

LETTERS

The Drama Review

51 West Fourth Street, Rm. 300
New York, N. Y. 10012

New York University
School of the Arts

Tel: (212) 598-2597

March, 1975

To our Readers and Advertisers:

The March Post-Modern Dance Issue of THE DRAMA REVIEW will be delayed approximately a month because this journal switched printers in the middle of the issue in a dispute involving the question of censorship. We apologize for the delay and would like to explain the circumstances surrounding this dispute, which we feel involves very fundamental questions in publishing.

In September and October of 1974, rising printing costs forced THE DRAMA REVIEW to re-evaluate its printing situation. We secured a bid from a printer in New Jersey that promised quality workmanship with a reduction in printing costs, which in turn would have allowed us to keep our current subscription rate through the year. (This may no longer be possible although we hope to hold the line as long as we can.) During the negotiations with the new printer, we mentioned that from time-to-time we publish photographs with nudes in them and that printers had found some of these objectionable in the past. The printer assured us he had no objections to nude photographs as long as they were not depicting an explicit sexual act. In our informal discussion over lunch, there was no mention of words the printer might feel were objectionable. Indeed, for the last fifteen issues of THE DRAMA REVIEW there has not been a word printed that could be construed as objectionable or obscene.

In December, 1974, we sent a manuscript to the printer entitled "It's About Time" by David Gordon, the dancer. In the article, he mentioned that his wife, Valda Setterfield, had uttered the words "fuck" and "shit" in 1962 during a public performance in Judson Church of *Random Breakfast*. The printer returned the manuscript and said that he would not print the magazine with those words in it. We then spent about a month trying to come to a compromise solution that would allow us to publish on time. At one point, we were agreeable (and thought that the printer was) to printing the words as the first letter and dashes—along with a disclaimer to the effect that we disapproved of this type of obscuration. But the printer indicated that he would settle for nothing less than an edited version of the material or removal of the article. For us, this meant the printer was exercising an editing function that was unacceptable—in fact, he was attempting to censor the magazine.

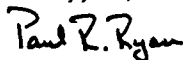
For our part, we pointed out that the words in question appeared in the Merriam-Webster Eighth Collegiate Dictionary; that they had been said during a public performance in a church and were not used as descriptive adjectives; that THE DRAMA REVIEW could not hope to print the texts of contemporary plays if it could not use these words; that TDR was a scholarly magazine and that these words could be found in many such journals, such as those that specialize in psychiatry. All our arguments fell on deaf ears. We finally had to insist legally that they print the issue or we would be forced to take it to a new printer. Without a formal word of reply, the printer returned all our material in an incomplete state early in February. We located another printer in Concord, N.H., who had no objection to our material and who is now processing the issue. But the legal maneuvering and the problem of ordering paper on short notice cost us a month of production time.

(It is interesting to note that *Artforum* had a similar problem with its printer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, recently when he refused to print an ad by the sculptor Lynda Benglis. The printer, according to press reports, insisted the ad was offensive to the workers in his plant and would jeopardize their standing in the community. His lawyer, however, told him he had to print the ad. *The New York Times* also faced a printer's revolt awhile back when they refused to set an ad because of its political content. They were forced to set the ad.)

One discerns a growing effort on the part of printers to exercise a degree of control over what they print after they enter into an agreement. In fact, this is an encroachment on the freedom of the press. It is censorship. It should and has to be resisted by all publishers. A printer has a right to his beliefs but they should be clearly stated in a formal contract before entering into an agreement with a publisher.

Again, we apologize for the inconvenience and hope you will bear with us through this delay. Your issue should reach you by the first week in April.

Sincerely yours,



Paul R. Ryan
Executive Editor

LETTERS

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letters were among the many received at The Drama Review in response to the letter on the facing page. Of all the letters received—far more than we could print—two supported the printer. Both have been included here in full.)

Dear Editor:

I would like to congratulate you on your courageous stand with regard to the publication of [the March] issue of *The Drama Review*. I understand exactly the situation in which you found yourself.

