

## The Invention of Influence

**Peter Cole**

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*Uniqueness and influence converge in these rich and impressive poems.*

In his foreword for this impressive collection, Harold Bloom, author of *The Anxiety of Influence*, expresses his supreme admiration for Peter Cole. The two seem to be brothers in their exploration of influence—Bloom creating a legacy of literary criticism based on the thought that new poetry can almost always be traced to a greater influence which preceded it, and Cole creating what Bloom speculates might be “a new kind of aesthetic vocation” where mystic traditions of heritage, lineage, and tutelage converge and are made into a sum greater than their parts. According to Bloom, what Cole wants from poetry is “reclamation and extension, connection and intense reconfiguration.”

*The Invention of Influence* presents a reconciliation between translations and original works. There is a sheer curtain between Cole as poet and Cole as translator—surely a far too pedestrian term for what Cole has achieved—which makes this a richly rewarding book. There is an underlying imbalance of power in these poems where influence stops and the sparks of uniqueness emerge:

*“Gaps are opened  
within the real,  
which echoes like doubt—  
or debts we feel*

*and may have forgotten,  
returning as  
the weird condition  
we’ll call tradition.”*

The title poem, “The Invention of Influence: An Agon,” is impressively researched, drawing on a variety of sources and arranged to feel spontaneous. Using multiple voices and forms, Cole’s “Agon” pulls on the thread joining the desire to create and leave behind something authentically of the self alone and the humility of being led by influence.

In the third section of the book, the use of form and rhyme feels wedged into place. The couplets of “More on Finishing, the confined Quatrains for a Calling,” and the anaphora of “A Byzantine Diptych” create a clean expectedness which contrasts the tumultuous sections that precede them. The lens is refocused on the words themselves, giving them an organized hymn-like quality where the discordance of fathers and sons (or masters and pupils) gives way to a sense of trust.

As an internationally renowned authority on Jewish mysticism, Cole has been recognized and rewarded for his interpretation of kabbalistic verse. With *The Invention of Influence*, Cole reimagines his heirloom verse and language to speak of himself, leaving readers to wonder if anyone’s potential could be reached if indeed they stood alone.

SARA BUDZIK (Spring 2014)

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