dystopia, Fantasy

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From Reader Review He, She and It for online ebook

Barbara says

It's the near future and the Earth has been decimated by war and pollution. The world is run by huge corporations (multis) whose chosen employees adhere to rigid, stylized rules for dressing, working, and living. Most people, however, live in far-reaching, dangerous, poverty-ridden slums called The Glop. A few towns that are able to create and sell original technology to the multis remain free.

People around the world have access to an extensive computer network into which they can project themselves to obtain information, do research, play games, communicate, and so on. However, users of the network can be cyber-attacked and even killed so defensive computer technology is in high demand.

As the story opens, Shira, an employee of the Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S) corporation has divorced her husband and lost custody of her son, Ari. Devastated, Shira returns to her original home in Tikva, a free Jewish town. There she lives with her beloved grandmother Malkah - a whiz at designing protective computer technology, and takes a job with Avram - a scientist who has created a humanoid cyborg called Yod, designed to protect the townsfolk from corporate raiders and assassins who want to co-opt its technology. Shira's childhood boyfriend Gadi, who broke her heart, is also back in town, having been suspended from his job creating stimmies (recreational interactive holograms).

Much of the story revolves around Yod, who develops desires and emotions - essentially becoming more of a person - as he works with Malkah, Shira, and other townspeople. As the story proceeds the Y-S corporation perpetrates various shenanigans in an attempt to get their hands on Yod, going so far as to use Shira's child, Ari, as bait. Meanwhile, in alternate chapters, Malkah relates a story to Yod about a medieval Jewish ghetto in Prague where the rabbi created a Golem (a powerful clay being) to protect the ghetto from raids staged by the surrounding Christian population. Like Yod, the Golem developed the characteristics of a human.

The book examines the question of what it means to be a 'real person' and whether an artificially created being has rights. I thought the various characters in the story were well-written and interesting and I cared about their lives and what happened to them. I also enjoyed the story though I felt it should have ended with more of a bang instead of a fizz.

It's a good book though, and I recommend it, especially to fans of sci-fi cyberpunk literature.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot...>

Dennis Fischman says

I re-read this book after many years, and I had to struggle with myself not to give it five stars. It is perfect for me. Reading science fiction set in a world where Hebrew names, Jewish culture, and Jewish history are basics is exhilarating. Plus I care deeply about the issues of the book: gender, power and its abuse, the meaning of love and loyalty.

It also amazes me how well Piercy could imagine the internet, virtual reality, and ecological devastation,

writing more than a quarter-century ago. The book lies on the border between Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson (with a little Isaac Asimov sneaking across the lines).

I agree with the readers who note the slow pace of the middle chapters. That doesn't bother me at all. I would gladly have spent even more time with Malkah, listening to her stories and hoping for her caresses.

The writing itself is not up to Piercy's poetic best. She repeats thoughts too often, and she gives minor characters quirks instead of personalities. Still, if she had written nothing else, this one book would have earned her a place in literature.

Felicia says

Absolutely fantastic book. Deep and layered and fascinating cyberpunk/morality/romance. Hard to describe but worth the read, a classic for sure!

Carol says

This beautiful sci-fi novel is set in the mid-twenty-first century, several decades after a major ecological cataclysm and resulting societal upheaval. The reduced human population can no longer live in the open without protective gear and structures, the majority of food must be derived from algae and grown in vats; but computer technology is very advanced, with AIs, service robots, and sophisticated virtual reality. People live in closed corporate enclaves, the sprawling and chaotic urban Glop, or in a few free towns. It's a world that is part cyberpunk, part post-apocalypse, but with a little more organic warmth to be found.

It is in this world that Piercy sets a re-telling of the golem story, alongside a very detailed and elegant rendition of the original tale.

