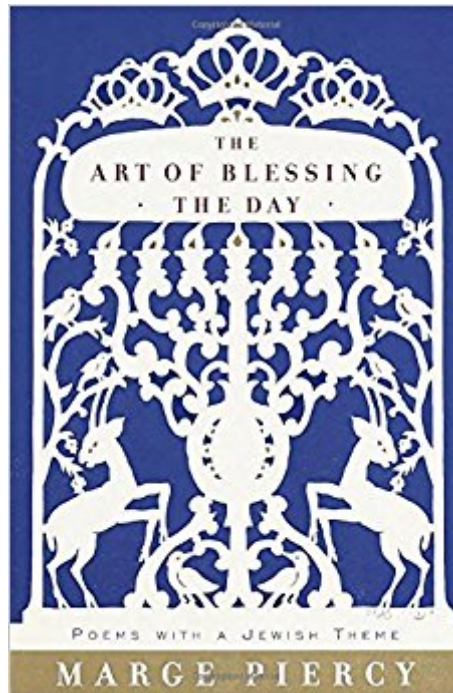




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The Art Of Blessing The Day: Poems With A Jewish Theme



Synopsis

Winner of the 2000 Paterson Poetry Prize About 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' 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, . . . untied the knot of pleasure and loosened your flesh till it fluttered,' and lush praise for 'life in our spines, our throats, 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 you carry in your blood is us, the books we did not write, music we could not make, a world gone from gristle to smoke, only as real now as words can make it.'" Marge Piercy's words make such a moving variety of experiences beautifully and forcefully real."

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Customer Reviews

The Art of Blessing the Day: Poems with a Jewish Theme, by Marge Piercy, is that rare book of self-avowedly religious poetry whose devotional purpose actually enhances its poetic strength. Piercy's poems, organized in chapters with thematic headings like "Family," "Marriage," and "Prayer," are plainly presented as help for living. Readers will turn to poems such as "Putting the Good Things Away" when they need inspiration for understanding their self-sacrificing mothers. Yet Piercy's devotions are real poems with a literary integrity whose strength and beauty are free of sentimentality. They are also like liturgy, because they make room for readers to experience new aspects of contemporary life while simultaneously offering the security of very old frameworks for perceiving life. The Jewish themes of these poems are sometimes overt (as in "Chuppah"), but they are often more subtle (as in "The Art of Blessing the Day"). Throughout, they evince the careful balance of faithful attention to worldly life and the humble consideration of cosmic order that distinguishes Judaism among Western religions. "Attention is love," Piercy writes in the title poem, "what we must give / children, mothers, fathers, pets, / our friends, the news, the woes of others. / What we want to change we curse and then / pick up a tool. Bless whatever you can / with eyes and hands and tongue. If you / can't bless it, get ready to make it new." --Michael Joseph Gross --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

We tend to think of writers according to categories: a novelist, poet, essayist. And find it hard to imagine a writer who excels in more than one medium. But Piercy has written many wonderful novels (e.g., *Braided Lives*, LJ 1/82; *Vida*, LJ 1/80) and an equal number of deeply moving and exquisitely crafted books of poetry (e.g., *What Are Big Girls Made Of?* LJ 2/1/97). Her newest volume of poetry is in many ways the best yet. It brings together poems written to celebrate Piercy's Jewishness, reflecting and expressing the joy, pain, passion, and elegance of this rich culture. Her poems overflow with family, ritual, tradition, history, and food. In the amazing "The Ark of Consequence," Piercy plays with the meanings of "ark" and "arc," calling us to recognize the interconnectedness of all that we do and are and understand that our actions have consequences:

"What we shoot up into orbit falls/ to earth one night through the roof." A group of Shabbat poems and a section on seder foods fervently capture the intensity and flavor of the Jewish tradition. Highly recommended for all libraries. AJudy Clarence, California State Univ. Lib., Hayward Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There is poetry and there is prayer. I struggle very much with prayer, but love poetry. The poems in *The Art of Blessing the Day* speaks to me in a way that helps me when I pray. That said, don't be put off if you are not Jewish or not religious. While Piercy explores Jewish customs and holy days, there is much here for everyone.

I have said of my own work as a poet -"a poet does two things -mines every day experience for the gems -and cuts those gems to reflect new light." Marge Piercy does both well! My kind of poet. She had me at her blessing for a tomato. Blessed be she who penned such blessings.

Marge Piercy has put together a collection of poetry with a mixture of sensuousness and depth, along with wonderful insights into her own family, immigrants with all the quirks of Eastern European Jewish immigrants from a generation now gone. Her poem "Nishmat" has a depth that is extraordinary, I have other favorites too. For a non-poetry reader, I have been captivated by this collection.

Although she is very famous, I never heard of the author Marge Piercy before I heard some of her poems from this book. I knew I had to get myself a copy. My current favorite poem is "The Wicked Stepmother." I laughed and commiserated and felt like her poems capture the essence of each subject. I'm no poetry expert, but I just love these poems.

Many wonderful poems that convey the blessings of time and space, landscape and memory.

A Lovely Gift filled with wonderful poetry.

wonderful poetry with a modern, wry, on target with today's Jewish Family and yet so very spiritual

Lovely book to have

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