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## Zinc Fingers: Poems A to Z

**Peter Meinke**
University of Pittsburgh Press (Jul 20, 2000)
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The best poems are the ones that call a reader to return again, conveying content through imagery, then going further, by penetrating these images in an act of transcendence. Representative of this process are the following lines about birds in Florida: “we need to worship / something beyond ourselves to learn / something in detail to love something / alive not a flag or a car but something / that breathes maybe anything / that breathes like the ibises here on our lawn.”

Other poems in this collection take a different, more lighthearted tone, compelling the reader to seek a listener to whom to read the poems out loud. The appreciable witticisms and quirky gestures stand out as these are often missing in general poetry.

Meanwhile, fearless self-examination as achieved through the willingness to write about often common subjects such as old age or relationships, conveys a man who will not be censored or limited by the narrowing demands of PC-ism.

He declares desires and the ramblings of his mind with the conviction, and perhaps resignation, of one who knows the raw truth is more interesting than the mask one might wear in the interest of social acceptability or lyric profundity. He does not offer apologies: “a man turned pig by a goddess can’t be blamed: / in front of power like that why should I feel ashamed.”

The arrangement of the poems in this book appears at first sight to be too clever or gimmicky: one poem more or less for each letter of the alphabet, A to Z. The author qualifies this in the notes at the front of the book saying that he enjoyed the unexpected juxtapositions, as when poems with new subjects appeared next to older compositions, or when “The Brain” turned up between “Assisted Living” and “Certitude.” Soon enough, such placements are recognized for their integrity, and to continue to be attached to any other interpretation would be an unnecessary distraction for the reader, who would be better off focusing on the quality of the poems themselves.
HOLLY WREN SPAULDING (June 15, 2000)

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