Zeitschrift: Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle
Band: 31 (1963)
Heft: 7

Artikel: John Rechy, City of Night
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-570489

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but all the time I know it isn't real. The hero, the fool, the world, none of it real. Sometimes I storm the walls to break them down, but then I stop. I'm afraid . . .»

Bob did not say anything.

«I guess I'm pretty drunk, huh?»

«You can explain it a million different ways,» said Bob, «but it's still there.»

Eddie raised himself up on one elbow and looked around. «And we're still here,» he said. «Room seems awfully familiar. Seems like I've been here every night of my life. Like I'll keep on being here every night till I die, pulling the shades down so nobody else can get in.»

«Let's drink to that,» said Bob, in an unnaturally high pitched, excited voice. «Let's drink to being together till we die.»

Propped up on one elbow, his face close to Bob's, Eddie could barely focus on the strange fusion of two meanings in Bob's eyes, one tender as his words and as sincere, the other as cruel as pretty dreams that lie—or rather, it seemed at the moment, as love's old sweet song gone sour. He felt himself being pushed back down on the bed and kissed.

«May we be here alone together every night till we die, and the world go t' hell,» Bob said again—like the record on the juke-box, Eddie thought.

And suddenly Eddie remembered the name of the song.

«Avalon!» he said, laughing faintly.

«What, baby?» said Bob thickly.

As from a distance Eddie saw Bob bending over him, felt the fingers fumbling with necktie and buttons, smelled the whisky-sweet breath heavy around him.

«Avalon, Avilion,» thought Eddie, snickering a little, «where falls not hail nor rain nor any snow.» Then everything seemed to fade away except a paradoxical desire to want to respond.

About:

John Rechy, City of Night

(Grove Press, Inc. New York, $ 5.95)

From a Subscriber's Letter

. . . Well, I have just finished reading John Rechy's *City of Night*, the longest saddest coldest 'gay'book ever written. I am quite sure that it is definitive, by which I mean that no one need ever write another word about hustlers in America, for he has said it all. In this sense it is a very discouraging book to read for those of us who have tried to write a little on the topic, for there seems to be no use in saying anything more, unless someone should write a sequel from the point of view of the 'score' himself . . . I called it 'cold' deliberately; it emits a light as hard and clear as diamonds, and there is no sentimentality anywhere in it, nor is homosexuality made an agreeable or attractive thing—and if the moralists have sense enough to realize that, they will leave the book alone. For

the shallow-minded little swishes who will read the book, there may probably be some slight surface titillation, as they imagine themselves—for instance—to be as glamorous and witty as Miss Destiny; and for the lonely h's in small towns there may be some thrill of excitement or adventure in the descriptions of the night cities—of New Orleans and Chicago and New York and Los Angeles, or they may get a glimpse of a new and darker world in such a chapter as that about Neil and his masquerades.

Stylistically, there are several marvels in it. I am quite sure that there is no one writing in America today who has a more faithful and exact ear for the reproduction of the dialogue and dialect of a whole group of people. In this respect, the book is more a drama than a novel, for the weight of the characterization is frequently carried by talk alone. And Rechy is the only man, I am sure, who has ever been able to use punctuation to convey inflection; at first repelled by his oddities in this little regard, and then interested, and finally fascinated, I ended up by being a complete convert to his method—it turned out to be Just! Too! Wonderful! *Really!* . . . As for the interludes, the connecting pieces: at first they seemed a little forced and gaudy, and then as the book sped on, they became an integral and necessary relief from the almost unbearable tension generated by the major episodes; they functioned somewhat like the 'knocking-at-the-gate' scene in Macbeth, permitting us to draw breath, to consider horrors past, and to think on fresh ones to come. Without this Blakean descent from the garden of creation into the moment of repose, I think that many of us would not have been able to bear the book at all.

One thing that fascinated me particularly was the Jeremy: White Sheets episode. I found myself a little puzzled as the event unfolded, until I finally glimpsed what I thought Rechy was doing. And it became clear: for me, at any rate, this was a high point of the whole book, the synthesis and resume, the hard cold modern analogue of the *Symposium* of Plato! For what else is this? Jeremy, by his penetrant questions, leads our nameless Ostler through a labyrinthine platonic questioning, sometimes so tenuous that you must backtrack and read again, drawing him out just as Socrates drew out the young men who listened to him under the ilex, getting him to admit to this, to that, to things he had so deeply buried that he had never faced them before. And twice there sounded the buried gong, in the two gestures which the Hustler made: he first took Jeremy's hand and placed it on his own leg, and then on his sex—and then—in the coldest most despairing action in modern fiction—the final meaningless entry, the symbolic spitting in the face of Socrates, the ultimate denial. After that, there is nothing—nothing save the graveyard dance of the Mardi Gras, and a world gone mad, and a telephone call which brought nothing except a priest's saying, «Yes, I know,» and the hot dust of Texas . . .

It is a great book, a terrible book. After this, there can only be imitators of Rechy, if they write in this field. It made me laugh, it made the hairs crawl, it sickened me. No one has a right to see so clearly and to write it down so well. And I think, if I were henceforth to be confined to a cell and solitude for the rest of my life, it is the one book I would want with me.

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