

The Vassall affair

Autor(en): **Black, Peter**

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«Perhaps this place was blessed,» whispered Thomas, kissing Peter's neck as the other looked up at the ceiling.

«Perhaps, but what ever happens now doesn't matter, we are together forever.»

Around the tall building the breeze murmured knowingly and from somewhere far away there came the sound of music, or was it again the sound of the wind singing in the topmost branches of the willows?

As the sun sank slowly down two figures stood at the window of their home and listened to the faraway music.

Book Review

CITY OF NIGHT by John Rechy (Grove Press, Inc., New York — 410 pages, \$ 5.95)

It is a pleasure to inform our readers of a true-to-life, outspoken book which can be recommended without reservations—one which deserves all of the bouquets tossed in its direction. Never has a writer conveyed with such down-to-earth authenticity the world of the homosexual.

To read this detailed fictional tour of the great cities of America is to be made aware of the defiant segment of twilight people who comprise rather more of society than it will permit itself to recognize. At some point in their lives, these deviates from «normality» refuse to accept the heterosexual pattern of life and make it in scene after scene of fleeting sex, using each other's bodies to satisfy a lust which can never be slaked.

Some try pathetically to impose the pattern of the conventional marriage on their doomed quest for abiding love. Others flout any pretense of conformity, selling themselves while youngmen and becoming the buyers when they become oldmen.

The characters in this lurid gallery form an endless parade: drag queens seeking «husbands,» hustlers, actors sadie-maisie (sodomasochist) johns, married men seeking the contacts they have tried unsuccessfully to subdue—these are all depicted with an honesty and lack of sensationalism which other writers have eschewed.

Again, may we urge one and all not to miss this swift-moving, unvarnished novel? It pulls no punches in presenting *la vie du monde gai* without mincing any naughty words or hard-boiled passages. Mr. Rechy is to be commended for bringing to life some of the questions which Dr. Kinsey posed many years ago. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner?* —Diego de Angelis

The Vassall Affair

A curious byproduct of the Vasall affair may be the end in Britain of the fairly old custom of hunting the homosexual.

I was talking about this with Lord Boothby. Said he: «In the light of this case I am considering the introduction of a Private Member's Bill to the House of Lords.

«It will have just one clause. It will seek to amend the present law which makes homosexual behaviour between consenting males in private a criminal offence.

«I've talked to Sir John Wolfenden about this. He agrees that this one clause would give him the really important reform his 1957 report asked for.»

The point is that though homosexuals are no more inclined to treachery than you are, the law as it stands gives the Communists a lever against them which they have over nobody else.

If Vassall had not been a homosexual, and subject to this law, the Russians might have got him anyway. I think he had a predisposition to treachery. But they could not have blackmailed him into it.

Homosexuals are specially vulnerable to blackmailers because they cannot appeal to the protection of the law. The blackmailer threatens him with exposure.

If he goes to the police exposure is what he'll get anyway; for the police can, and sometimes do, charge the victim for participating in the offences he is being blackmailed about.

So the law sharpens the threat of exposure and sharpens the wits of those vulnerable to it.

Dame Rebecca West observed that for seven years Vassall had been a cool efficient, unsuspected spy, to the evident astonishment of Lord Radcliffe, who appears to take the conventional view of homosexuals as giggling queers.

But why should they be? The law forces concealment, pretence, vigilance on them in degrees which can amount to a continuous and successful double life.

If anyone wished to devise a really good secret agent training course which would place special emphasis on dissimulation, toughness and self-reliance, the way homosexuals are treated in Britain could hardly be improved on.

Yet, does the law represent public opinion? I submit that a really decisive majority is on the whole innocently compassionate.

It accepts that homosexuality is an unlucky condition and is vaguely and humorously sorry for homosexuals, whom it believes to be a kind of subspecies.

Wrongly, according to the evidence of Wolfenden. In fact arguments that they are from a special type, bent or class are easy to refute.

This general tolerance is withheld, significantly, from acts of public indecency or seduction of young persons; in other words, from homosexual practices that are universally regarded as sexual offences.

Who then does this law represent? Sincere chumps who shut their minds to this subject at the age of 17; a minority with more complex motives, derived from authoritarian and unimaginative temperaments which are crippled by self-doubts and primitive fears of anything outside their own totem.

If they could not witch-hunt for homosexuals they would go after people with red hair or weak chins. Any recognisable difference suits them.

Peter Black in «Daily Mail», Continental Edition, April 1963

SECOND ENGLISH SHORT STORY CONTEST

The date for entries has been extended to September 30th, 1963. We shall be happy if this extension will enable more writers to submit stories to the contest.

The Circle

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