ForeWord Reviews

POETRY

Things On Which I've Stumbled
Peter Cole
New Directions
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Peter Cole is well known for his many translations from Hebrew and Arabic. He is also a 2007 MacArthur Foundation Fellow and co-editor of Ibis Editions (Jerusalem). In this major new book he goes on a poetic and autobiographical search for the answers to large questions. What he "stumbles" toward what he hopes to find he does find: that the asking for answers is the answer itself transmuted by poetry:

> …as knowing is
> not what's there but how we lift it
> up with the winches of syntax and sense
> up in the eye of desire for linkage
> of every sort…

The title poem is a tour-de-force that combines fragments from ancient Hebrew texts discovered mouldering in a Cairo synagogue's storeroom with the poet's own commentary on issues of religious belief art history love and loss. The forms of Cole's poems seem always communicative of his content and vary widely between long sequences and very short pithy verses; he takes on formal patterns such as the sestina; he often rhymes. Yet these occasional formalities are embedded within a thoroughly contemporary attention to "making it new."

The pleasure of reading Things On Which I've Stumbled is derived largely from the frankness of the poet's struggle for meaning made visible in almost every line of his poems. Readers searching for wholly modern poetry dealing with spiritual issues grounded in history and presented with great craft will find it in Cole's new book.

James DenBoer