

poems are generally exaggerated and uneconomical. When Law's accretions destabilize her focus, the layering of images can be successful, but it far too often overdetermines what would have been better left alone. Law's *Perihelion* suggests astronomical scale, but the collection ends up feeling like a mobile of model planets spun by a restless hand.

Leila Wilson

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Peter Finch, *The Welsh Poems*. Exeter: Shearsman, 2006. 146pp. \$16

The Welsh Poems doesn't make much new. But that's not Peter Finch's project. Across the book, Finch figures the poem as a site of cognitive waste, a word-fill. The collection includes extended permutations, poems gleaned from websites, found-language chunks, and stream-of-consciousness blocks—all pointing away from notions of originality and toward ideas of infinite transformation. Regrettably, however, Finch's ideas are often more compelling than their realization.

One long poem, "Easy X-Rays," includes four columns of words in reduced font spread across four and a half pages. It ends in eighteen repetitions of the word "waste" (which pick up three earlier iterations and a single "waist"). The poem draws a connection between language and discarded excess; it works best as a visual exemplification of the mind's detritus. Reading it, you have to wade through an awful lot of verbal rubbish.

Those familiar with experimental poetry will quickly recognize the strategies required to read Finch's work. (The best experimental poetry, on the other hand, challenges the conventions that allow for its categorization.) Uninitiated readers may simply refuse to read the refuse, as the book is chock-full of fluff like the following from the poem "Tea Room":

They took the road back in a car that leaked marking its territory as it went
like a cat. Cat. Cart. Critch. Kringle Cat. Coot. Cooloop Cat. Cancan Teena-
dan Can Deeta Canrowtoo Canreeta Canrowtoo Cancreela Crimb Crime
Crark Cat. Cob had two one huge with a lazy tongue one black and white
with fragile bones so deep down in the fur you knew it had to be old.

Such stream-of-consciousness heaps leave readers without a sense of destination or satisfying necessity. The "huh" or "huh?" that follows may be the most illuminating criticism available.

To balance this engagement with excess, Finch also consistently alludes to spiritual encounters with blankness: "I favour the cessation of particle movement, gaps between, cold." This, of course, recalls some eastern spiritual traditions, which clearly inform Finch's work. He overtly points to such an

influence in the poem “Past Interests,” listing, along with many other interests, “The martial arts aikido, tai chi chuan and tae kwondo” and “Tibetan Buddhism.” What Gary Snyder describes, Peter Finch enacts—a transitory dwelling in “That place where the outgoing breath ends and the incoming has not yet begun.”

Though the poems draw from international influences, the title *The Welsh Poems* foregrounds the question of how these pieces are particularly Welsh. It’s tempting to align Finch’s reliance on his poems’ materiality with the first half of the traditional binary of oral (indigenous Welsh) versus literary (Anglo) culture. Consider the haiku-inspired collages “Super Furry Animals,” a series in which Finch has, using a photocopier, smudged and blurred the words “super furry animals” almost beyond recognition. As the series pays homage to the eponymous Welsh band, it works by impeding various avenues of reference, celebrating sensuality at the cost of sense. Or consider Finch’s “Chaos Theory”:

Ah Wales. Motion blur. Full of fractals. Small sections from which the entirety can be predicted. Language poll. Are you able to? If you are, can you explain what entropy is? Just listen to us talking. Hot peaks. Hot zits. Hot zats. Hot rats. Wyddoch chi rhywbeth? Pile of sand.

The poem decomposes into non-linearity, into sentence fragments, into nonsense rhymes, and finally into Welsh. For some, this scrap of essentialism may prove troubling. Regardless, the poem doesn’t quite enact Finch’s brilliant and tactile ideal to “let the mind go loose then reel it in pin sharp.”

A similar problem arises with Finch’s poem “Recycle”:

thj tsay I hv eaten tplumat rein
thicebox & wch youreprob
savbreakForgive thy redelicious
sosw eet &s oco Idwmcls m

Rather than accomplishing the recycling its title suggests, the poem feels more like the box broken down and left by the curb, as yet untransformed. For an idea of what an engaging transformation might look like, read Kenneth Koch’s several riffs on the same Williams poem. Like Koch’s spoofs, “Recycle” shows a preference for disposability rather than monumentality, a well-recognized aesthetic position. But Koch steels his poems with considerable wit. Lacking that, Finch should be careful that readers do not toss the book out with the Poetry.

Heidi Lynn Staples

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