



Notes of a Desolate Man

Chu T'ien-wen, Howard Goldblatt, Sylvia Lichun Lin, Sylvia Li-Chun Lin

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Winner of the coveted *China Times* Novel Prize, this postmodern, first-person tale of a contemporary Taiwanese gay man reflecting on his life, loves, and intellectual influences is among the most important recent novels in Taiwan.

The narrator, Xiao Shao, recalls a series of friends and lovers, as he watches his childhood friend, Ah Yao, succumb to complications from AIDS. The brute fact of Ah Yao's death focuses Shao's simultaneously erudite and erotic reflections magnetically on the core theme of mortality. By turns humorous and despondent, the narrator struggles to come to terms with Ah Yao's risky lifestyle, radical political activism, and eventual death; the fragility of romantic love; the awesome power of eros; the solace of writing; the cold ennui of a younger generation enthralled only by video games; and life on the edge of mainstream Taiwanese society. His feverish journey through forests of metaphor and allusion—from Fellini and Lévi-Strauss to classical Chinese poetry—serves as a litany protecting him from the ravages of time and finitude.

Impressive in scope and detail, *Notes of a Desolate Man* employs the motif of its characters' marginalized sexuality to highlight Taiwan's vivid and fragile existence on the periphery of mainland China. Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin's masterful translation brings Chu T'ien-wen's lyrical and inventive pastiche of political, poetic, and sexual desire to the English-speaking world.

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