



# The Angel of History

*Carolyn Forché*

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## **The Angel of History** Carolyn Forché

Placed in the context of twentieth-century moral disaster--war, genocide, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb--Forché's ambitious and compelling third collection of poems is a meditation of memory, specifically how memory survives the unimaginable. The poems reflect the effects of such experience: the lines, and often the images within them, are fragmented discordant. But read together, these lines, become a haunting mosaic of grief, evoking the necessary accommodations human beings make to survive what is unsurvivable. As poets have always done, Forché attempts to give voice to the unutterable, using language to keep memory alive, relive history, and link the past with the future.

## **The Angel of History Details**

Date : Published February 3rd 1995 by Harper Perennial (first published 1994)

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Author : Carolyn Forché

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# From Reader Review The Angel of History for online ebook

## Kat says

I discovered Forche through her translations of dissident Claribel Alegria. She is always difficult, probing and challenging. I like to dig and her poetry requires patience and a love of the convoluted linkages in the history of emotional reality and physical reality.

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## Emily says

Oops. Everyone loves this book but me. I can see why it's powerful- it certainly is evocative. But man. This is DARK AF. Are there any happy poems in general? Certainly not in this slim but bleak volume.

Do not read unless you're cool with imagery of a deceased pregnant woman's body being cut open to have a severed head stuffed inside.

Definitely wasn't ready for that one.

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## Victor says

Possibly my favorite book of poetry.

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## Helen says

The Angel of History is a unique collection of poetry in five parts, where the poet steps in to the lives of those devastated by war and oppression and writes through their lives.

For the most part, the poetry is very effective. It would have been helpful for someone not as fluent in French as perhaps she should be to have footnotes instead of notes in the back of the book to assist with translation but never mind. Also, a lot of lines are lifted and rightly attributed to other writers and notables from history. It's again effective to have actual primary source documentation to bring home the point, but a part of me wishes the poet would have reached a bit further into herself and found her own words and ideas in their entirety.

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## Andrew says

Amazing.

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## **Kent says**

A truly great book. It is interesting to compare this to another book I recently read, C. D. Wright's *Rising, Falling, Hovering*. Forche creates this argument against war by directing her anger at an indisputably despicable war: World War II. But what I admire so much is that the poems seem to exist outside of time, as in this speaker couldn't possibly be alive at all the times she implies she is. Yet even in this vague chronology what is obvious is the impact war has on history and on people trying to live through history. People are ruined. And wars continue to happen.

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## **Craig says**

From ELEGY:

And so we revolt from silence with a bit of speaking.

I love this book. I love Forche's voice in general, its quiet refusal to remain quiet.

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## **Joanna says**

Gorgeous, haunting, important.

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## **Anne says**

Deep and big. Wonderful language...

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## **Nicola says**

This book succeeds at the polyphonic, fragmented lyric where so many books fail. Why? Perhaps, this is too simplistic, but I think it's because she maintains the integrity of each line. The lines are clear, haunting, and epigrammatic. The fragments arise between sections and "stanzas" and within perspectives and times not within the lines and phrases themselves. This integrity is the foundation for me and gives the "pile of debris" its intensity. Some such lines I will carry around for many years to come:

And God's name [i] a boneless string of vowels.

Please, when you write, describe again how I looked in the white dress that improbable morning

when my random life was caught in a net of purpose.

...the little ones in graves the size of pillows.

and the section:

## XXVII

If you ask them anything they go on telling you the same thing forever.  
Not what happened, but what may happen.  
Death understood as death.  
[i] The world in its worlding.  
Our hope put into question.  
Figures dead and alive  
whispering not truth but a need for truth when one word is many things.

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### **christopher leibow says**

The Angel of History was remarkable and astonishing. It's fragmentary structure is something that I have attempted since reading some essays by Heather McHugh and I think this is a wonderful example of tying fragmentary pieces of history into a loose narrative that peeks out enough to catch a glimpse and be carried along. The fragmentary form is an appropriate vehicle considering the topic of history itself and the violent history of the twentieth century. The opening epigraph from Walter Benjamin is perfect. By the second poem in the collection I am totally captivated. The lines, "Autumns the fields were deliberately burned by fire so harmless children ran through it/ making a sort of game." And then the this line in the third poem took my breath away, "Within the house, the silence of God. Forty-four bedrolls, forty four metal cups/And the silence of God is God." This line born on the back of a quote from Elie Weisel's poem set the stage of the journey that the poet was taking the reader on.

Throughout the poems. Forche' act as witness to inhumanity, to the detris of suffering, but like the angel of history, there is nothing she can do, there is no redemption, except that of witnessing the suffering of the world and that the suffering will not be forgotten. This is a beautiful book, a beautifully honest collection, that finds beauty in suffering. Maybe that's redemption enough. This collection is one that I will return to time and time again.

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### **Nicole says**

So powerful.

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**Molly says**

(read for Loft Mentorship Program 2012-2013)

"Surely all art is the result of one's having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end." (19)

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**Fran says**

Evocative and powerful.

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**David Clark says**

This is one of my favorite books of poetry ever.

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