

WEN YIDUO*



**Wen Yiduo (November 24, 1899 - July 15, 1946) was a Chinese national poet known for his nationalist poems. He was born in Xishui County, Hubei Province. After receiving a traditional Chinese Confucian education, he attended Tsinghua University. In 1922, he went to the United States to study fine arts and literature at the Chicago Art Institute. His first poems were published during this period. He returned to China in 1925 and worked as a university lecturer. With the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, he emigrated to Kunming. There, he was able to continue teaching, this time at the National Southwest Joint University during the war. In his poems, he tried to recreate the symbolism and morality of pre-modern Chinese society. He was assassinated by the Kuomintang in 1946. The poet and his wife Gao Zhen are buried in the Babaoshan Revolutionary Cemetery in Beijing.*

DEAD WATER

Here is a ditch of hopelessly dead water.
A cool breeze would not raise the slightest ripple on it.
You might throw in some scraps of copper and rusty tins,
or dump in as well the remains of your meal.
Perhaps the green on copper will turn into emeralds,
or the rust on tin will sprout a few peach blossoms.
Let grease weave a layer of fine silk-gauze, and
mold steam out a few red-glowing clouds.
Let the dead water ferment into a ditch of green vine,
floating with pearls of white foam;
but the laughter of small pearls turning into large pearls
is broken by spotted mosquitoes stealing the wine.
Thus a ditch of hopelessly dead water
can yet claim a bit of something bright.
And if the frogs can't endure the utter solitude,
let the dead water burst into song.
Here is a ditch of hopelessly dead water.
Here beauty can never reside.
You might as well let ugliness come and cultivate it,
and see what kind of world comes out.

