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A Shower of Roses

Tom Milton
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"Do we have a purpose?" "Are we capable of unconditional love?" "What is God's role in our lives?" These are the types of questions Tom Milton explores in his fifth novel *A Shower of Roses*. But perhaps Milton's most pressing question is, "Can womankind save mankind (because he's surely not going to save himself)?"

Set primarily in London in 1981, the story follows the life of Eva Ostrowski. Eva is the daughter of Polish parents who escaped the onslaught of the Germans and the Russians during World War II. She is married to a man named Marek whose name can be loosely translated as "a severe brand of Pole." Marek, like Eva's parents, is also a transplanted Pole who now works for the CIA. He often travels back and forth to Poland (disguised as a banker) in an effort to aid the Solidarity movement's attempt to overthrow Poland's communist government.

To fully develop Eva's character, Milton intersperses the storyline with insightful passages about Eva's past. Eva was raised in a tightly-knit Polish community in St. Paul, Minnesota. Catholicism and polka music were the two most important ingredients in the glue that held this community together. During her fifth-grade year, Eva's favorite nun gave her a book called *The Story of a Soul* by St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Through this book, Eva came to understand that in a world dominated and controlled by men, her greatest contribution would be myriad small acts of kindness and the spreading of happiness through unconditional love for others. Eva's marriage to Marek is the embodiment of the theory that opposites attract. He is an atheist. His sole mission in life is to effect the political balance of power on the world stage, and he is unconvinced anyone is capable of unreserved love. Eva is everything he is not, and it is through this relationship that Milton presents the reader with his theories regarding some of life's most profound issues. *A Shower of Roses* is provoking and engaging. The story takes its time developing the central theme of finding and defining one's place in the grand scheme of things, but once it hits its stride, *Roses* is hard to put down. Eva's struggles and insights take place in a world seemingly designed by Emmanuel Kant and Virginia Woolf, a world in which the desire for power and control at all costs meets the belief that unconditional love can save a soul from the "darkness of unending night." Can a price be placed on a human life? Is there a limit to the amount of love one can give? *A Shower of Roses* takes its audience to dark places in its search for answers to these questions, but by the end of the story, after encountering these issues for herself, Eva "knelt down and thanked God for revealing the truth to her."

CHRIS FISHER (March 24, 2011)

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