The main character, Shira, has just lost her son in a custody settlement manipulated by her corporate employers. She returns to her grandmother Malkah's house in Tikva, the free town in which she grew up, where she begins working with the town robotics expert and inventor on the training and development of Yod, a highly advanced cyborg he built to protect Tikva from physical and computer-based attack. As Shira's relationship with Yod grows and blossoms, her former employers target Tikva in order to get their hands on the new technology, and the town also makes some alliances with newly emerging communities in the Glop and elsewhere. Piercy thus creates a fascinating and complex story that operates on both an intimate scale and in a wider scope. Interspersed with the main story is Piercy's version of the original golem story, as told to Yod by Malkah, who made major contributions to his programming. This interpolation is nearly seamless and, despite having many parallels with the main narrative, never feels like a repetition or contrived device. *He, She and It* is a very moving book, with wonderful characters and a vivid setting. It touches on interesting questions of personhood, control, freedom, development, growth, and the bonds between parents and children, and between lovers.

Zach says

"You really took revenge on me. You really did."

Megan Baxter says

A friend loaned this to me, telling me one of her profs had told her it was cyberpunk, and she hadn't been enthralled with it. I've read at least one other Marge Piercy, and for the most part, enjoyed this one, although there were some issues that I've seen in both books so far that I'll get to in a minute. But first of all, let's address genre. Is this really cyberpunk? I would tend to fall on the side of no, not really, although there are some elements of classic cyberpunk in there. But instead, I would classify as a late entry into that genre of feminist science fiction that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s. In this case, Jewish socialist feminist science fiction. It's an interesting mix.

Note: The rest of this review has been withdrawn due to the changes in Goodreads policy and enforcement. You can read why I came to this decision [here](#).

In the meantime, you can read the entire review at [Smorgasbook](#)

Lit Bug says

Published in 1991 (*Body of Glass* in the USA), *He, She and It* is a dystopian future in the 22nd century where big, bad global corporations control scarce world resources and remain luxurious, spick and span, while independent free zones remain in squalor but free and dangerous.

The story follows Shira Shipman, working at one such corp called Y-S, recently divorced and forced to give up the custody of her only son, Ari. She returns, dejected, to her hometown Tikva, a Jewish free-zone where she grew up with her grandmother Malkah, a brilliant programmer until she was 17. She meets Yod, an illegal assassin android created by Malkah and her one time lover Avram to protect Tikva, and gradually, despite her reluctance, falls in love with him, while simultaneously trying to get her son back and teaming up with her renegade pirate mother Riva and her gang, Avram, Malkah and Yod, tries to thwart the attack of Y-S on Tikva.

Parallel to the surface story is one of the better-known story of how the Golem Joseph was, in Jewish folklore, created out of clay by Judah and his wife Perl to protect their town from pogroms in 1600s Prague. Allusive to the surface story, it foreshadows somewhat the happenings of the futuristic story, while all the time creating parallels between folklore and science fiction.

Basically, it is cyberpunk, but closer to its derivative, feminist cyberpunk, in several ways. While it employs the technology of cyberpunk, it also throws light on prejudices between men and women, men and machines and women and machines, striving to undo the knots that make cyborgs acceptable, but not androids.

Mostly, I was interested in how I read Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism* in the light of the novel. I was delighted to see several connections, until I read the "Acknowledgements" section after the novel, where Piercy acknowledges having incorporated the essay in her fiction. The incorporation, though it enriches the text greatly in terms of layers, it tries too hard to make those connections.

For instance, Yod, the machine that acquires consciousness and tries gradually to comprehend the complexity of human emotions, says at a point to Malkah,

“You are embedded in history in a sense I cannot be.”,

directly alluding to Haraway when she argues that

“The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust.”

The cyborg was not born of a woman, nor impregnated by a man. It does not understand the bonds of blood, as Yod confesses his inability, when he remarks he does not understand Shira's pining for her son or her complex ambivalence towards her mother Riva whom she hardly knows.

Without a conventional birth, a conventional set of father and mother, and having no initiation in bonds formed through the biological process of birth, the cyborg still needs a community – but not necessarily with others of his kind, but someone he can identify with. The Golem (meaning body without soul) is made of clay, a product of mythology and made allegedly in the 1600s, but he is clearly closer to him in essence than any other machine or robot he is “biologically” closer to in the 22nd century.

