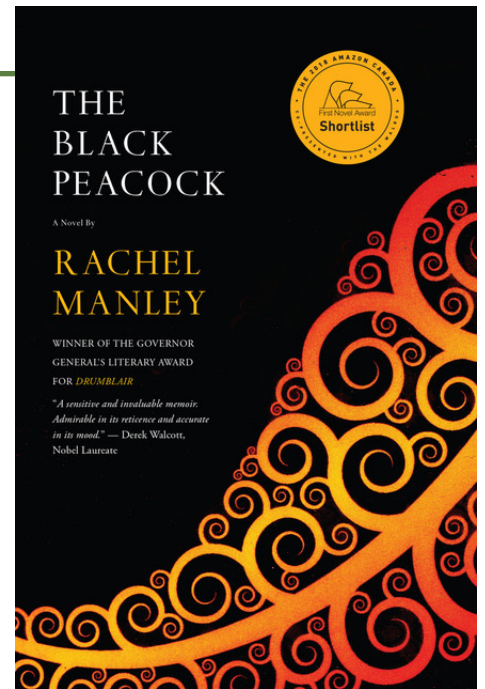


READER'S GUIDE

The Black Peacock by Rachel Manley

INTRODUCING *The Black Peacock*

Daniel has invited Lethe to join him at his isolated retreat, Peacock Island. Friends since attending university in Jamaica, their connection has been unbreakable even as they've spent the past thirty years crisscrossing the Caribbean and travelling the world in search of work, love, and home with other people. Now, Daniel has become an internationally renowned prize-winning poet, and Lethe aspires to be a writer in her own right. Together again, they once more attempt to define what their relationship is.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Aging and Death

Daniel has returned to Peacock Island to die, and Lethe to be with him during that time, although she does not know it. The island is transformed into a version of the underworld, complete with Charon the boatman. Although close in age, Daniel has matured more distinctly than Lethe, with his successful career and steady home. Lethe continues to wander and wonder, filled with energy and youthfulness while Daniel is dying. But although seemingly ageless, Lethe is steeped in death from the passage of her mother, grandparents, father, and Blanca.

Family and Love

The messy entanglements of their own families inform Lethe and Daniel's behaviors as adults, and in the course of their marriages they both create and leave other families behind. Daniel's closeness with Lethe's grandparents is juxtaposed with Lethe's ability to charm Daniel's aunts on her visits. Always there is the question of whether these two fit together as family or not, whether they will ever be together romantically, and how to define a relationship as close and longstanding as theirs has been without physical intimacy. Daniel's feelings for Lethe as a teenager were unambiguously sexual and romantic; Lethe's tolerance for him is less obvious. As they date and marry other people, however, their feelings are underlaid with the detritus of other people, the presence of which alters Lethe and Daniel's own relationship.

Home, Belonging and Identity

Both Lethe and Daniel struggle to create a place for themselves. In university, Lethe's skin colour marks her as an outsider to Jamaica. Raised there, however, she doesn't fit in England either, and neither her mother nor father are present enough to offer an alternative. Her grandparents' home, Erehwemos, offers some sanctuary, defined both by the name and the steadiness of her grandparents. After their deaths, however, Lethe is adrift again and continues island-hopping across the Caribbean. Daniel too is looking for a home that was denied him as a child; his own restlessness takes him through two marriages and extensive world travel before he is able to settle on Peacock Island.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the significance of Othello?
2. Compare Lethe and Daniel's approaches to art and writing.
3. How does Lethe seen through Daniel's eyes differ from Lethe herself, and which narrator do you find a more credible authority on Lethe?
4. Do you think Lethe would have been able to settle had she not been witness to Blanca's attack?
5. Compare their spouses' reactions to reading Lethe's and Daniel's letters. Why did Lethe's marriage survive it and Daniel's not?
6. In what ways are Daniel and Jacob similar and different, and how has that effected their relationships with Lethe?
7. What is the significance of geography to the text?



ABOUT RACHEL

Rachel Manley is an award-winning author and poet. Her memoir, *Drumblair: Memories of a Jamaican Childhood* (Key Porter, 2008), which won the Governor General's Literary Award for Nonfiction, was inspired by life with her grandfather, Norman Washington Manley, founder of Jamaica's first national party. Born in Cornwall, England, and raised in Jamaica, Manley now resides in Toronto.