

*The Rose Fancier*—Olga Masters; Norton; 1991; 135 pp. ISBN 0-393-03031-8.

This posthumous publication of short stories by Australian Olga Masters is a look at the human condition. Master's sense of reality dwells on the negative side of human life. Dealing mostly with people of the working class, the stories are full of unhappy marriages, divorce, dissatisfied women, neglected children, unwanted pregnancies, and family upheaval.

The exception to the mostly depressing stories is the first story in the collection, "The Boy With Two Birthdays," the tale of a type of coming of age for Leo, whose birthday was moved forward because his parents were ashamed to have two children born in one year. The title story, more typical of the collection as a whole, is about the two spinster Parker sisters and their father's rose garden. What holds them in their childhood home is another sad story of jealousy and misplaced loyalty. "The Split" is a poignant portrait of a small boy confused and shuttled between his divorced parents. The special sadness comes in Master's drawing of the father and his mother—uncertain with the situation but wanting it to work out somehow. Masters doesn't leave us much hope, as the story ends with the boy running from the kitchen in tears, the father shouting, and the grandmother silently clutching a sugar bowl.

The stories in *The Rose Fancier* evoke a darker, more depressing side of Australian everyday life, perhaps a reality too real to be comfortable. The stories are disturbing in their vividness, and the character creation is poignant in its bleak honesty.

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#### JOURNAL

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