The structure of the novel alternates between the third person narrative telling the story of the 22nd century and the first person narrative of Malkah when she “penetrates” the Net/Base to talk to Yod every night, telling him the story of the Golem as well as her own troubles. This has three-fold significance. It creates a backstory as well as a foreshadowing on one level. For Malkah, it is a way of teaching Yod through the story his purpose, it is her lessons, or “moral of the story” insinuated through the tale that will later form the subconscious for Yod. And for Yod, it is a way of feeling he belongs – what Haraway so correctly calls “affiliation”, and not “politics of identity”. Yod does not look for other cyborgs to relate to on the basis of a machine-human composite identity. Rather, he longs for “community” – affiliation, which he finds with the Golem in Malkah’s story, and draws parallels on his own between the 17th century Golem and the 22nd century Android.

In a sense, the novel revolves around two people – Shira and Yod – not solely because they make an unlikely couple charged with socio-political implications, but on their own as individual marginalized identities as well. Shira, because she is a woman. Yod, because he is an android. Both of them uncomfortable, misfits and unnatural, in a “man’s world”. Sub-humans.

While Yod represents a conscious entity where whole sets of male-female behavior simply did not apply, Shira is representative of a class where she found herself trapped in a forcibly feminized identity. While Yod finds in Shira a human who considers him at par with humankind in general, in Yod, Shira finds a male (Yod is made to be a male) who does not expect of her conventional feminine behavior, unlike the other men in her life, since the android is free of culturally imbued separate gender roles.

This is all the more evident when Shira tells Yod,

*"Yod, we're all unnatural now. I have retinal implants. I have a plug set into my skull to interface with a computer. Malkah has a subcutaneous unit that monitors and corrects blood pressure ... Avram has an artificial heart and Gadi a kidney .. We can't go unaided into what we haven't yet destroyed of 'nature.' Without a wrap, without sec skins and filters, we'd perish. **We're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending toward.**"*

This is exactly what Haraway says in her essay - "*We're all cyborgs*".

The explicit feminist concerns too are scattered all over the text, as in the Prague Golem narrative where Chava talks about how she feels free after her husband's death, although she loved him deeply – after his death, "*when the grief subsided a little, I began to remember who I had been, before I had loved, before I was a wife and a mother. My old dreams came back. A man may want to marry you because you're a brilliant scholar, but what he wants is a wife.*", as well as Shira's remarks in the latter half of the work.

But this otherwise ideologically brilliant text fails on several counts.

It tries too hard to convince the reader in some places. The text is diffused, spread over instead of being crisp, dense and direct. There are no inconsequential digressions, but the narrative flows too leisurely, spending a disproportionate time on issues that do not need to be elaborated upon – things that should be left for the readers to ponder upon as introspection are explicitly laid out as correct, but unnecessary expositions.

The characters are flat – even the attempts to imbue them with complexity turn too contrived. The dialogues, in most places, are plain pathetic. Too bare, simplistic and childish. Almost 50-70 pages after I've already guessed why Y-S wants to attack Tikva (and which is plain to anyone), Yod announces with a flourish that he has found out the motives of Y-S.

Also, it was so focused on feminism, it almost became a *misandrist* text. It clearly "reeks" of male-blaming implications. The women are all good, productive, sincere and warm. Men are all insincere, sometimes brilliant but always cold. Except for Yod – because he is not male though his body is male.

Worse, of all the cyborgs Avram had manufactured and then destroyed because they were not perfect, the blame lay with Avram, because he only imbued them with manliness, while Malkah, the quintessential modern woman endowed Yod with feminine behavior that made him less destructive, and more humane, and therefore, human.

Here is what Malkah says – "**Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge, extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection...**"

It seems that Piercy was keen on fictionalizing 'A Cyborg Manifesto' – and she tried so hard to expand fictionally in over 500 pages what Haraway has condensed in nonfiction of 43 pages, that it becomes banal, commonplace when it had the possibility to turn into a powerful work ideologically and in terms of story-telling.

