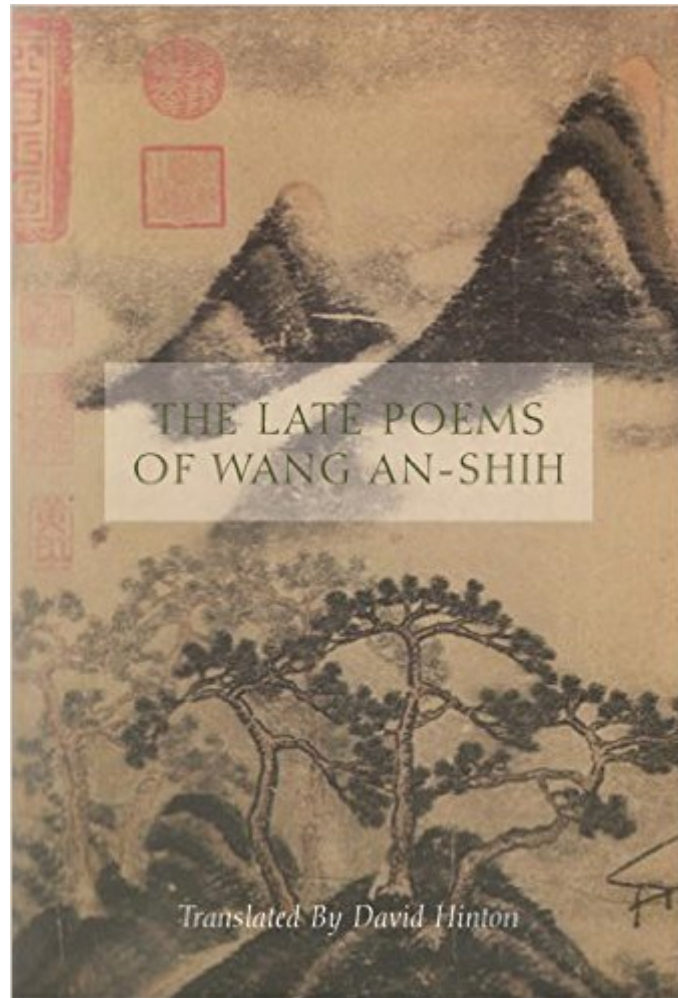


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The Late Poems Of Wang An-Shih



Synopsis

A selection of poems by the ancient Chinese poet and statesman Wang An-Shih, translated by David Hinton. Wang An-shih (1021-1086 C.E.) was a remarkable figure— not only one of the great Sung Dynasty poets, but also the most influential and controversial statesman of his time. Although Wang had little interest in the grandeur of high office and political power, he took the responsibility of serving the people seriously. He rose to become prime minister, and in this position he instituted a controversial system of radically egalitarian social reforms to improve the lives of China's peasants. Once those reforms were securely in place, Wang retired to a reclusive life of artistic and spiritual self-cultivation. It was after his retirement, practicing Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism and wandering the mountains around his home, that Wang An-shih wrote the poems that made his reputation. Short and plainspoken, these late poems contain profound multitudes— "the passing of time, rivers and mountains, silence and Buddhist emptiness. They won him wide acclaim in China and beyond across the centuries. And in Hinton's breathtaking translations, Wang feels like a major contemporary poet with deep ecological insight and a questioning spirit.

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Customer Reviews

Wang An-shih was an eccentric politician from the Sung Dynasty. Known as a diligent political reformer who sought to help the underclasses, Wang An-shih's compassion for the peasant and farmer was only surpassed by his displeasure for court life. After establishing his reforms and securing successors to ensure their success, he retired to the mountains and wrote poems and

commentaries on classical Chinese and Buddhist texts, assuming the guise of a sagely hermit. The poems presented in this volume come from the last decade of his life. David Hinton's book includes an excellent Introduction to Wang An-shih and his poems, giving the reader an understanding of his philosophical perspective and his literary style. He also explains his interpretation of texts and choices in translation. Though brief, the Introduction is helpful in understanding Wang An-shih and his works. Hinton also includes several pages of helpful end notes. Most of the poems follow a four line structure attempting to capture a sight, feeling, relationship, or record thoughts surrounding mundane activities of daily life. The poems tend to be emotive but not emotional (the poem "The River" on page 28 is a notable exception) and are often tinged with melancholy. A Ch'an spirit fills the writing as well as Taoist influences. There are frequent references to darkness and shadow, stars and moonlight, clouds and water, that are not only descriptive but express as metaphors Wang An-shih's state of mind. Cosmological associations are important in Wang's An-shih's worldview and psychology. His poems seek to melt the metaphysical categories of Absence and Presence found in Chinese philosophy into an experience of unified mystery that sharpens awareness and the senses.

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