



## Old Rosa

*Reinaldo Arenas, Ann Tashi Slater (Translator), Andrew Hurley (Translator)*

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**Old Rosa** Reinaldo Arenas , Ann Tashi Slater (Translator) , Andrew Hurley (Translator)

A terrifying and beautiful novel, Old Rosa is composed of two stories that converge on a single charged point in the lives of a Cuban mother and son. In the first, the mother finds her son in bed with another boy; in the second, the son is imprisoned in one of Castro's camps for homosexuals.

## Old Rosa Details

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Author : Reinaldo Arenas , Ann Tashi Slater (Translator) , Andrew Hurley (Translator)

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## From Reader Review Old Rosa for online ebook

### **Jerry Daniels says**

In two short stories, each containing a paragraph that doesn't end until the last page of the story, Reinaldo Arenas uses independent clauses most often separated by commas to make the action in the story more immediate.

This style works best for the first short story, Old Rosa, than it does for the second, The Brightest Star. Told by a young Cuban boy observing the relationship his mother has with each of the men in his family, Old Rosa reads like a sheet of musical notes. It is an ode from the storyteller who also disappoints his mother.

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### **ElenaSquareEyes says**

Old Rosa is one novel told in two short stories. The first is about Rosa, her life as a farmer, her marriage, and her children including her eldest son who runs off to join Castro's rebels and her youngest son who she catches in bed with another boy. The second story finds her youngest son Arturo in one of Castro's camps for homosexuals where he's forced to do mind-numbing manual labour and his only escape is his imagination.

Rosa is a strong, proud and shrewd woman who works hard and expects everyone around her to do the same. She is very set in her ways and as her life goes on you see how that can be detrimental to her well-being. She doesn't believe in what her eldest son Armando is doing by joining the rebels, she thinks it all nonsense and just focusses on her farm. She's an interesting character as she's not always likable but she is sympathetic as she's often a victim of her own pride and prejudice.

Arturo writes and dreams to survive the labour camp. His mind is all over the place as he cuts down sugar cane and learns to live with the other prisoners. They all make a life for themselves, often being over the top and embracing the insults the guards throw at them. Arturo doesn't want to be like the "queens" who wear short skirts made from palm fronds but he finds he's a target if he tries to keep himself separate. His writing and imagination is what he clings to in the camp.

Old Rosa has a very different writing style to anything I've read before. Both stories have long, run on sentences with lots of commas and there's no paragraph breaks or anything like that as well. It is the second story that really sticks out in the way it's written, it's 60 pages long and it's one complete sentence. That might sound crazy but it's true. The whole story is like Arturo's chaotic train of thought, bouncing from one idea to another with no rest at all. This writing style made Old Rosa simultaneously quick to read as you get pulled along with the character's thoughts, but if you needed to put the book down for whatever reason, it made it difficult to find an acceptable place to stop.

Old Rosa is a unique yet often unsettling story. Both Rosa and Arturo go through such pain and hardships and both of their imaginations are so vivid that as the reader you're not always sure what's real. The dreamlike state both characters find themselves in gives an unusual perspective on the Cuban Revolution and how things changed after Castro came into power.

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## **Ciaran Monaghan says**

This has two linked stories in one book; the first is the life story of Old Rosa and the second is about her son. Old Rosa is a conservative, very religious woman who works hard to build her farm over the course of her life and maintain her prosperity but is dogged by misfortune and sees her life's work crumble away under the new Communist government in Cuba post-revolution (although this is not the cause of all her problems). In the second, we follow her younger son, trying to survive in a prison camp for homosexuals and slowly being ground down by the experience.

For me, the first is too short and fast-paced to really feel too strongly either way. It is not bad but there isn't enough for me to say it was too good, either. I think the second is more interesting but is not as accessible, being written as a stream of increasingly unstable consciousness which is always difficult for me to engage with. As I found this by chance in a random book sale, I don't feel too disappointed but I wouldn't go out of my way to recommend it to anyone.

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## **Tony says**

Lindo.

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## **Armonté Butler says**

Old Rosa was a great book that I used to write my Women's and Gender Studies thesis paper! I love the work of Arenas and how he continues, through his literature, to resist the Cuban Revolution.

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## **Vincent says**

Arenas had already found his way into my heart and onto my list of greats, but Old Rosa confirms this placement. This slim but powerful book could easily fit into his great *Pentagonia* (the structure reminded me of *Farewell to the Sea*). Essential for fans of Cuban literature and good reading regardless of national origin.

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## **Fabian says**

Cements "Before Night Falls" writer's cred. Sure, Arenas wrote an outstanding before-the-gallows autobiography. This assures us his fiction was just as incredible. New, even, despite the popular theme of Latin American tyrannies.

Seek this out! The first part occurs all within one paragraph. The second: one paragraph & one period. This is innovation atop a heap of broken hearts.

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**Rebecca says**

another book I read in prep for my thesis but I read this one in Spanish.

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**Stephanie says**

Amazing fiction.

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**Adam says**

Oh boy, this is a hard one to rate... I'll need to read this again someday. I picked this up thinking it would be a quick and fast read, but I felt stuck in a poem that wouldn't end, letting my mind wander for most of the page, and missing quite a bit

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**Maughn Gregory says**

A riveting portrayal of the brutality of totalitarian regimes. I'm a leftist and celebrate the thawing of U.S.-Cuban relations, but let's not forget how Castro tortured and murdered gays (and others). More broadly, let's not forget how homosexuality used to be defined as inherently counter-revolutionary by the macho-identified political left.

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**Melissa Reiser says**

Pure poetry in prose.

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**Anna says**

Mysterious, poetic little book. If you never knew fire could be dreamy, equally so Cuba's gay prison camps, read on.

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**Joe says**

The book contains two short stories taking place in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution. The first is a nice introspective into the stubborn mind of the petty-bourgeois figure, represented as an old hardworking landowner named Rosa. It raises questions about old versus new, tradition versus change, family versus individual. The second story is told by her son Arturo, a young writer imprisoned for homosexuality, and explores oppression, sexuality, and the function of art (particularly as an escapist device to deal with reality).

These are two well written and well translated stories that complement each other nicely. I'll definitely be reading more Arenas in the future.

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### **Manuel says**

(3,5)

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