Some years ago, when I was producing *The Toilet and Dutchman* by the playwright who was then known as Leroi Jones, we ran into a similar problem of censorship. The editor of *The Los Angeles Times* said that language such as this, meaning the four and seven letter words in the plays, had the effect of being a reenactment of the crimes of Dachau and Buchenwald. He said that a veil of silence should be forever drawn on these subjects, and that from that day forth that newspaper would forever enshroud these subjects in a blanket of silence. From that day on, and despite the rave reviews at our opening, we received no newspaper coverage by that paper, and we were not even able to place our paid ads in the *Los Angeles Times*. Needless to say, many of the other papers soon followed suit.

All this occurred on the eve of the Watts riots. The emotional and intellectual state of the American black, the anger and the frustration which the plays were revealing were the causative factors of that explosion which so shook the Nation that no "blanket of silence" could any longer dim, dull, or muffle the sound of that alarm.

The enormity of this kind of censorship is so appalling that it must be fought, however, and wherever it occurs. Although a certain amount of hostility is indeed aroused by the use of language which may not always be acceptable to all people in all living rooms, usually the self-righteous indignation directed toward the language is a manifestation of a far deeper prejudice and a more dangerous one, as it is more often a mask used to cover basic bigotry.

The theater has always been, and still remains almost the last arena of uncensored public expression of opinion and conflict for writers and audiences. I applaud your effort to keep it so.

I am sure that there will be many who will be angered by the loss or postponement of this issue, but it seems to be a small price to pay in the effort to protect the freedom of expression in the theater from self-appointed arbiters of public taste and awareness.

Rita Fredricks
Washington, D.C.

Dear Editor:

I shall feel very disheartened if your March letter to readers and advertisers doesn't result in tons of mail arriving at your office supporting your position. Thank God you are battling, and in many ways you are the front-line soldiers for all journalists and editors. Unless you win this skirmish, editors all over the nation will become nothing more than copy-markers and proof-readers.

We will never have to square-off against the situation you now face. Questionable material would be "objectionable" to our readers much more quickly than it would be to our printers. Still, I'd like to help. If there is any thing I can do from our base here in Cincinnati, please let me know. And, best of luck.

Thomas A. Barker, Editor
Dramatics Magazine

Dear Editor:

A resounding cheer for the publisher [sic] in New Jersey! If your "scholarly" magazine is bent upon perpetuating that kind of trash, the printer at least shows a little good taste. It is, indeed, about time!

I'll relieve you of concern for at least one of your subscribers. I'll not bother to renew my subscription, rest assured.

Harold K. Moon
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah

Dear Editor:

May I offer my support to you and your staff for upholding your beliefs and convictions concerning your recent bout with the press and censorship.

We have a constitutional guarantee of the freedom to write, to publish, and the freedom to read. It is that intellectual freedom and the right of the individual to choose what he wants to read that reinforces the action taken by you.

(Mrs.) Gretchen H. Neill
Director of Library Services
DeKalb Community College
Decatur, Ga.

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

I have just read your open letter to readers and advertisers of March, 1975, and I want to take the time to respond to you with all the encouragement I can give for your position. Whether or not I agree with the material in any issue of *The Drama Review*, I support completely your position with regard to the censorship by the printer in New Jersey. It would seem to me that *The Drama Review* and journals such as *Artforum* should begin to compile a list of printers with whom difficulties have arisen in the past concerning this very vital issue so that other scholarly and specialized publications can avoid future dealings with them. I was Associate Editor for *Theatre Survey* for a time and, though we never ran into this particular problem, we had to cope with questions concerning printer's accuracy and responsibility.

I hope this conveys a strong moral support and an understanding of why the March issue of *The Drama Review* will be late.

George E. Bogusch
Associate Professor
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Fla.

Dear Editor:

I received your mimeoed sheet describing the episode with your printer. I find the whole thing appalling and if *The Drama Review* needs support of any kind via petition, in case you sue, I will give you all the support I can.

No apologies on your part are necessary regarding the delay and I look forward to your next issue.

Lester W. Thompson, Jr.
Managing Director
Tufts Arena Theatre
Medford, Mass.

