FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Historical

Eromenos
Melanie McDonald
Seriously Good Books
978-0-9831554-0-9
(February 28, 2011)

Though *Eromenos* means "beloved," this is not a simple love story. Instead, it is a story of obsession involving Hadrian, Rome's fourteenth emperor, and his young lover Antinous, who spent his adolescence—seven years—as Hadrian's companion.

The writing of *Eromenos* required extensive and thorough research into the habits and routines of ancient Rome. Melanie McDonald leads us expertly through Antinous' eyes. We not only experience the complicated nature of his relationship with the most important man in the world, but we also see, hear, and smell ancient Rome: "…most of the city's inhabitants swell in apartment complexes rising like hives full of honeycomb, and likewise buzzing with activity all of the time."

The novel is divided into four sections—Earth, Air, Fire, Water—with each section representing a different season of Antinous' life. The early sections (Earth and early pages of Air) are emotionally simple, more physical in detail and description: "At first it seemed surprising how often smoke soiled the air or blazes lit up the nighttime skyline, illuminating the tangle of carts forbidden to traverse the streets on business by daylight…"

The later sections (latter pages of Air, Fire, Water) portray Antinous' confusion with his place in the world *and* in relationship to Hadrian: "Hadrian must not have been much loved as a child, I think, to so mistrust love as an adult that he prefers being in control to being in love."

What is the nature of love? Of control? These big questions without easy answers are the heart of the book, as we watch Antinous come to his own conclusions about both.

No one knows what happened to the real Antinous. All that *is* known is that he drowned in the Nile and then Hadrian deified him. McDonald has given us the imaginary voice of a young man whose image has been immortalized in busts and sculptures, a young man who may very well have been as haunted as his death is mysterious.

Melanie McDonald has an MFA from the University of Arkansas and was awarded a

2008 Hawthornden Fellowship for *Eromenos.*

S. Hope Mills