

is the same as Ovid's — "To be known. To be remembered. To live forever" — makes the poet her lover and decides to become his Muse through devotion, sex, and magic. Thus she will become immortal along with him.

Feeling this beneficent power, Ovid returns to Rome with her and starts to write a new poem while the *Metamorphoses* begins to be accepted as a masterpiece by everyone but the "marble man" Augustus. Seeking to influence his aloof sovereign, Ovid finds a new secret patron, the emperor's granddaughter Julia, shortly to be exiled, like her mother, for immorality. As Xenia becomes pregnant with what she prophesies will be twins, Ovid's new poem, under Julia's patronage, is seen to be his lost play *Medea*, with Ovid, Xenia, and her unborn children playing the central roles. Xenia has thus become the obsessed poet's masterpiece, but he is hers as well, each bargaining for eternal life, so what of the play's climax? Will Ovid be able to write the scene where Medea murders her brood if Xenia doesn't commit the same act? And what will happen when the jealous witch-girl discovers the identity of her lover's mysterious patron?

All these questions are answered in the novel's climax and epilogue and, as in the rest of the book, through beautiful, moving language and the requisite scenes of "transformation," rife with thrilling sense imagery.

Ovid is finally, of course, exiled to the dreary town of Tomis, on the west coast of the Black Sea, in a much less hospitable climate. And the fate of Xenia and her children? One must read the novel for this revelation, and afterward he or she will truly, along with the distraught Jason, "testify . . . that there are no gods."

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*Serpent.*

Nicholas Mosley.

Dalkey Archive Press, 1990.

192 pages. \$19.95 (hardback).

*Reviewed by Zoë Francesca*

*Serpent* is the third book in Mosley's "Catastrophe Practice" series. The other four are: *Catastrophe Practice*, *Judith*, *Imago Bird*, and *Hopeful Monsters*. First written in 1981, *Serpent* was revised by the author in 1990. On one level, *Serpent* is a modern retelling of the story of Masada, an ancient fortress where Jews committed mass suicide rather than surrender to the Romans. The plot, however, takes place entirely on an airplane. A screenwriter (Jason) boards a plane bound for Tel Aviv to convince a Hollywood producer (Epstien) that his new screenplay on Masada can never be made into a film. In the back of the plane, the screenwriter's wife (Lilia) and child meet up with a possible terrorist. On the ground, a psychology major turned security guard

and his wife, a physics student turned airport official, do battle with eerie "protesters."

The chapters where we must plow through existential conversation between characters from Jason's screenplay are somewhat tedious compared to the present-day action on the plane. They remind us too heavily of the pedantic goals of the book: a discussion of whether it is better to sacrifice oneself for society or to survive; whether life is a "going concern" or a "calamity," and whether we are all really actors.

What takes this novel to an exciting, experimental level are layers of speech and articulated thought that make up the text. Plato argued, we are told in the book, that ideas are more real than experience because experience depends on ideas. In *Serpent*, ideas about politics, terrorism, and betrayal become real, presumably because they were thought of before they happened. This is what keeps the book's suspense high. We quickly learn that premonitions are bound to materialize into events, and halfway through the book the pace picks up as the airplane and its passengers get out of control.

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*Illume.*

Andrea Rosenberg.

Eucalyptus Press, 1999.

71 pages. No price (paperback).

*Reviewed by Jeffery Beam*

Occasionally a first book comes across my desk which surprises by its maturity and creativity. *Illume*, a self-published, handsomely handmade limited edition book-length prose poem, details through a detached, melancholy, and gentle manner an obsessive observation of personal psychological states through symbolic notations of the real:

Some mornings I feel the world's rotation when I wake up. I lie back on my pillow and feel its slow movement under my bed. It's a strange, soothing vertigo that fills me these mornings, the noise of cars and of the street echoing and revolving, muffled and remote, miles away from my open window. When I sit up, the room spins wildly, and then everything settles down to its usual immobility.

Reminiscent of the poetic fictions of Anaïs Nin and Jeanette Winterson, Rosenberg's youthful, self-absorption is "fascinated by change and its exhilaration and disregard for consequence. It is a wild freedom from the future, a violent break with the past. It is active." Her excavations pour vinegar into sweet musings of the heart, troubling the loss of love and friendship, grieving a beloved brother's dying of AIDS, combating personal guilt, celebrating joy and dreams, and confront-

ing an unfeeling father. Familiarly strange, rising up like thoughts, the episodes range from home to abroad, from interior landscapes to the Sistine Chapel. Only occasionally overly sentimental, they are always sincere and appropriately earnest.

