

The Hesperides Tree

Nicholas Mosley

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In Greek mythology, the Hesperides were the daughters of Atlas, who guarded a golden-apple-producing tree of life. Zeus and Hera received the tree as a wedding present and planted it in a beautiful garden protected by a dragon.

Mosley's most recent novel explores the themes of myth and coincidence in our lives. It is a story of an unnamed, adolescent narrator, the soft-skulled progeny of a documentary filmmaker and a psychotherapist, who travels with his parents to Ireland's west coast: "We ruminated on what life was all about; whether it had any meaning. But after a time it seemed such words became too cloudy even for us; and my father would break off and say—"But the important things anyway can't really be said. Words can take you so far then you have to go on a journey."

In Ireland, the narrator eyes a young "fair-haired girl" who becomes the object of his desire. Journeying back to England, he impregnates a lesbian feminist in an awkward sexual encounter and develops a friendship with a gay computer geek (and his father—"a hugely rich media tycoon"—who happens to be the former lover of his mother).

Frustrated with his studies, he leaves the university and returns to Ireland to find the fair-haired girl. Together they trek to a deserted island, home to a species of rapidly evolving birds, the mythical garden of the Hesperides with its Tree of Life. The plot flickers on, playing on the edge between nothing and something, reality and virtual reality.

Mosley, a British Army officer, vintage World War II, has written the critically acclaimed Whitbread Award winner, *Hopeful Monsters*; fourteen works of fiction; and numerous works of nonfiction (including a biography of his father, Sir Oswald Mosley, who founded and led the British Union of Fascists, and his own autobiography).

This bildungsroman is a confusing cerebral concoction, much less fulfilling than others of the genre (like Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*). Mosley struggles to confront human experience in the midst of chaos theory, nonlinear dynamics, and a scientific preoccupation with the Darwinian notion that organismal expression is encoded within the molecules of heredity. *The Hesperides Tree* explores a young man's emerging consciousness and questions the nature of Nature.

"Myths seem to have meaning without having to say what the meaning might be."

BEEF TORREY (July / August 2001)

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