However, I see immense potential in it in terms of reading material for youngsters. While it is too simplistic to us, it may provide youngsters with an alternative take on contemporary gender equations

through the figures of a cyborg and an android, apart from human beings in a futuristic setup. While many are understandably addicted to the Delirium series or Infoquake and its sequels, this would be a more realistic approach without a dense text and with much allure of the cyberpunk world.

But for grown-ups, I'd rather go back to dear old Nekropolis by Maureen F. McHugh who tells a similar tale, but much better rendered when she depicts Morocco under fundamentalist Islamic rule equipped with advanced technology, where a technologically enslaved young woman falls for an android (or a harni in their lingo). That is a much better and much shorter novel than this.

Two stars for the ideology. One star for its potential usefulness to youngsters. Nothing more for anything else. It was a huge, huge disappointment. Having heard a lot of lavish praise, I'd approached it with huge expectations, which didn't measure up. The ideological premise is wonderful, but the execution is way below the mark. At least, not to my taste.

Carolyn F. says

I guess I'm going through a robot loving stage. Shira ends an unhappy marriage but her husband not only gets custody of their son, he's allowed to live off-planet. This is a post-apocalyptic world by the way. When she sees there's nothing for her to do, she quits her corporate job (corporations have all the power now) and goes home to her domed Jewish enclave where she grew up accepting a job from a family friend. Well the job is to acclimate a cyborg named Yod. Her grandmother has inputted feelings and they end up becoming lovers. And then are tragically torn apart. There's a bittersweet ending.

I really enjoyed the book EXCEPT for the grandmother's telling a story about a golem in the 1600s to Yod online. This part was so extremely boring to me that I ended up skipping them completely. I guess they are a morality tale, but I got that through the main story and didn't need it again in the story within the story.

I'm giving this book 3.5 stars but would have given it 4 stars if the author had completely removed the golem story.

Lindsay says

As you can probably surmise from the huge collection of tags I've attached to this book, there is *A LOT* of stuff going on here!

Even the structure of this book is complex and multifaceted: two stories, told by two narrators, in alternating chapters. The first narrator is Shira Shipman, a young, upper-middle-class Jewish woman who has recently become a wife and mother. Her life is also almost completely controlled by her employer, a huge biotechnology corporation, not only because they have a very strict, conformist corporate culture (there are even rules, unwritten of course, dictating how women of varying degrees of seniority within the company should dress), but also because Shira lives in what is essentially an upscale version of the company town: it's like a sealed-off, climate-controlled suburb/office park where everyone in the middle and upper ranks of salaried workers and management lives and works. Shira's narration, especially in the early chapters, is therefore suffused with nervousness, and a sense of waiting for the other shoe to drop, since her husband has recently been promoted and their family moved into a bigger, nicer house. Shira is certain there must be a

catch, since she knows she's not exactly a team player, and not exactly in her bosses' good graces.

When the other shoe does drop, Shira packs up and leaves, heading to a place that's the polar opposite of the stuffy corporate-controlled environment she's just fled: it's a free Jewish settlement out in the middle of nowhere, unaffiliated with any of the major corporations that dominate this denuded, radiation-spoiled future Earth. Her grandmother (who brought her up) lives there, and she soon learns that her mother, who left her when she was born, is also coming to stay there. She also soon finds that her grandmother and the father of one of her childhood friends are working on something mysterious and fantastical: a robot that looks, talks and *feels* exactly like a person, but has superhuman physical and mental abilities.

