



## Vanishing Rooms: A Novel

By Melvin Dixon



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## Vanishing Rooms: A Novel By Melvin Dixon Bibliography

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- Dimensions: .66" h x 5.94" w x 8.50" l, .65 pounds
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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Completed prior to Dixon's early death from AIDS in 1992, *Vanishing Rooms* is a lovely, lyrical narrative ballet from a talent who just seemed to be reaching full bloom. It's also a bittersweet suggestion of how that talent might have overcome the occasional pretentious false note to attain true virtuosity had it not been robbed of time. Set in New York City in the fall of 1975, the story shifts fluidly among the voices of Jesse (a young black dancer whose drugged-out white boyfriend Metro has just been brutally murdered by Village gay-bashers), Ruella (a sassy, lonely black female dancer who falls in love with grief-stricken Jesse after taking him in) and Lonny (a 15-year-old, sexually confused Italian street tough so freaked out by his gang's murder of Metro that police find him curled up inside the white chalk outlines of Metro's body on the street the next day). Dixon's poetic and well-honed prose deserves its likening to James Baldwin and Toni Morrison--this despite its regular lapses into Ntozake Shange preciousness, much of it employing the cliché of dancing as a metaphor for human relations, or turning on Jesse's annoying insistence on calling Ruella by the funky nickname "Rooms" (perhaps to echo the title, taken from a Robert Hayden poem). Many of the themes here, too--of the "darker" side of interracial desire, the lasting scars inflicted on black, gay, or otherwise "outsider" childhoods, and the need to either transcend one's demons through art or purge them in a twilight world of drugs and anonymous sex--have become over familiar, especially in the decade since this book was written. But unlike many novels set in NYC between Stonewall and the onset of the plague years, *Vanishing Rooms* forgoes recreating that frenetic era in all its naturalistic detail for a more broadly brushed, expressionistic landscape. That elegant lens, which Dixon enhances with the chilly, burnished tones of Manhattan in the fall, suffuses *Vanishing Rooms* with an exquisitely wistful sense of loss--a pressing sense of what we might have hoped for, from Dixon and the rooms his words had yet to fill, that almost undermines this tender novel's considerable accomplishments. --*Timothy Murphy*

#### From Publishers Weekly

The disturbing issues of racism and homophobia are forcefully examined in Dixon's provocative new novel (after *Trouble the Water*), in which he skillfully illuminates the mixed emotions of distinctive urban characters whose lives are changed by tragedy. When a group of homophobic thugs in Manhattan brutally assaults and murders a Louisiana-born gay white man called Metro, his black lover and roommate, dancer Jesse Duran, begins to see New York as a cold battlefield of racial and sexual hostilities. Seeking solace, Jesse turns to a fellow dancer--a sensitive, self-doubting black woman named Ruella McPhee. The poetically charged narrative depicts Ruella's growing love for Jesse, as well as Jesse's conflicting feelings about his sexuality, and about Ruella and Metro. Utilizing three different voices in alternating chapters, Dixon creates convincing psychological characterizations. He captures a true feminine quality in Ruella's voice; Jesse's ruminations reveal a self-involved person looking for stability. The remaining voice is that of Lonny, a sexually confused 15-year-old who unwittingly contributes to the assault on Metro. This realistic portrait of pain and loss carries strong emotional resonance.

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#### From Library Journal

In this novel by a professor of English at Queens College, CUNY, three people are tragically affected by the death of a gay man in New York City, and each tells his or her story: Jesse, a black dancer whose white lover is killed in a gay-bashing; Ruella, another dancer, to whom Jesse turns in his grief; and Lonny, a white teenager whose gang of friends escalate a name-calling incident into gang rape and murder. Each character has a distinct voice and a distinct set of personal problems. Jesse and Ruella can give voice to their emotional needs only through the dance, while Lonny turns to dance of another kind entirely. Dixon's powerful tale is

rich in psychological insight, with action that is at times vividly brutal. Recommended, especially for African-American and gay fiction collections.

- *Debbie Tucker, Cincinnati Technical Coll., Ohio*  
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## **Users Review**

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#### **Joseph Thomas:**

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