
LETTERS

THE EDITOR:

Concerning Mr. Gerald Weales' letter [T37] about André Gregory's directorial achievements including his production of my play *Beclch*; as old Ez Pound would say: "Can you be interested in the writings of men whose general perceptions are below the average?"

Well, at least I beat up a little interest in Mr. Weales, the bore.

*Rochelle Owens
New York City*

THE EDITOR:

In T36, you introduced André Gregory's version of his expulsion from the Theatre of the Living Arts in Philadelphia with the prediction that it would lead to "a long and difficult public colloquy."

For openers, let's correct a few factual errors. André Gregory was not founder of the Theatre of the Living Arts. Louis Silverman and I purchased a derelict movie house in January, 1964, rehabilitated and equipped it with our own money and credit, organized a non-profit civic corporation as operating entity and leased the theatre to it at cost. Our wives personally supervised reconstruction, negotiated the Equity contract, called auditions in Philadelphia and New York, selected the five plays for our first season and cleared rights for production. Thirty-five community leaders formed the first Board of Directors, helped to fund the first season and elected me President.

We hired André Gregory originally to direct one play and assist in the fund-raising; he is an inspiring speaker. He is also a very ambitious young man. Very soon, the Board of Directors became factionalized, and the four founders of TLA withdrew from day-to-day supervision

of the front office and ceded to Mr. Gregory complete power (not just artistic freedom, which we had already given him contractually).

The pose of Beleaguered Artist Persecuted By The Hostile Establishment ill suits Mr. Gregory; he created his own Frankenstein's monster.

The Board of Directors which operated during my administration was broadly representative of all walks of life in our community. On it were knowledgeable theatre professionals *and* Social Register matrons *and* business executives *and* representatives of the professions *and* of various ethnic groups *and* the plumber *and* electrician who had contributed months of labor to create the theatre. After the *coup* in March, 1965, many of these people were ousted and replaced by Mr. Gregory's new Main Line friends. From that point on, the Board provided unswerving, unquestioning, absolute support for Mr. Gregory despite mounting evidence of what I and the other founders thought be erratic and irresponsible judgment.

Now this is the real issue, and the reason I believe serious theatre people should study what happened at TLA.

I argue that the cult of personality represented by the Artistic Director concept in regional theatres is dangerous at best, disastrous at worst. We have mourned the demise of theatres in Pittsburgh, Seattle, San Francisco (twice!) and Lincoln Center. Years ago, Ted Hoffman observed that "artistic directors of theatres do not develop sufficiently to meet the possibilities that the economic status of their theatre invites; they hesitate to make use of guest artists of greater ability than their own, they tend to lose actors who are critical of them for good reasons, and wind up associating the loyalty of mediocre actors with quality." (The most talented members of our original company

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left Mr. Gregory long before the blow-up: David Hurst, Ron Liebman, George Sherman, Wolfgang Roth. Not one of those who were loyal to Mr. Gregory have returned this season.) Hoffman also said: "Directors in resident theatre must recognize the need to be successful in meeting audience demand."

Well, Philadelphia does not demand *Beclch* or *Dream of Love* or other refugees from Judson Poets' Theatre in New York. Less than half of the 8,000 subscribers we painfully built up in two years of parlor parties have rejoined this year.

Mr. Gregory says: "Too often our regional theatres are dominated by the taste of the Board and this taste, though it represents money and a certain social milieu, is in no way representative of the entire community. We must re-examine the structure and goals of the regional theatre. What does each of us want and what is the best way to get it?"

Mr. Gregory told our Board that he wanted to create a new kind of theatre, featuring plays of sex and violence and attracting a new kind of audience—homosexuals, drug addicts, and would-be suicides. (As there were many witnesses to this singular expression of artistic philosophy, I doubt if Mr. Gregory will contradict me, though in his TDR piece he skillfully implied that these, his own words, were an attack by an unsympathetic Board member.)

I objected strenuously to production of *Beclch*, not only because I thought it was sick, decadent, shock-for-shock's sake, (*and* dull) but because I knew it would alienate most of our subscribers into withdrawing their support. The Board backed Mr. Gregory.

When the play opened, every local critic panned it. Audiences walked out in disgust. But Mr. Gregory was not fired for these reasons. He was *not* fired even when influential members of the Board quit after they saw *Beclch*. No, Mr. Gregory was fired because he challenged the Board's authority to discharge David Lunney, the Managing Director, who had ignored all budgetary controls during his tenure, amassing a \$250,000 debt despite grants totalling nearly \$300,000 from Otto Haas and the National Endowment of the Arts. (Withholding taxes were diverted to subsidize lavish production budgets, leaving TLA with Federal tax liens exceeding \$40,000 while Gregory and Lunney pursue their careers in Los Angeles...)

LETTERS

In a chin-to-chin showdown over ultimate authority, Mr. Gregory quit. He was then fired *after* he blasted his late friends in the press as a "Main Line Mafia." It is a smokescreen, nothing more, to assert, as he did in TDR, that he was fired because of *Beclch*.

So what lessons can be learned from TLA? To my mind the *only* hope for regional theatre is in strong and wide community support—and that means a representative, knowledgeable Board of Directors, actively shaping policy, not just raising money. Opposed to this is the theory that an artistic director must be a philosopher-king. TLA provided the crucible in which to test this theory. In Mr. Gregory's TDR letter, he refers to the Theatre of the Living Arts as "my theatre." In this city, we are proud of the Philadelphia Orchestra, not Ormandy's boys. . . .

The audience devoted to good theatre is already small enough, without deliberately outraging and alienating it. Goethe said: "...a great public is entitled to our respect, and should not be treated like children from whom one wishes merely to extract money. By accustoming them to what is good, we may lead them

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gradually to feel and appreciate what is excellent, and they will pay their money with double satisfaction when their reason and understanding approve the outlay." In broad audience subscription-support lies regional theatre's only security.

I agree with Mr. Gregory that regional theatre is in trouble. But I say the fault lies with the theatre-people, not the communities' Boards or audiences.

Robert Brustein summed up the dilemma nicely in 1965: "Must we choose between a discredited Establishment and a careerist *avant garde*? Are the only alternatives to be between the collapsed idealism of the old and the secret cynicism of the new?"

*Frederick Goldman
Philadelphia, Pa.*

THE EDITOR:

To protect my reputation as translator, I must disavow responsibility for the shape in which Manfred Wekwerth's "Brecht Today" appeared in T37. It is one thing for an editor to delete

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