



Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays: The Drinking Gourd/What Use Are Flowers?

Lorraine Hansberry, Robert A. Nemiroff (Editor)

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Here are Lorraine Hansberry's last three plays--Les Blancs, The Drinking Gourd, and What Use Are Flowers?--representing the capstone of her achievement. Includes a new preface by Jewell Gresham Nemiroff and a revised introduction by Margaret B. Wilkerson.

Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays: The Drinking Gourd/What Use Are Flowers? Details

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From Reader Review Les Blancs: The Collected Last Plays: The Drinking Gourd/What Use Are Flowers? for online ebook

Niki says

I picked this up in order to read The Drinking Gourd, a screenplay created for television. Commissioned by one of the major networks to inaugurate a commemorative series to mark 100th anniversary of the Civil War, this was never produced, despite positive comments by TV execs. Politics seem to have gotten in the way... So I read this in my interest to understand that racial politics of the 1960s and to see a different type of source on my perpetual issue of teaching slavery through literature. (For the latter, I found this piece too reliant upon the playwright's notes for visual/audio supports to "tell" the story.) Still bold for its time.

Jennie says

Book Riot 2016 Read Harder Challenge #23: Read a play

Jason says

Interesting reflections on race...

sawyer says

So far of the plays in this book, I've only read "Les Blancs," which I sought out after coming across a quotation from the play in another book I was reading (which exactly I can't remember). I haven't fully processed it. I hadn't read a play in a very long time and enjoyed the format, along with the content, which brings up a lot of important issues.

Alison says

Bumped this to four stars for the raw talent of Hansberry, but overall what's presented is a 3.

Les Blancs is a fascinating play, particularly considering how forward thinking it was (Hansberry was a true visionary, in my opinion). It's a story about the clash of civilizations, expectations, and family played out in the war for African independence. The themes are mostly deftly handled and deeply felt. However, unfortunately, Hansberry died before completing the play, and it was finished by her ex-husband and literary executor Robert Nemiroff. And frankly, you can tell, and it's not in a good way. The dialogue in particular stands out compared to Raisin in the Sun, where it was a highlight, and overall I got an unfortunate sense that in places the message was lost. I don't think Nemiroff had the experience or ability to complete this tale, and it's a damn shame.

The Drinking Gourd was a teleplay that was never produced due to fear and racism. It's an interesting tale of slavery and the South in direct and sharp opposition to the likes of Gone With The Wind - again Hansberry had incredible, visionary talent to tackle a wide range of issues. However, a TV script turns out to not read as well as a play. I still greatly enjoyed it, but definitely for the content and the promise it held, while the form left me a bit cold.

What Use Are Flowers? is a little oddity - a short play about the aftermath of nuclear apocalypse. It's interesting, giving us a hermit discovering a small band of feral child survivors, and I love apocalyptic fiction, but overall it didn't amount to much. Hard to describe, but I guess I'd just say it didn't have the power of her other works.

It really was a tragedy Hansberry died so young. She had such immense talent. Reading this collection, however, is probably for completists only. I'm glad I did, but as I said, it has more potential than promise.

Shelley says

Wow, Lorraine Hansberry is amazing! It's a shame that most people only know her play *Raisin in the Sun*. That's a fine first play, but she went so much deeper than that later on. And she died young so we missed out on more that she could have done.

This book has a great range of later plays: *Les Blancs*, which is set in Africa and brilliantly exposes the hypocrisy and inconsistency of whites fighting independence struggles there; *The Drinking Gourd*, which focuses on the reality of American slavery at the start of the Civil War, written in such a forthright way that TV networks refused to show it even though they commissioned her to write it; and *What Use are Flowers?*, which is a science fiction dystopia.

Nicky says

Want to understand colonialism? Want to stop being a liberal? Want to have your life changed? Want to really, fully, truly confront the brutality of human history? Want to end it all with a glimmer of hope? Start here...

Yossie says

[[NB: A Review of 'Les Blancs' and not the entire book]]

Lorraine Hansberry created a storm. All reviews of this play must begin and end here: the playwright initiated a storm — it is her trademark. Not only is it her trademark, it is also the only way to describe what happened when *Les Blancs* opened on Broadway in November 1970, five years after Hansberry's death from cancer. One critic, Arthur Sainer, described

an audience feeling something at stake that talks about the condition of human beings [...] a harrowing revelation of what we have brought each other to.

Another one—Alvin Klein—was bored by the play and what he called a “*pervading dullness and didacticism*” which seemed to do little but divide an audience into two different clapping camps: when whites were insulted on stage, the blacks applauded, and when a white man finally called an African a hypocrite, the whites applauded. (Reed, *The Sunday News*)

Continued here: <http://yossiepaul.wordpress.com/2014/...>

Zainab Magdy says

I only read *Les Blancs* and not the other two plays but it was enjoyable. Not very touching, smart and clever and everything but there is something that keeps one distant from it and I don't know why.

Madeleine says

I found this play to be quite hopeless. It offers the white side and the black side, but no grey area so no compromise or resolution seems possible. I was left unattached to characters that I think were supposed to be the saviors of the argument. If I had trusted them or cared about them, their individuality might have been beacons of hope for the future of race relations in Africa. I wonder what parts of the play were written by Hansberry herself, and which were added posthumously... I read this play for a class, and am excited to hear the different reactions of my classmates.

--Update: the more I thought about this play the more I found it to be brilliant. It stuck with me after I read it, and the class discussion was lively. I did not initially connect with the characters because they each represent a different side to colonialism--Marta the "good" doctor but ignorant to the harm of her Western exceptionalist notions, Tshembe who is the African who "escaped" to Europe and is struggling between his new comfortable life and the loyalty to his home and people, Charlie the adventure seeking American who just wants to pacify his imperial guilt, and DeKoven who is paralyzed with the knowledge that his presence in Africa is wrong but it would also be wrong to just leave when the white men have begun this cultural upheaval. Any play that can stir up discussion like *Les Blancs* did, is worthy to be staged again and again.

Kim Whitman says

Wrote on the title play for my master's degree. Easily one of the most complex texts about race in the United States I've ever read.

Irene says

very good! so underknown/underrated/unappreciated!!

Imani ♥ ? says

Review later.