This robot, who is named Yod (a letter in the Hebrew alphabet; Aleph through Tet were his predecessors, all but one scrapped because of horrible, sometimes deadly, flaws), might be the most interesting character in this novel. That's saying a lot, because this novel is stuffed to the gills with interesting characters. Unfortunately, Shira Shipman isn't one of them --- that's the biggest thing that disappointed me about this book, that practically all of the real-time narration is done by the most boring character. (The other narrator, Shira's grandmother Malkah, spends almost all of her chapters telling the story of the seventeenth-century Rabbi Judah Loews --- also called "the Maharal" --- who created the Golem to protect his people, living as they did in the ghetto of Prague, where Christian mobs could attack them at will. This story is also hugely interesting, but because it's all very external to Malkah herself, the reader doesn't spend as much time in her mind as they do in Shira's. And that's a pity, because Malkah's mind seems like a fun place.) Yod owes his moral and emotional complexity entirely to Malkah's programming; her involvement may well have been the thing that saved Yod from the fate of all the failed attempts before him.

(And now, a random note on terminology: Yod is not a cyborg. There are some cyborgs in this book, but Yod is an android. Cyborgs are people who have been technologically augmented; androids are humanlike technological constructs. Carry on, then.)

Chaos ensues once people outside the tight circle of people who've been working on "the project" learn about Yod and his abilities. There's a lot of corporate-espionage type stuff, amped up by both the apparent absence of laws in this future world (assassination raids, abduction and hostage-taking are apparently standard practice), and the immersive nature of the "cyberspace" the denizens of the free settlement must navigate to earn their livelihood, since they specialize in cybersecurity. (Cybersecurity being very important in this world, what with all the aforementioned corporate espionage.)

This conception of cyberspace --- a three-dimensional "space" that you, virtually embodied as an avatar, move around in to talk to other people, download data, build firewalls or "patrol" existing firewalls looking for signs of intrusion --- is pretty much ripped from the pages of William Gibson's novels, as is the anarchic, impoverished megacity in which Everyone Else (i.e., the poor and the non-corporate) lives. "The Glop" (from "megalopolis," which is one of my favorite science-fiction neologisms ever, and one of the minority that seems like real people might use it) looks a lot like a lower-tech version of the Sprawl from Gibson's novels; Marge Piercy even acknowledges this debt in an afterword.

Derivative as all this is, I still found the worldbuilding in this book to be pretty solid. It helps that Piercy spends most of her time developing settings that *aren't* the Glop or corporate bubbles: her most original, most interesting "world" is the small, tight-knit community of Tikva, which marries freedom and openness with airtight security and a technological specialization that basically buys them their autonomy. (As in, every major corporation wants to buy their firewalls, so they all tolerate the upstart little city-state's existing outside any one of their control). It's a really interesting, well-realized picture of an intentional community, with a sharp focus on day-to-day survival in an uncertain world.

Another juxtaposition this settlement (and the book as a whole) tries to embody is that of future and past. Everyone in Tikva is a practicing Jew, and Jewish religious and cultural identity are just as integral to the place's cohesion and survival as its cutting-edge technology.

But the best thing, in a novel where everything is done amazingly well, has got to be the characters. I did not find Shira very interesting, but almost every other character who was in the book for longer than a scene or two was absolutely fascinating. And even Shira, though boring (to me), was well-developed, believable and even relatable. She evolves over the course of the book, and we see a lot of different aspects of her character: her feelings of confusion and betrayal when she has to confront her mother for the first time, and her slow metamorphosis from a closed-off, emotionally stunted, timid woman to someone bold, spontaneous and loving, which coincides with her finally moving past a schoolgirl crush on another character. And Yod! Yod is an absolutely masterful work of creation; he's not human, exactly, and he's also not male in the way that a man is male (psychologically, that is; physically he's quite male), but he is certainly a person, and despite the title he is not an "it." (His ambiguous status comes up when he wants to participate in some ritual, I forget which, that is restricted to Jewish men. He wants to be considered, not just human, not just a man, but specifically a Jewish man). His emotions were about half familiar to me (as an autistic person, I am well acquainted with the angst of wondering whether one is really human or not) and half alien (he was made for violence, and takes a predatory delight in it that bothers the moral and relational parts of his psyche), and all beautifully described and conveyed through his confused-but-eloquent speech and his halting, work-in-progress manner. He's definitely one of my favorite non-human characters I've ever encountered.

