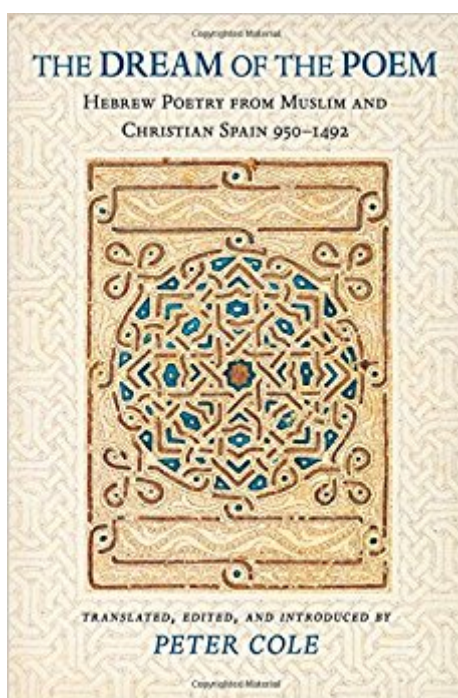


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# The Dream Of The Poem: Hebrew Poetry From Muslim And Christian Spain, 950-1492 (Lockert Library Of Poetry In Translation)



## Synopsis

Hebrew culture experienced a renewal in medieval Spain that produced what is arguably the most powerful body of Jewish poetry written since the Bible. Fusing elements of East and West, Arabic and Hebrew, and the particular and the universal, this verse embodies an extraordinary sensuality and intense faith that transcend the limits of language, place, and time. Peter Cole's translations reveal this remarkable poetic world to English readers in all of its richness, humor, grace, gravity, and wisdom. *The Dream of the Poem* traces the arc of the entire period, presenting some four hundred poems by fifty-four poets, and including a panoramic historical introduction, short biographies of each poet, and extensive notes. (The original Hebrew texts are available on the Princeton University Press Web site.) By far the most potent and comprehensive gathering of medieval Hebrew poems ever assembled in English, Cole's anthology builds on what poet and translator Richard Howard has described as "the finest labor of poetic translation that I have seen in many years" and "an entire revelation: a body of lyric and didactic verse so intense, so intelligent, and so vivid that it appears to identify a whole dimension of historical consciousness previously unavailable to us." *The Dream of the Poem* is, Howard says, "a crowning achievement."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Peter Cole has provided the literary world with an astonishing service; he has managed to recuperate an entire poetic tradition and securely place it within the crown of the greatest achievements of the Western canon prior to Shakespeare. It is humbling to read these poems,

many of which were almost lost forever, some of which were not discovered until the 20th century. They are arguably the finest poems written in Hebrew since the Bible and, unlike medieval and Renaissance poetry in English, Cole's remarkable translations allow them to be read fluently with a diction and tone that is uncannily modern. References to religious and cultural borrowings, from the Arabic tradition, from the Torah and from the Psalms, as well as the manner of choosing a particular word, are clearly explained in more than 200 pages of Notes, and do not in any way impede the pleasure of the general reader. Many of the poems feel strictly contemporaneous. Here is "The Apple", an ekphrastic poem by Shmu'el Hanagid (993-1056):

II, when you notice, am cast in gold:  
the bite of the ignorant frightens me. II  
An apple filled with spices: silver coated with gold.  
And others that grow in the orchard beside it, bright as rubies.  
I asked it: Why aren't you like those? Soft,  
with your skin exposed?  
And it answered in silence: Because boors and fools have jaws.

Cole's careful attention to half-rhymes and his skill in metrical pacing are evident throughout. Secular poems on many subjects, from the joys of wine and sangria to sexual passion and romantic ambivalence are given the same loving attention as those that are more obviously devotional and pietistic.

This book contains translations into English of the Hebrew Poetry written in Muslim and Christian Spain from 950 to 1492. It is the labor of love of one translator Peter Cole, who has also provided a rich and informative background introduction to the period and the poetry. There are also extensive notes on the poems in the back of the book. And there are brief biographical sketches of the poets. Along with the giants of medieval Spanish- Jewish poetry Yehuda Ha-Levi, Moshe ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabriol, Shmuel ha- Nagid, Cole has included the work of over fifty poets who have never been translated into English before. Here Cole does the admirable work of bringing to a wider audience poets who have no previous place whatsoever in the consciousness of English - language readers. Regrettably the Hebrew originals are not printed in this volume. Cole wanted them to be at the back but for reasons of economy Princeton University Press decided to make them available only on their website. This is a deprivation for those who would like to read through the volume comparing in as convenient way as possible, original and translation. I lack the knowledge and skill to fairly assess the faithfulness of the translations to language and spirit of the originals. What I can say is that the poems can be read with real pleasure. They flow and are understandable, their language moving and clear. They reflect a wide range of life, and especially religious, experience. Here are three brief examples: First, a short lyric of longing of the great Shlomo ibn - Gavriol.

Please note that the one star is for the terribly edited Kindle version, not for the book of medieval Iberian poems beautifully and lovingly translated by Peter Cole. \*\*\*Do not purchase the Kindle version.\*\*\* I am returning mine for a refund, as most of it is quite literally unreadable. The Introduction is OK, just a few words here and there joined together like Siamese twins. It's the poetry that suffers (i.e., most of the book). One of the major problems (there are a great many) is that the font size fluctuates arbitrarily from print that is slightly too large to print that is so minute as to be illegible. And this from Princeton, no less, a major university press! Deep shame on Princeton University Press and for producing this miserable version! How bad is it? I would not even take the Kindle version were it offered to me free. That's how bad it is. And the Kindle price is only a few dollars less than the print version. It will be obvious to anyone who has the misfortune to buy the book that no one has edited or even cast a weary eye on the Kindle version. The book is so sloppy as to be either a very bad joke or a tremendous insult. I'm sure Mr. Cole has no idea of what they (the robotic mobi conversion algorithms) have done to what appears (as far as I have read) to be a work of translation of the highest caliber; translation that is, raised to an art. Most Kindle books of verse, even those by major modern poets, appear problematic at best. We have the technology, certainly; we have had it for almost two decades, at least. But there is absolutely no quality control at either Kindle or the publishing houses. Is the work outsourced to distant non-English speaking lands? Are these books converted in yurts in Outer Mongolia by illiterate shepherds in their off hours?

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