Rosenberg's skill rests in a courage to face her darkest thoughts and resist easy answers:

Rain is falling, and running down the windows like tears. I resent such easy pathetic fallacies, but I find they are practically instinctive. And those wavy wet lines, uncertain as unraveled yarn or bleeding ink, look to me like mirror images of the ones on my own face.

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*Amor Eterno: Eleven Lessons in Love.*  
Patricia Preciado Martin.  
University of Arizona Press, 2000.  
110 pages. \$24.95 (hardback).

*Reviewed by Lindsay Martell*

Patricia Preciado Martin's collection of short stories is a light, earnest invitation. With a relaxed hand, Martin leads the reader through a careful exploration of desperate love, suffering, and penetrating disillusionment. Created as lyrical vignettes, *Amor Eterno* is a compact balance of voices that sing the praises of both contemporary and traditional notions of love, *familia* and the cascades of an evolving Mexican American heritage.

We are served 11 stories of love. Some are written as letters, which are then cautiously flushed out to reveal a more streamlined story. Martin's grasp of infusing poetry and prose is particularly engaging; neither seems halting or forced. The stories that work best as those filled with rich, easy humor. Martin's sheer grasp of storytelling in the traditional sense is decidedly strong, if not somewhat moody:

What was the sorrow of his aged uncle and antepasados was the delight of the young boys and a source of high adventure and discovery: the surrounding high walls and enclosures, bullet-pocketed and eroding. The crumbling chapel with the fallen hand-hewn beams that still smelled of smoke when it rained. The empty alter niches now harboring lists of colored birds. The creaky, termite-ridden stairs to the empty bell-tower, which had been plucked of its cast-iron bell and gaped like a toothless mouth. The weed-strewn family cemetery where the tumbled tombstones with exotic names scattered like so many spilled dominoes and where ancestors silently claimed their final meager heritage.

The constant revolution of sound and character works deftly in some places, especially in Martin's pictorial descriptions of Doña Eloisa; a devoted mother whose

pilgrimages to la Mision de San Xavier in the hopes that her son returns from the Korean War unscathed, remain fluid and earnest. The depiction of such characters as Lola in "Forbidden Love," while colorful, may leave readers somewhat restless:

Our prima Lola! A California Home-Girl! A teenager! Knowledgeable. Daring. Streetwise. The keeper of the keys to the kingdom of romance: boys and cars, flirting and dating, drive-in movies, lovers' lanes, making-out and French kissing, and the sensual sandy beaches of the California beaches we could only fantasize about.

Martin has successfully molded color and language in *Amor Eterno*. Readers can embrace the steadfast structure of her writing style and all its subtle intricacies. The stories are palatable diversions; each one acting a steady bridge to the next, allowing us to breathe in 11 nurturing lessons of love.

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*The Body Artist.*  
Don DeLillo.  
Simon & Schuster, 2001.  
124 pages. \$22.00 (hardback).

*Reviewed by Kevin McGowin*

The ironic thing about people's negative or lukewarm criticism of DeLillo's *The Body Artist* is that for almost 30 years the author has satirized the very culture that now takes umbrage at being more or less left out of it. The blatant ironies are more subtle here; yet work on a small canvas is no less riveting. DeLillo is simply not writing what people are used to from him: the lists in *White Noise* or the allusions to and indictments of popular American culture in his other works.

Now over 60, DeLillo has the insight to see that the Culture has caught up now, in Real Time, with his parodic treatment of middle-class suburban America. This feeling is present also in *Underworld*, set at mid-20th century, but it's far too easy to see a short novel as a reaction against the tendency toward the *Bleak House*-length tomes of five years ago. It is another voice entirely, a Voice that DeLillo has flirted with in all his novels, but never allowed to become dominant.

*The Body Artist* is every bit as surreal as "vintage" DeLillo and, if you wish, as apocalyptic. Yet it is rather pointless to compare the work with *White Noise* or *Mao II* or even *Underworld*. It is the story of the most profound apocalypse: the internal, personal one. DeLillo shares a certain vector of vision with Carver, Cheever, and even Kafka in this sense, yet the work is still distinctly his own.

*The Body Artist* has been criticized for DeLillo's "sen-