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Fifteen years ago Una and Ray had a relationship.
They haven't set eyes on each other since.
Now, years later, she's found him again.

Blackbird premiered at King's Theatre as part of the Edinburgh International Festival, in August 2005, and transferred to the Albery Theatre in London's West End in 2006. The production received the 2007 Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play. In 2007, the play opened simultaneously at the Manhattan Theater Club in New York and at American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco.

Blackbird Details

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From Reader Review Blackbird for online ebook

Brigitte Suastegui says

So surprising. The language was a little hard to follow at first, but then as the plot progressed, the more clear it got. The subject matter was intense and not what I expected at all, but I ended up loving it. Such a weird, awesome, passionate, play.

Duncan says

This is a very disturbing play. We saw it twice, once at the Theatre by the Lake in Keswick and again two months later at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. Both were the same production and main cast: Ray played by Peter MacQueen and Una by Janine Hales. The former production was traverse and the latter in the round. To be honest the traverse version, being the first one we saw, was most harrowing. The play asks many questions and allows us, the audience, to provide some of the answers albeit through much debate.

You may be interested to know that the author, David Harrower, allowed alterations to be made to the version published, and presumably staged, in the United States. These referred mainly to specific locations which were removed for the US audience. Sadly, this introduces some ambiguity as the drama unfolds and is not only unnecessary but also, in my opinion, possibly an example of cultural hegemony. We saw the original UK version on the stage and read the amended US version.

Lauren says

i really wanted to see this on broadway when it was on but never got to it and the film at the time (titled 'uno') didn't get distribution rights in the US so I bought the play and read it in a day. It's raw, it's real, it's dirty, it's fascinating. It's not natural dialogue, which could turn so readers away (especially since this piece isn't meant to be read, it's meant to be seen in a production). But it's a fabulous play. I hope to see it or even be in it one day.

Frank Hering says

An amazing script. I can't wait to see this play sometime. I was able to find some clips on YouTube, but not much. A movie version, called Una, is supposed to come out soon. The playwright wrote the screenplay. On Broadway, Jeff Bridges and Michelle Williams star in Blackbird. God, I wish I could see that!

Very believable characters, and the conversation they have rings true. Una, now approaching 30, finds and confronts the man who had sex with her when he was in his 40s and she was 12. He went to prison; she's been through therapy and her hometown's staring. Fifteen years later, they each reveal what they have been through after their relationship (?) ended with his arrest.

Surprisingly, Blackbird is part tragic love story, and that's where each character's and probably most reader's conflicting responses lie. And several things remain hauntingly ambiguous, and the characters themselves might be most confused about what is true.

Miriam Cihodariu says

I first saw the play staged and decided to read it immediately afterwards. It's pretty heavy.

The purpose seems to be nuancing and then a little more nuancing on top of it, to instill more humanity and complexity to taboo characters which usually no one wants to touch. Still, it goes beyond the simple premise of humanizing and still manages to maintain the non-negotiable 'wrong' status of pedophilia.

I recommend it for anyone who has the stomach for the topic, it's written beautifully.

Doug says

Harrower's harrowing play is an exciting read, and must make for riveting theatre seen live. I have two minor quibbles: a LOT of the play is the two characters TELLING about events from 15 years after they have happened, and it rings slightly false and off - the audience NEEDS the information they are given through these exchanges, but they still sound expository, rather than naturalistic. Secondly, I haven't a clue why it's called Blackbird - and if anyone can tell me the significance of the title, I'd appreciate it!

Beth says

3.5 stars

The earlier you read this play, the more I think you'll enjoy it. Or perhaps I should rephrase that. I'm no moral guardian - hell, I look at some of the stuff I used to read when I was 12-ish and shudder - but this isn't the sort of books kids should read, if only because I don't think it's safe for kids to read philosophically about whether it's possible for child molesters to love them (!). What I mean is that there is something so close to convention in its treatment of its dark subject, lean, mean writing, and shocking moments poised to cause shock and discomfort that it seems better suited to those who aren't quite as used to the particular style born out by "issue theatre" (not inherently a bad thing, and, certainly, Harrower comes up with an addictive and almost irresistible play to chew on.)

And, um, this is one of those plays with all the qualities of a Great Play. It's a great great play for student productions thanks to its stripped-down nature - one simple set, two meaty roles (one male, one female), pretty short run-time, edgy but provocative material. It's wonderfully written.

But it's so damn sparse. It annoyed me because of how much it feels like the archetypal Edgy British Play from around this time - told in jagged, disjointed sentences that are sort of a paradoxically stylised vernacular. Revolving around one dark, edgy subject (statutory rape, the repercussions of). There are fascinating subjects floating around it, but ultimately the play itself is focused on being "thought-provoking" that it doesn't actually feel like it tells a *story*. Fascinating elements are only alluded to in part, such as Una's

loneliness as a child, Una's relationships with her parents after the 'truth' about her and Ray's relationship emerges, and the general repercussions on Ray's later relationships. Cliches (if, sadly, cliches with truth in them) like Una's promiscuity are dwelled upon far more than more interesting and complicated subjects such as her capacity for new 'love' and what would make her describe her sexual relationships in detail to her parents (!). Sometimes, this is a play that seems almost to be using all its edgy, dark, and twisted - but beautiful - writing, to sadly go for much more obvious and less daring targets than may first appear.

