

Plats, by John Trefry, 1<sup>st</sup> submission

reviewed by Anthony Miller for Village Writers Novel Critique Group, March 4, 2010

John,

I really tried to like your submission. There are some good images: the cracked stucco walls of shabby apartments, dreary haze, and the like. But part of me thinks I'm missing the point, another part says there isn't one, and a third part suspects you're putting us on.

We used to have a member who got into an argument with the editor of a journal to which he submitted his short stories. The editor was looking for character-driven stories, and Jack tried to convince him that plot-driven stories like Jack's were what readers wanted. Of course, Jack was free to write whatever kind of stories he wanted (very amusing ones, I thought) and the editor was free to not publish them. But whether the characters or the plot drove the story, neither of them wanted fiction devoid of either. That is what I feel you've given us.

Well, 'devoid' is perhaps too strong a word. There are characters, even if they have neither names nor descriptions. There is a 'she' and an 'I' and a 'you.' And there are events: somebody drives a car, and somebody wakes up, and somebody finds an apartment ad that seems to have been blowing about the street for a week. But who are these somebodies? Will the found ad lead to a rental, to the finder having necessary shelter, or does it exist only to be described? And why should I care?

I can only find small changes to suggest, because the big picture is so incomprehensible to me. You have a fondness for words I've never met before: apophenia, invaginated, renitence, louring, icteric. Why send well-educated readers to the dictionary every page or two, unless to show off your vocabulary? You tend to use **lay** when **lie** is meant. (After you **lay** the book on the table, it **lies** there.) You leave the apostrophes out of contractions like **didn't** and **couldn't**, a flouting of convention that annoys. You use apostrophes instead in participles like **bedimm'd**. I'm used to that in poetry, but in prose it seems out of place. It's justified, to my mind, only in 'the water **wick'd** from the air,' (line 216) where it prevents the momentary confusion of reading it as two-syllable **wickèd**, meaning evil.

If I pulled this off a bookstore shelf, I'd close it and put it back on the shelf after a sentence or two, and look elsewhere for a good read. You have good command of the language, but language exists as a medium of communication. Communication requires a sender, a receiver, and a medium that carries information from one to the other. Whatever it is you're sending, this receiver fails to get it. Where is the market for writing like this? John Gardner, in *The Art of Fiction*, says the best writers pursue their art not for income, but for glory; but even glory needs an audience. At worst, this is a pack of pretentious nonsense; at best, it's a form of literature I am not equipped to appreciate. I hope you will stick it out with us, and next cycle bring us a well written bit of fiction that reads like it's going somewhere.

apartment blocks  
could be part of  
could be repetition  
could be a cry