

## Peter Meinke

Peter Meinke has published twelve books of poetry, including *Scars* (1996) and *Liquid Paper* (1991). His most recent, *Zinc Fingers*, received the 2001 SEBA Award from the Southeast Booksellers Association. Recently he was Distinguished Visiting Writer at Converse College, in South Carolina; he lives in St. Petersburg, Florida.

### Supermarket

My supermarket is bigger than your supermarket. That's  
what America's all about. Nowhere am I happier,  
nowhere am I more myself. In the supermarket, there  
you feel free. Listen: the carts roll  
on their oiled wheels, the cash register sings  
to the Sound of Music, the bagboys are unbearably polite!  
Everywhere there are lies, but in the supermarket we speak truth.  
The sallow young man by the cornstarch bumps my cart,  
I tell him, There are always two brothers. One is  
hardworking, serious. The other is good-looking but worthless;  
he drinks, he is a natural athlete, he seduces Priscilla  
Warren whom the older brother loves, and then abandons her.  
Yes, cries the sallow young man, O my god yes!  
Everywhere there are lies, I lie to my classes, I say,  
Eat this poem. Eat that poem. *Good* for you.  
I say, Sonnets have more vitamins than villanelles,  
I give green stamps for the most vivid images.  
But in the supermarket truth blows you over like a clearance sale.  
I meet Mrs. Pepitone by the frozen fish, dark circles  
under her dark eyes. I tell her, If we had met 16 years earlier  
in the dairy section perhaps, everything would have been different.  
Yes! Mrs. Pepitone cracks a Morton pie in her bare hands, lust  
floods the aisles, a tidal wave, everyone staring  
at everyone else with total abandon; Mr. Karakis is streaking  
through the cold cuts! Outside, the lies continue.  
We lie in church, we say  
Buy Jesus and you get Mary free. If you have faith  
you can eat pork, dollar a chop.  
We give plaid stamps for the purest souls.  
I meet Sue Morgan by the family-sized maxi-pads. Or  
is it mini-pads?--Or is it mopeds? In the supermarket  
everything sounds like everything else. I tell her,  
You can see azaleas in the dark, the white ones  
glow like the eyes of angels. I tell her, Azaleas  
are the soul of the South, you kill all azaleas

Jimmy Carter will shrivel like a truffle. Yes,  
she exclaims, Hallelujah! And still the lies  
pile up on the sidewalk, they're storming  
the automatic doors. Mr. Hanratty the manager throws himself  
in front of the electric beam, he knows this means  
he will be sterile forever, but the store comes first:  
the lies retreat to the First National Bank  
where they meet no resistance. Meanwhile,  
in the supermarket I am praising truth-in-advertising  
laws, I am trying to figure the exact price per ounce,  
the precise percentage of calcium propionate. And  
for you, my tenderest darling, to whom I always return  
laden with groceries, I bring Spaghetti-O's and chocolate  
kisses, I tip whole shelves into my cart, the bag boys  
turn pale at my approach, they do isometric exercises.  
But I know this excess is unnecessary,  
I say, My friends, think Small, use the 8-item line, who  
needs more than 8 items? All you really need is  
civility, honesty, courage, and five loaves of wheatberry bread.  
Listen friends, Life is no rip-off, the oranges are full of  
juice, their coloring the best we can do, why do you think  
we live so long?                So long.

My dear friends, the supermarket is open. Let us begin.

### **Atomic Pantoum**

In a chain reaction  
the neutrons released  
split other nuclei  
which release more neutrons

The neutrons released  
blow open some others  
which release more neutrons  
and start this all over

Blow open some others  
and choirs will crumble  
and start this all over  
with eyes burned to ashes

And choirs will crumble  
the fish catch on fire

with eyes burned to ashes  
in a chain reaction

The fish catch on fire  
because the sun's force  
in a chain reaction  
has blazed in our minds

Because the sun's force  
with plutonium trigger  
has blazed in our minds  
we're dying to use it

With plutonium trigger  
curled and tightened  
we're dying to use it  
torching our enemies

Curled and tightened  
blind to the end  
torching our enemies  
we sing to Jesus

Blind to the end  
split up like nuclei  
we sing to Jesus  
in a chain reaction

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