Claire Corbett says

One of my favourite SF books of all time. Time to re-read. That sexism is alive and well and rife in literary culture is proved by the fact that *Body of Glass* isn't more famous than anything by William Gibson, for example, though I see it did at least win an Arthur C Clarke award. This is published in the US under the truly dreadful title *He, She and It*. Also worth checking out *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Classic 1970s feminist utopia, with, if I remember correctly, a rather good dystopia as well.

Allan Nail says

Beautiful. I won't say much here, as I'm teaching this book in the fall. But this is a beautiful, challenging, and memorable read.

So many aspects of this book fascinate me, it would have been hard for me not to like it. There was religion, science fiction, apocalyptic fiction and themes of starting over, golems; just an endless array. There is no small irony (or pun?) in saying that what struck me as most moving was the humanity at the center of this book.

I really don't want to go on about this one, in part because I want to savor my feelings about this book for a while, but mainly because I've been taking expansive notes on this text as I read, and to start would be to not stop any time soon. So, I'll pick up the next book and head to bed, but I won't soon forget this one. Highly, highly recommended.

Tucker says

A long book that started off slow, but got better and better right up until the end. The human creator of this golem/cyborg put it through iterations until the result became increasingly humanlike. In that, the premise of the 2015 film *Ex Machina* resembles this book, which predated the film by two-and-a-half decades. The robot has opinions, makes conversations, and has sex (as a male).

This book also foretold the rise of the Internet. It has people living in what we might call today "smart houses" where there is an Internet of things and you can issue commands to that air and small robots will adjust your surroundings or retrieve information, and as a result, you are under surveillance all the time. Then again, Orwell got this, too, even earlier.

But more so than it predicts "the future," it looks at the potential opportunities, pitfalls, and philosophical problems in relationships between humans and robots.

“How do you feel when you see such a mechanism? Do you feel a sense of kinship?” She must be losing her mind, asking a machine how it felt.

Yod rose to rejoin her. When it was not in its security mode, it moved with surprising grace. “Do you feel a sense of kinship when you eat telapia?”

“Why should I?”

“You’re as closely related biologically to that fish as I am as a mechanism to that cleaning robot. Perhaps you’re closer.”

(New York: Fawcett Crest, 1991. p. 88.)

Sooz says

so i'd say i am about 1/2 way through the novel and have gradually become fully and completely invested in the story. the copy i have from my library looks like it was published in the sixties ... you know ... hardback with the plastic slip cover, poorly executed artwork on the cover that (no offense to the artist) but it looks kind of cheap. so in some ways the novel feels more dated than 1991, but in other ways the author has done an admirable job of predicting the future and the book still feels relevant today. 20+ years can really really date a sci-fi novel.

the author has also introduced a timeless element by interjecting the Prague story line and the creation of the Golem to protect the citizens of the Jewish ghetto. this story line perfectly mirrors the creation of the cyborg. throw in some Frankenstein references and the story opens up to a wider philosophical perspective on a theme that has been around for a long long time and has a well-established place in our story-telling traditions.

i think i would get more meaning from the story if i understood more of the religious rites and traditions of

Judaism. i suspect i am missing things but i am too ignorant to even know for sure if that is the case. so i will blithely go on reading and enjoying, He, She and It.

it seemed to take me a long time to get finished this book. i didn't want to give up but i wasn't hugely motivated to give all afternoon over to reading it either. i enjoyed the futuristic segments a lot more than the historic i wasn't a fan of the second story line. i get why the author did it and agree it provided a valid parallel perspective but ... meh. in the end He She and It was just okay for me. i might have written a kinder review and given one more star but for the fact i started another sci fi written about the same time. it's called Sparrow by Mary Doria Russell and i am soooooo hooked, and can't wait to get back into it.

Diana says

2 stars because while the idea isn't bad, I found that it was easy to get myself lost in all the Jewish terms sprouting in the in-between, and I felt lost with lots of the dystopian information which were sort or given randomly at times. Also, the pace was agonizingly slow, IMO.

