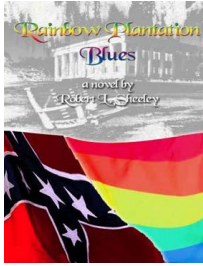


# RAINBOW PLANTATION BLUES



..... It is a rare and special event when a first novel by a new writer can give us so many beloved human characters with believable frailties and amazing fortitude. Robert L. Sheeley's new book illuminates the horrors of slavery as it existed in the United States of America in the nineteenth century, particularly in South Carolina. In the midst of that horrific time, the reader is also treated to the wonderful strength of gay love between two young men of different colours in the midst of a society saturated with the ever-present threat of death on the gallows for those whose way of loving was different from the "norm."

.....Jonathan Thomas is a rich, privileged young white man who, when his father dies, inherits a prosperous plantation built with "the bloody whip." He knows he is a "sodomite" - the only word available to him at that time in history - and although he tries to deny his "unnatural" desires to himself, he cannot help loving, and lusting for, one of his slaves, a former childhood playmate, Kumi, a beautiful Black Adonis. Kumi's intelligence, humanity, and strength as a slave surviving under the oppression of back-breaking labor - as well as his owner's almost nightly demands that he provide *stud service* and impregnate the healthiest female slaves to produce stronger slave children (who were sold away from their mothers for the slave owner's profit) - make Kumi one of the most memorable characters we have in modern American literature. The image of his owner, Jonathan, whose story of internal torment as a hidden gay man occupies much of the novel, *pales* in comparison to the strong Black nobility of Kumi, Jonathan's human property, the descendent of kidnapped African people, who is himself struggling with his "unnatural" desires.

..... Feminism is a philosophy, not gender-specific. And I believe Robert Sheeley is a feminist. (He is a much better feminist, and an advocate for women's equality, than this reviewer is an anti-racist.) Sheeley gives us an interesting character, Stephen, a friend of Jonathan's, who brilliantly articulates the oppression of women belonging to the "aristocratic" plantation class. Then, in his narration, Sheeley himself addresses the oppression of "common" women, and especially enslaved Black women.

.... Despite the obvious political lessons, and a vision of slavery which opened the eyes of this white reviewer - who had thought herself to be well-educated about Black History in the U.S.A. - Sheeley's novel is a rollicking good read, filled with humor, pathos, and great descriptions of the ways of life of both the owners and their Black slaves on southern plantations shortly before the Civil War.

..... Rainbow Plantation Blues could be called a Gay and a Black novel as well as a feminist novel, but I suspect it will fit most easily into the category of a mainstream historical novel. Any human being who reads it will learn much, as this reviewer certainly did, about the realities of the South's "peculiar institution."

.... Hopefully, homophobia - and a few mild descriptions of gay male sex - will not prevent any reader from meeting Kumi and Jonathan, as well as their unforgettable families, friends, and enemies.

Barbara Louise is the author of the Lesbian-Feminist SF novel [Horned Humons in a Strange Utopia](#)

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