

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-