



# Smile as they Bow

*Nu Nu Yi*

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As the weeklong Taungbyon Festival draws near, thousands of villagers from all regions of Burma descend upon a tiny hamlet near Mandalay to pay respect to the spirits, known as *nats*, which are central to Burmese tradition. At the heart of these festivities is Daisy Bond, a gay, transvestite spiritual medium in his fifties. With his sharp tongue and vivid performances, he has long been revered as one of the festival's most illustrious *natkadaws*. At his side is Min Min, his young assistant and lover, who endures unyielding taunts and abuse from his fiery boss. But when a young beggar girl named Pan Nyo threatens to steal Min Min's heart, the outrageous Daisy finds himself face-to-face with his worst fears. Written in lyrical, intoxicating prose, *Smile as They Bow* is, like the works of Arundhati Roy and Ha Jin, an unexpectedly whimsical, illuminating, and above all revealing portrayal of a culture few Westerners have ever witnessed.

Over the past twenty years, Nu Nu Yi has become one of Burma's most acclaimed authors--and in 2007, she became the first person living in Burma to be nominated for an international literary award. *Smile as They Bow* was censored for more than twelve years by the Burmese government. It is fitting, then, that this is her American debut.

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