

Charles Goodrich

Camped beside the Metolius River in the Third Year of Trump's Presidency

How do you grow old living with failure and disgrace?

Stay close to the cascading creek: cold, shimmering.

—Wang An-shih, translated by David Hinton

Late November, shimmering stars
and a promise of frost. While the House moves
toward impeaching the president,
I huddle close to a little campfire
reading poems written a thousand years ago
by Wang An-shih.

A celebrated Sung dynasty poet,
Wang was also a public servant
who rose to become prime minister.
He persuaded the emperor
to build granaries, hospitals, and orphanages
and to lower the peasants' taxes.

But those reforms were anathema
to the dynasty's well-heeled bureaucrats
and Wang was sacked and banished.
He spent his forced retirement
wandering forests, visiting monks, meditating,
and writing these poems.

Though governments and nations rise and fall,
mountains and rivers endure,
Wang's poetry insists.
But whose heart can remain at peace
while the entire planet is being carved up
and eaten alive?