



Stagnant Water & Other Poems

Wen Yiduo

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Poetry. Asian & Asian American Studies. Translated from the Chinese by Robert Hammond Dorsett, MD. Foreword by Christopher Merrill. Calligraphy by Huang Xiang. The temptation, when evaluating a poet gunned down by his government, is to start there, with the politics that led to his murder. But Wen Yiduo (1899-1946) was much too complex and heterodox to comfortably wear the martyr's robe, his works too nuanced and unsettled to be a paragon of any revolution. His poems explore religion and rickshaws, contain the chrysanthemums of Chinese folklore and the mud of contemporary times, and dare readers to challenge prevailing conceptions, even to render their own cynicism as hope. Mao blamed the Nationalists for Wen's death, thus elevating him to something like mythic status, yet the poet needed no such validation. He resisted easy classification. He was a writer whose ballast was in ideas and logic, while remaining fresh to the point of innovation. In Dorsett's interpretation, we revel in the details of Wen's work: lyric, ironic, passionate, and above all, politically aware but ideologically free. It represents a long overdue attempt to bring international attention to one of China's preeminent 20th-century writers.

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