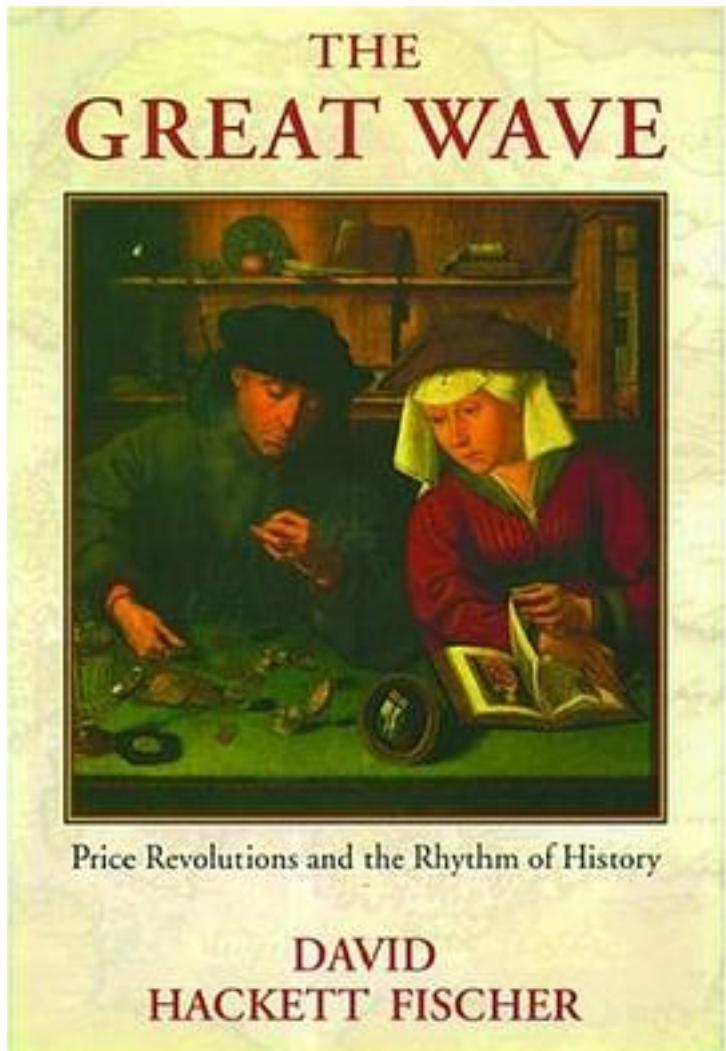


The Great Wave



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著者:Ron Slate

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THE GREAT WAVE, Slate's follow-up collection to THE INCENTIVE OF THE MAGGOT, is a more personal performance than his much lauded and talked about debut book, which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Academy of American Poets Lenore Marshall Prize, and was the winner of the prestigious Larry Levis Poetry Prize. While Slate's first book burst forth from a twenty-year period of silence, THE GREAT WAVE bears the mark of a finely honed fluency and makes good his exceptional promise. While Slate occasionally returns to his experience as an international businessman ("Meeting in Madrid", "Samba de Orfeo", and "Reunion"), his most powerful and moving poems revivify childhood memories ("Four Roses") or address the condition of his elderly parents ("December First, Terminal"). One of the most haunting and poignant poems recounts the tragedy of the 1942 Coconut Grove fire in which Slate's fraternal grandmother died "with her sister in the ladies' room." Of this event, Slate writes, "My life began with the fire, / glimmering in the birth waters. / Beyond my bedroom wall/voices murmured a memory." "Coconut Grove" is one of several poems that mention historical catastrophes such as fires and floods and these allusions shock us with recognition of our own perilous and tenuous and terror-ridden times. Everywhere, the collection displays Slate's sly and signature wit as in a marvelously humorous and historically accurate "Khrushchev's Foot," in which Slate reminds us of the time Khrushchev slammed his shoe in anger on a desk at the UN. Out of this event, he imagines, "Such a delicate foot, veined and moist--/it makes me want to reveal a secret, / an expendable one, declassified." Reading THE GREAT WAVE, we are reminded that the purpose of poetry is to confront the urgencies of the present by remembering and reinventing the past.

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