

# Rose, Rose, I Love You

By Wang Chen-Ho

Translated by Howard Goldblatt

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183 PAGES

Wang Chen-Ho (1940–1990) was one of Taiwan's leading authors of popular fiction and was also known as one of the most prolific writers of satire of his time. Considered to be a part of the "back to the roots" movement of the 1960s and 70s, Wang's popularity stemmed from his ability to intricately weave vernacular dialogue into his writings, creating prose recognizable and accessible to a wide variety of people. His razor wit and keen eye for irony in everyday life in Taiwan make his writings appear caustic and sly, while at the same time revealing the human frailties, idiosyncrasies and contradictions that abound in a society shaped by a wide range of cultures, languages and political influences.

*Rose, Rose, I Love You* is the first book of Wang's to be translated into English and remains true to the author's stylistic traditions. Set in the mid 1960s, *Rose, Rose, I Love You* is the story of the frenzy that grabs a Taiwanese village when news that 300 American servicemen from the Vietnam war are about to arrive for R & R in their town. Eager to ensure that American dollars land securely in the pocket of the local officials and business people, the lead character, a flatulent, chubby and egotistical English teacher named Dong Siwen, schemes to organize the local big four brothels into a master plan thinly veiled as an attempt to "elevate" the moral character of the prostitutes, so as to "leave a good impression" with the Americans and "save face" for all involved. What begins as a crash course in English for a group of bar girls evolves into a farcical and elaborate ordeal to teach courses on global etiquette and "American culture," and various attempts to "improve" the sanitary conditions of the hotels in order to thoroughly fleece the unsuspecting GI's. Couching the makeover of the village, the brothels and the bar girls in the rhetoric of "patriotic duty," Dong Siwen stops just short of introducing the girls to a team song and playing the national anthem before the beginning of each lesson.

Part of the fun in this book comes from the clever naming of the characters (Dr. Venereal Wang, Big-Nose Lion, Stumpy Courtesan) and places of business (Night Fragrances and Valley of Joy brothels, to name a few) as well as linguistic malapropisms and oddities. The skillful translation (and in some cases transliteration) of Mandarin, Taiwanese, Japanese and English by Howard Goldblatt exposes the reader to the complex language structure used by the natives of Taiwan and reveals the wide range of influences that have had an impact on the contemporary culture. As noted in Goldblatt's preface, Wang wrote *Rose, Rose, I Love You* in 1984 when much of Taiwan was coming to terms with the end of martial law, the rise in Taiwanese nationalism, and the challenges to traditional values brought on by modernization (p. viii). Those readers with some knowledge of Taiwan's modern history (the occupation of the island

by the Japanese for 50 years, the rule of the Kuomintang, and the more recent rise in the overall standard of living for most natives) will understand why *Rose, Rose, I Love You* struck a cord with the people of Taiwan as they sought a more unified Taiwanese identity.

Comic and irreverent, *Rose, Rose I Love You* offers a unique view of the effects of Westernization on Taiwanese society and the corruption that can ensue from an over-dependence on the American dollar. Readers and educators looking to explore the sociological, anthropological or political implications of the complexities of modern Taiwanese or Chinese society can use this book to explore topical issues such as Taiwanese identity, foreign influence on Asian society, or even greed as social motivation. Students working on comparative modern Chinese literary traditions might also find this book useful as a means of exploring the question of how modern Chinese writers are coming to terms with the break from the terse, allusion-bound conventions of classical Chinese to write in the vernacular. Due to the liberal use of colorful language and adult situations, this book would be more appropriate for postsecondary educators and their students. ■

Michele Ferrier

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