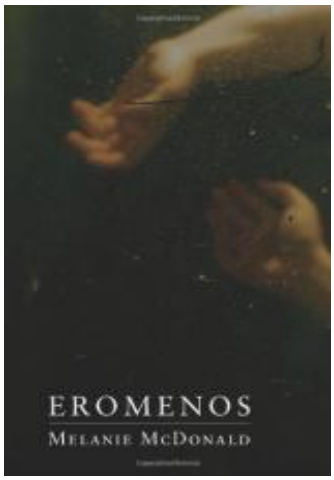
Eromenos

by Melanie McDonald



About the Book

Eros and Thanatos converge in the story of a glorious youth, an untimely death, and an imperial love that gives rise to a pagan god.

In this coming-of-age novel set in the second century AD, Antinous of Bithynia, a Greek youth from Asia Minor, recounts his seven-year affair with Hadrian, fourteenth emperor of Rome. In a partnership more intimate than Hadrian?s sanctioned political marriage to Sabina, Antinous captivates the most powerful ruler on earth both in life and after death.

This version of the affair between the emperor and his beloved ephebe vindicates the youth scorned by early Christian church fathers such as St. Athanasius as a ?shameless and scandalous boy? and ?sordid and loathsome instrument of his master?s lust.?

Eromenos envisions the personal history of the young man who achieved apotheosis as a pagan god of antiquity, whose cult of worship lasted for hundreds of years, far longer than the cult of the emperor Hadrian. In this novel, Antinous of Bithynia, the Greek youth whose beautiful image still may be found in works of art in museums around the world, finds a voice of his own at last.

Discussion Guide

1. Though a member of the Imperial Court of Rome, Antinous was Greek. How might his nationality have affected his perceptions of Roman culture?

2. What effect did class differences have on Antinous? relationships with the other students at the Imperial School? What effect did they have on his relationship with Hadrian?

3. How would Antinous? coming of age --- ?taking on the white toga? --- impact his relationship with Hadrian?

4. In what ways were Roman society?s perceptions and assumptions about homosexuality similar to those of contemporary society? In what ways might these perceptions and assumptions differ from those of today?

5. Controversy still exists today over whether the actual death of Antinous was a murder, a suicide, or an accident. How does the author of this novel choose to portray his death? What incidents in the novel might be seen as factors that contribute to the character?s choice to sacrifice himself in devotio suicide?

Author Bio

Melanie McDonald was awarded a 2008 Hawthornden Fellowship for **Eromenos**. She has an MFA in fiction from the University of Arkansas, and her work has appeared in *New York Stories*, *Fugue*, *Indigenous Fiction* and other journals. She spent several months in Italy while at work on this novel.

Critical Praise

?I sat down to read just a few pages of **Eromenos** by Melanie J. McDonald and I couldn?t put it down. I read the entire novel in one sitting. . .?

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