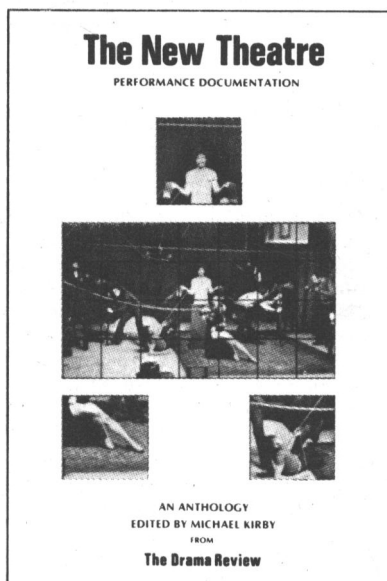
Dear Editor:

This is in response to your memo describing your dispute with the printers. I do not mind the delay one bit when it is a matter of taking a stand on civil rights principles. There is entirely too much encroachment on free speech, free press and freedom of assembly in many quarters. Too many individuals look away and fail to face up to these challenges to their rights.

If I thought *The Drama Review* was censored in any way I would not be able to trust it any longer. Therefore I am behind you 100 percent in your effort to publish your reports "like it is."

Congratulations and good luck.

Louise M. Waterston
San Juan, Puerto Rico



THE NEW THEATRE attempts to recreate various theatrical experiences by documenting in words and photographs a wide range of recent experimental, or avant-garde performances from many different countries. Entirely reprinted from *The Drama Review*, the book includes drama, dance, and several productions—some related to Happenings—that would be difficult to classify. Among the documented performances are: Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum figuris* (Poland); Frederic Baal's *Real Reel* (Belgium); Ariane Mnouchkine's *1789* (France); Victor Garcia's *The Balcony* (Brazil); Georgij Paro's *Christopher Columbus* (Yugoslavia); Luca Roconi's *XX* (Italy); Shuji Terayama's *Jashumon* (Japan); *The People Show 39* (England); Richard Foreman's *Sophia* (USA); and Robert Wilson's *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (USA).

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LETTERS

Dear Editor:

We read your letter with great interest and certainly do understand the delay in publication. Thank you for sharing the facts of your problem with us.

Please send a copy of your letter to Paul S. Nathan, the author of the column "Rights and Permissions" in PUBLISHERS WEEKLY. The American Library Association cares, too. A personal covering letter to Mr. Nathan and to the "Right to Read Committee" at A.L.A. will be helpful. I suspect that many other people have felt the same way and may have already suggested the same contacts.

Mrs. Marjorie Wilhite
Serials Librarian
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

Dear Editor:

My congratulations to the New Jersey printer. If you would advise me of his name and address, I would like to write him directly and congratulate him for his part in preserving some of the last vestiges of the few things that are left of what made America great.

I resent you and the too many other organizations that use our freedoms to desecrate and pollute our country.

I especially resent the fact that you are contributing to the filth that is permeating the theatre—which is where I make my living—and to our educational apparatus, where my children gain their educations.

Hooray for your New Jersey printer—and boo to you and your New Hampshire printer.

Byron D. Stout
Regional Sales Manager
Electro Controls, Inc.

Dear Editor:

We have recently received your letter explaining the delay in publication of the latest issue of *The Drama Review*. We appreciate learning of your situation and fully support your statements concerning freedom of the press. We encourage any actions you feel are necessary in maintaining your editorial freedom.

Although we don't look forward to increased subscription rates (which will force us to reduce the number of our subscriptions, and ultimately cost publishers and printers some of their business), we support your decision to obtain other printers. Perhaps you should also consider alternative publication strategies; for example, a "cheaper" paper copy might encourage more individuals to subscribe, while libraries can (should) obtain their subscription in microform format. (Let printers mull that possibility over; their presses may become as outmoded as their social sensibilities.)

I hope you will send a copy of this letter to your former printer as an expression of our disapproval of his misguided protectiveness. We seriously wonder what manners of speech he (and other printers and their workers) use in their own daily affairs, of which the arts are merely an expression. If the printers you mention feel the need to exercise their social consciousness, we would hopefully suggest that they express themselves in a less authoritarian manner, and that they direct their concern toward less reputable sources of the things they consider unfit to print. If a "bad" word or a nude body are the largest "evils" they see around them, I sincerely hope their minds will be opened.

Charles Lee Regan
Periodicals Librarian
El Paso Community College
El Paso, Texas

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