

Davison, Peter
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Peter Davison, who lives in Boston, is the poetry editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has published ten previous books of poetry and several volumes of non-fiction. Not so surprisingly, some of the work in the present collection has appeared previously in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the *Boston Globe*, *The Paris Review*, and other notable magazines in the in-bred literary daisy chain of uninspired versifiers. One wonders, if the playing field were truly level, whether most of these poems would have seen print in other than the small press backwaters. In a foreword concerned with hair-splitting over fatuous terms like “audiographs” and Pinsky’s regrettable “technology of the breath,” it would be easy to overlook the fact that these poems are intended to showcase the poet’s “mature work,” in this instance merely a euphemism for “old and tired.” In a piece about aging, the best he can offer is the observation that if “you’re over sixty and you don’t hurt anywhere you must be dead.” Like hearing a Henny Youngman joke for the tenth time, his is a wearisome shtick. But the very publishing success of Davison and his fellow poetasters militates against their taking any chances with the formula, which calls for the piling on of metaphors and similes as if that were the purpose of poetry. In “Under the Language Sea,” he speaks of darting nouns, “their gills pulsing like adjectives.” On another occasion, having spotted a vixen, he observes that “rather foxlike in concentration she pursued a faint trail across the road under a fallen tree.” He may wish to believe this work was hatched in “a juicy swamp of invention,” but it reads as though it had been “jammed in hardening concrete.”

These are poems about poetry, not about life.