



# 20190404\_theslowdown\_20190404\_128

Wed, 9/30 7:09PM 5:00

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

wong, poem, silent films, voice, kill, legal dispute, actress, history, character, silence, imagines, star, hollywood, audibly, white petals, remind, femininity, anna mae, play, anna

00:05

I'm us

00:06

Poet Laureate Tracy k Smith.

00:08

And this is the slow down.

00:22

Every poem has something to teach us about ourselves. But many poems are also useful tools for learning about the wider world. In this way, I wish poems were a more regular feature in history courses, because they offer a glimpse of what history feels like on the ground. They shed light on the effects public history has on individual

00:50

lives.

00:51

Today's poem imagines the perspective of early 20th century Chinese American actress Anna may Wong, whose career spanned silent film, radio, television and stage. Like so many actors of

color in early Hollywood, the roles available to Wong were woefully limited, often pandering to stereotypes of Asian femininity. Case in point are the dragon lady and butterfly rolls. Wong is best known for when she tried to break into a traditional leading role in the 1937 version of *Pearl's Box*. In *The Good Earth*, Wong was devastated to be turned down for the character of Oh Lon. Instead, the part was given to Louise Rainer, a white actress. In 1951, Wang starred in her own TV show, *The Gallery of Madame Lu*, where she played an international Art gallerist, who also solved crimes. I'm dying to play a clip from an episode, I'm dying to find a clip from an episode. But tragically, nothing of the show seems to exist. It seems that in the early 70s, a legal dispute arose about ownership of this and other network holdings, and a boat full of footage, including that very show itself was dumped into the New York Harbor. Today's poem, *Anna Mae Wong on silent films by Sally when Mao* offers us a version of Wong's voice, and the chance to hear her speak candidly about Hollywood as she knew it? I admire persona poems that resist the urge merely to mimic the speaker's actual voice, the surface markers of place, or class or time instead, the best persona poems attempt to dig deeper for a sense of character. They tap into the voice of feeling or thought, the way a person sounds, when she's not speaking, or when she's speaking only to herself. *Anna Mae long on silent films by Sally when Mao* It is natural to live in an era when no one uttered and silence was glamour. So I cast one glance westward, and you'd know what I was going to kill. murder in my gaze, treachery in my movements. If I bared the grooves in my spine, made my lust known, the real would remind me that someone with my face could never be loved. How did you expect my characters to react? In so many shoots, I was brandishing a dagger. The narrative was enchanting enough to make me believe I too, could live in a white palace. smell. The odorless gardens, relieve myself on their white petals. To be a star in Sun City. To be first lady on the cellular Lloyd screen. I had to marry my own cinematic death. I never wept audibly. I saw my sisters in the sawmills reminded myself of my good luck. Even the muzzle over my mouth could not kill me, though. I never slept soundly through the silence. The slowdown is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Library of Congress and the Poetry Foundation. To get a

04:47

poem delivered to daily go to

04:49

slow down show.org