There is a woman who asks for a divorce and the custody of her child gets given to the father. We get a lot of remembrances of her past dalliances with a man called Gabi, the father of which offers her a job back at her more matriarchal home. She has to tutor an android in order to make him more human. But they kind of feel in love.

Also, there is the in-between story, something that happened in the past between a woman and a golem, which is a story of sorts that acts like an explanation and a mirror for the actual story going on.

Mikhaela says

Jewish girl in dystopian future meets cyborg, and falls in love. Jewish girl in 1600s Prague meets golem, and falls in love.

As much as I enjoyed The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay, when it comes to books involving golems in Prague, this book takes the blue ribbon. Kavalier took me a while to get in to, but He, She and It gripped me from the beginning and I could NOT put it down. He, She and It is many things--Jewish feminist fiction, a robot love story, dystopian science fiction, cyperpunk sci fi, fiction about class, fiction about corporatization, fiction about environmental disaster and fiction about gender and love and storytelling and armed resistance. It's beautifully written with wonderfully complicated and fascinating characters.

The book has two main parallel stories. The first follows Shira, a woman living in a dystopian cyberpunk future controlled by a handful of oppressive corporations. Her mother is a renegade lesbian terrorist (or freedom fighter) and her grandmother is a genetic scientist who lives in a small Jewish village off the grid. When her husband is awarded sole custody of their son in a bitter divorce, Shira goes to live with her grandmother in the Jewish free zone and falls in love with the illegal cyborg created to defend the zone.

The second story, told by the grandmother, follows a the daughter of a rabbi in the Jewish ghetto of 1600s Prague. Fearing for the lives of his community, the rabbi creates a golem to defend the ghetto. His independent and intellectual daughter falls in love with said golem.

But honestly, no review can do this amazing book justice. I plan to read it many, many times.

Katie says

Abandoned. I just didn't connect with this at all. Didn't care for the writing or the characters. Largely a matter of personal taste because objectively there's nothing much wrong with either but I can't be bothered to slog through all its futuristic jargon.

Ariel says

I started *He, She, and It* on spring break and *finally* finished it today, but I'm glad I could savor this novel over three months because it is fabulous. Marge Piercy writes a cyberpunk novel that doesn't ignore women, religion, ethnicity, community. She's the kind of science fiction writer I love: someone who doesn't care about how people interface with a computer or what technology builds a cyborg, but rather what happens and what folks feel.

I may call *He, She, and It* cyberpunk, but it's not all dark and techy. The razor-girl character, Nihi, is a queer, community oriented mother revision of the archetype started by Molly from *Neuromancer*. Much of the novel takes place in Tikva, a Jewish anarcho-feminist libertarian socialist community that lives outside the multinational corporate dominated world oppressing everyone. Woven in the story of Joseph the golem from the early modern Prague ghetto.

I recommend that *He, She, and I* be recognized as part of the scifi/cyberpunk canon and course lists. Unlike hard scifi authors, we don't need to stretch to find Piercy's leftist politics that don't sacrifice a gender or race analysis in critiquing capitalism.

Debbie Zapata says

I finished this book very early on a morning when I was planning to work in the yard all day long. As I trimmed trees, weeded, clipped grass, and gave all the plants a nice drink, I thought how lucky I was to be able to spend my time caring for the life around me.

Not like most of the people living in Shira's day. We only gradually learn what a disaster the planet has become by the year 2059, which is a good way to tell this type of story. I don't like having to read two or three chapters explaining how the world got the way it is; I like for the characters themselves to tell me, the way real people would. A memory shared here, a history lesson remembered there.

Climate change, nuclear war, plagues, floods, the total destruction of the Middle East and its oil fields, a few huge corporations running everything, Smart Houses for some, life in a Soylent Green type of megalopolis for the majority. This is Shira's world. It is scary because it is all too possible: sometimes it seems as if we could wake up there tomorrow. Piercy wrote this book in 1991, and I know of many changes since then that have brought us much closer to the type of life that she imagined.