Still, it's wonderfully written, twisty and dark and sharp. Yet it doesn't really feel ambiguous because it's so short and kind of deliberately underdeveloped - so intent on making *you*, the reader, think that it doesn't really seem to think anything of its own. The characters exist mostly, intentionally, as archetypes for discussion and contemplation, debate that can never have an answer because Harrower has deliberately provided you with only enough to make you wonder, and not enough to make you decide or choose. Harrower doesn't take a stance on anything. The twists are so damn manipulative that you can pretty much feeling Harrower jabbing at you with the end of his pencil, saying, "Can you handle this yet?" It's so obviously designed to pique the audience's sensibilities, to make them wonder and question, that it's almost irritating. For a play about such a dark, horrible subject, it's also a play that can't make up its own mind - or didn't seem to have one in the first place.

Realini says

Una, written by David Harrower, based on his play Blackbird

What a strange work!

Let me be clear: I do not think I understand what was going on in this film and what exactly the ensemble wanted to convey.

It may be one of those cases where this is actually an invitation to think and the artwork depends on the viewer...

It has been said that the onlooker is often, maybe always more important than the object of art itself

So if I dismiss this and say, well this is about a much older person who took advantage of a minor and his punishment, it could be a mistake.

Or not...

This film has some major attributes.

One of them is the actor in the leading role:

Ben Mendelsohn aka Ray

His work is outstanding, at least in two major productions that gave the public an idea of what this artist can do:

The phenomenal Animal Kingdom and more recently, the fabulous Killing Them Softly

Having stated my admiration for the leading actor, I now must say that his contribution was nearly annulled by the other protagonist:

Rooney Mara

This artiste has a way of making me want to change the channel, even when she is in the company of big names.

Take Carol:

Even if the story was interesting, worthwhile and provoking, Rooney Mara has almost eliminated any pleasure.

It is also true that Cate Blanchet does not have the same appeal for this viewer as she used to possess.

Rooney Mara gives me the impression that she is over reaching; there is a sense of artificiality in her performance.

It is very likely that I am wrong and the parts require a certain awkwardness and what I call over the top is actually perfect planning.

Nevertheless, Una would have benefited from the presence of Eva Green or Kelly Reilly in my opinion.

Una comes to face Ray, many years after – I do not know how to describe this, the first impulse was to say- they have had an affair.

Una was very young, under age at the time and as aforementioned, it would be easy to dismiss this as an abuse.

Which in many ways it is, perhaps this is the main problem of this motion picture that it tries to complicate what seems so simple.

We have a much older man involved with a teenage girl and even if the latter thinks she loves him, it is a no go.

To try and analyze, tell the story could be liberal and open minded, but is it really the right thing to do?

Perhaps...

A comedian in disrepute-, which may highlight the problem of treating too lightly a serious, moral and life issue-, was talking about the need to understand and engage with a child kidnapper, if only to get to save the children involved.

In other words, Una may serve as a case study of what happens when a minor thinks she or he loves and older man.

Of course, it is much more complicated than that, for the film takes place more in the moment when the protagonists are adults and they look at this past, but I see the premise as paramount.

In many ways, it reminded me of Jagten aka The Hunt, wherein a much smaller child accuses a man of inappropriate behavior, almost ruining the life of an innocent person by just inventing a story.

Nevertheless, Jagten was in a completely different league, with a different take and a more meaningful subject.

Amy Robertson says

Difficult but worthwhile.

OngoingRain says

Supreme.

Louise says

Hope to watch the movie when it comes out on 2017? Ben Mendelsohn and Riz Ahmed again woohooo and Rooney Mara of course. Why is Ben looks so hot in his 50s *sobs* :D

Harry McDonald says

David Harrower's modern masterpiece has the linguistic daring of Caryl Churchill and the intimacy of David Hare's *Skylight*, with a whole lot of horror mixed in.

Ray and Una are reunited, having previously had some sort of 'relationship.' I'm saying no more.

I started reading and couldn't stop. I was so horrified but so compelled by what was happening that I had the whole thing read in an hour. The ambiguity in the morals and the plot have kept this work very present in my mind.

READ IT.

Patrick says

Disturbing, dramatic, intelligent, and manipulative. The drama pulls to the point that the tension is visible between the text. The action is engrossing enough on the page, but with a pair of brilliant actors, the effect on stage could be explosive.

daisyampersand says

Harrower's "Blackbird" is a play in one act with a lot of potential, but not enough pay off. While I admire the unconventional story—a young woman confronting her abuser juxtaposed with understanding what love does or does not mean, and how love, as we experience it, can sometimes be problematic, toxic, and painful—as well as the Beckett-esque rapport, it does fall short for me. I'd like to know more about Una's pain, instead of just filling in the blanks based on my knowledge (or maybe a reader's personal experience)

on sexual abuse and PTSD. “Blackbird” is truly one of those plays that is probably excellent performed, but not at all a satisfying read. It wasn’t the worst play I’ve ever read, and the themes alone make it stand above others.

And similar question as others: where does the title come from? There didn’t seem to be any indication in the play itself

Lorma Doone says

Ridiculously manipulative. You think you know what's going on, and then BOOM! Yeah, I loved it. No, I didn't love it - I appreciated it.
