



Sandalwood Death: A Novel (Chinese Literature Today Book Series)

Mo Yan

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This powerful novel by Mo Yan—one of contemporary China’s most famous and prolific writers—is both a stirring love story and an unsparing critique of political corruption during the final years of the Qing Dynasty, China’s last imperial epoch.

Sandalwood Death is set during the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1901)—an anti-imperialist struggle waged by North China’s farmers and craftsmen in opposition to Western influence. Against a broad historical canvas, the novel centers on the interplay between its female protagonist, Sun Meiniang, and the three paternal figures in her life. One of these men is her biological father, Sun Bing, an opera virtuoso and a leader of the Boxer Rebellion. As the bitter events surrounding the revolt unfold, we watch Sun Bing march toward his cruel fate, the gruesome “sandalwood punishment,” whose purpose, as in crucifixions, is to keep the condemned individual alive in mind-numbing pain as long as possible.

Filled with the sensual imagery and lacerating expressions for which Mo Yan is so celebrated, *Sandalwood Death* brilliantly exhibits a range of artistic styles, from stylized arias and poetry to the antiquated idiom of late Imperial China to contemporary prose. Its starkly beautiful language is here masterfully rendered into English by renowned translator Howard Goldblatt.

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