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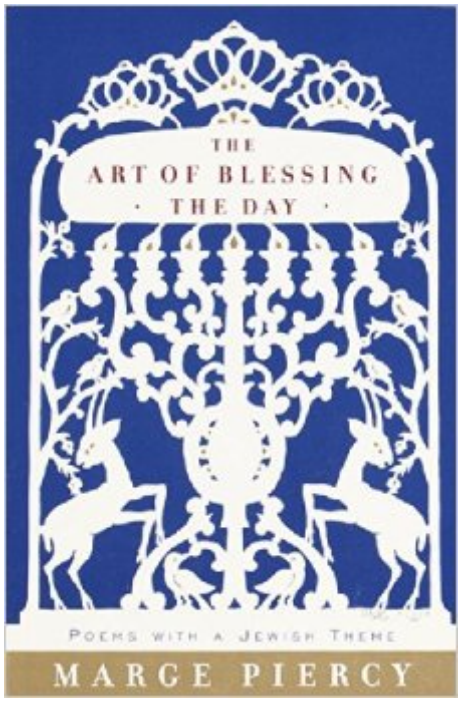
# The Art Of Blessing The Day: Poems With A Jewish Theme

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## Synopsis

Winner of the 2000 Paterson Poetry PrizeAbout Marge Piercy’s collection of her old and new poems that celebrate the Jewish experience, the poet Lyn Lifshin writes: "The Art of Blessing the Day is an exquisite book. The whole collection is strong, passionate, and poignant, but the mother and daughter poems, fierce and emotional, with their intense ambivalence, pain and joy, themes of separation and reconnecting, are among the very strongest about that difficult relationship."These striking, original, beautifully sensuous poems do just that. Ordinary moments--a sunset, a walk, a private religious ritual--are so alive in poems like ’Shabbat moment’Â Â and ’Rosh Hodesh.’ In the same way that she celebrates ordinary moments, small things become charged with memories and feelings: paper snowflakes, buttons, one bird, a bottle-cap flower made from a ginger ale top and crystal beads. "She celebrates the body in rollicking, gusto-filled poems like ’Belly good’ and ’The chuppah,’ where ’our bodies open their portals wide.’ So much that is richly sensuous: ’hands that caressed you,Â Â . . . untied the knot of pleasure and loosened your flesh till it fluttered,’ and lush praise for ’life in our spines, our throats,Â Â our knees, our genitals, our brains, our tongues.’"I love the humor in poems like ’Eat fruit,’ the nostalgia and joy in ’The rabbi’s granddaughter and the Christmas tree,’ the fresh, beautiful images of nature--’In winter . . .the sun hangs its wizened rosehip in the oaks.’"I admire Piercy’s sense of the past alive in the present, in personal and social history. The poems are memorials, like the yahrtzeit candle in a glass. ’We lose and we go on losing,’ but the poems are never far from harsh joy, the joy that is ’the wine of life.’"Growing up haunted by Holocaust ghosts is an echo throughout the book, and some of the strongest poems are about the Holocaust, poems that become the voices of those who had no voice: ’What youÂ Â carry in your blood is us,Â Â the books we did not write, music we could not make, a worldÂ Â gone from gristle to smoke, onlyÂ Â as real now as words can make it.’"Marge Piercy’s words make such a moving variety of experiences beautifully and forcefully real."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I’ve just finished reading "The Art Of Blessing The Day" for the third time, and every time I read it, I discover something new. There is so much depth and so many levels of meaning that each reading seems like the first for me. It’s such a rich, marvelous collection that it’s almost impossible to convey how much it affected me. She composed it like a piece of music. Each section has its theme, and moves from poem to poem with so much variation and skill. There’s a gorgeous rhythm to her work and the harmonies are equally beautiful. Her voice is like an instrument creating vocative music...elegiac...celebratory...even though pain surfaces from time to time. It’s okay! It belongs! She has awakened in me so many memories, and in reliving them through her art, I arrive at new insights, new understandings. The poem about her mother refusing to wear her gifts really struck a chord. When my mother died, I returned home and together with my sisters went through all her stuff systematically, and we simply wept when we saw every gift we had ever given her over the years was wrapped in tissue paper and had never been worn. We could almost hear her voice saying "Es eez tzu goot far mihr" "It’s too good for me. I am unworthy". That is a terrible weapon wielded by our mothers.You can’t give them anything...but that’s an old story and she tells it so well. To return to the music in Piercy’s poetry: she begins with a fanfare "The Art of Blessing...."and I know what’s coming but she continues to astonish me with the variety of rhythms, the way one poem flows subtly and skillfully into the next.

Among the many blessings to be found in American literature and poetry are the works of American-Jewish writers. Jewish-American poets have been celebrated in two recent anthologies: Telling and Remembring edited by Rubin and Jewish-American Poetry edited by Barron and Sellinger. Ever since Emma Lazarus, writing in the late 19th Century, the poetry written by American Jewish women have played a large part in this literature.Marge Piercy may well be the best of the Jewish-American poets writing today. Her work is featured prominently in both the Rubin and the Barron and Sellinger anthologies with the latter collection including an essay as well. Both anthologies draw heavily from Ms. Piercy’s "The Art of Blessing the Day" which prompted me to

explore the entire volume.The book as written, the dedication states, "for all who may find here poems that speak to their identity, their history, their desire for ritual -- ritual that may work for them". The collection is, indeed, specifically Jewish but its themes transcend any particular religious commitment and reach out to those who seek themselves in a spiritual path. The broad theme of the book is announced in the title poem (from which I have taken the title of this review) as "to taste/each moment, the bitter, the sour, the sweet/ and the salty, and be glad for what does not hurt." Again "Bless whatever you can/with eyes and hands and tongue. If you/can't bless it, get ready to make it new."I was struck by the unity of the collection. Unlike most books of poetry where the reader may pick and choose among poems, this collection is best read as an integral whole from beginning to end.

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