But the book is not just about how people caused the planet to fall apart, it is also about what happens between people themselves after all the chaos. Relationships are explored: mothers and daughters, male and

female, ex-lovers and old friends, robots and humans. There are changes in this aspect of life also, but not as many as you might think. After all, some things do remain the same, no matter what, and (perhaps unfortunately) human nature is one of those things. But then you add Yod, a cyborg, a combination of organic and machine. How will his presence affect Shira and her life? Her job when she returns home to Tikva is to socialize Yod, to help him learn about humans. What will Shira learn from him?

Woven through the events that take place in Shira's life is the story of the Golem of Prague, as told by Shira's grandmother Malkah to Yod, piece by piece like a bedtime story spread out over time. At first these chapters confused me because Malkah speaks about her own life and then shifts to telling about the real-life Rabbi Judah Loew and his world; how he decided to create the Golem in order to protect the Jews who lived in the walled ghetto of the city. Of course it is impossible not to see the connecting threads between the two stories, the similarities between the two worlds, the ever unchanging human natures past and present. This side story makes the whole book deeper and richer, even though I am very sure I have missed many layers in this first reading. I do know that the episode when the Golem was brought to life was the most intense, spine-tingling few pages I have read in a very long time.

I have read quite a few of Piercy's books now and she never fails to amaze me. I have started on a memoir she wrote in 2003 called *Sleeping with Cats*. I fully expect to be as amazed at her own life as I have been with her fiction.

Linda Robinson says

Strong women, engaged and accomplished women, women who don't faint or puke while staring down an enhanced security ape. One of the panel discussions at WisCon this year was the difference between a solid female protagonist and a bad ass super hero, and Marge Piercy needs to be on the next panel. Her characters are strong without being perfect. Shira Shipman is the Mother in this book's trinity of graces. Her son has been assigned to her exhusband in a divorce decree and she wants the boy back. Riva, Shira's mother is the Maiden, dedicated to her work, detached from emotional entanglements, not motivated by glory or attention but by the need for community and individual freedom. Malkah is the Crone, working to apply her searing intelligence against the corporate overlords who want power first. The women are equal to the men, with flaws, quirks and weaknesses usually assigned to whatever girl is in a leading role. Chava, Nilhi are as strong as the Glop leader Lazarus. Weaving the story of Joseph, alive in the ghetto of 1600 Prague, into a video to help Yod, alive in 21st century Tikva, understand who he is creates a mobius strip of historical context. The reader, on the fast train of a fascinating story can look out the window and wonder what's the difference between a mechanically enhanced human, and a machine that can learn and grow? Excellent storytelling. Piercy's gift is to narrate a great tale, and trust that her audience will exercise their brains examining the story afterward, and share some good conversation about the book with friends.

Chana says

I don't know where I got this book as sci-fi is not the genre I usually read and with a title of "He, She and It" I didn't expect much of it. I was vastly surprised when I found myself reading about the Maharal of Prague. I was humbled and honored to even gaze at the printed word Maharal. I had heard stories about the Golem but didn't know too much. I was very moved by his story and cried when it came to an end. One of my sons has been to Prague and to the Altneushul. He said there are stories about the attic of the Altneushul but that there

is no evidence to back up the stories of the Golem. For some reason it is one of those stories I would prefer to believe. My heart became very attached to the Golem as told over to us by Marge Piercy. Even if the Golem is not a true story I am very honored that one of my sons has stood and prayed in the same synagogue as the Maharal. If we don't have a Golem, we have a continuing faith in our Father in Heaven and a continuity as the Jewish people.

Much of the book is not set in Prague or the past. It is set in the future with a cyborg created to protect the free Jewish town of Tikveh. It is a pretty good futuristic story, projecting into the Net seemed like a perfectly reasonable thing to do and there were some exciting battles, some decent philosophical discussions. I enjoyed it.
