

**A Review of David Orsini's *Bitterness / Seven Stories*
By Martha McCann Rose, Salve Regina University**

Bitterness/ Seven Stories is a perfectly crafted, elegant collection of stories. As a reader, I was moved and delighted by several aspects of the work: the language, the characters, and the treatment of the human condition.

David Orsini's use of language is masterful. The imagery envelops the reader. The words chosen are graceful and rich. As a native New Englander, I was drawn into the descriptions of the area; these familiar places became new. "Memorials," set in the city where I spend each day, made the Newport waters fresh again. In that story, the lighthouse is a clear symbol, yet not overwrought. In "Affinities," the power of Nature guides the protagonist Adam Mackenzie as well as the reader to strength.

The characters in each story are complex yet complete. I felt as if I were traveling the hard road with the sinner in "Aftermath." He was looking for redemption, but he was denied that closure. In "Bitterness," I understood the husband's decision, but I also felt the wracking pain it would cause his wife.

The stories captured the pain of the most searing human experiences without relying on violence to thrust them forward. There was torment, but refreshingly the characters weren't evil. "Ménage à Trois" offers an example of behavior that rises from chaos, so the author doesn't condemn the characters. There is quiet despair and no easy answers for these souls, as the last two stories ("A More Than Ordinary Life" and "A Sublimation of Desire") also reveal. Choices are made, and life continues.

All these stories create rich, powerful, and quiet tableaux. I want to introduce them to my students.

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