

Perspectives

Letters to the Editor

Hodges's letter off target

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to Mr. (J.M.) Hodges's misinformed and irrational criticism of Rob Bowen, director of "Angels in America." As a member of the company, I take personal offense to having my experiences and those of my colleagues extolled by an individual whom I have never met and who possess no firsthand knowledge of our process. As I tear apart your criticisms, Mr. Hodges, I would like to give you a few lessons in responsible and effective writing that may be of some use, should you ever again feel the need to publicly express your opinions.

The first lesson is never to pretend to possess knowledge of a subject to which you have no first-hand experience. In this letter I am not going to touch upon any subjects to which I have no reliable source of information. You see, as a member of the company, I am in a position to speak knowledgeably and honestly about the specifics of our process. You, Mr. Hodges, do not enjoy this same privilege, yet your letter implies that you are a reliable authority on all things relating to our show. This is simply not possible, because, as you said yourself, our rehearsals were closed. You make vague and misleading statements concerning the amount of time we spent in rehearsal, and how Bowen "treats them like slaves." Yet you fail to state any sources at all to back up your claim about our supposed over-working. I sure as hell know you never asked my opinion. Hypocrisy. Do I smell another lesson brewing? Had you done any real research into this argument, you would have discovered that we have an actor in this company that is a member of the Equity Union, which exists to protect actors from the kind of treatment you allege and has strict rules regarding the amount of hours that can be worked. I can assure you, we came nowhere close to violating those rules. I would remind you that all the actors were made aware of the rehearsal schedule at auditions, and we chose to

participate.

The second lesson that I would like to impart, Mr. Hodges, is that a half-truth is as bad as a bald-faced lie when it omits pertinent information that is necessary for a complete understanding of the issue. You bring up the issue of a black character in the play being played by someone who is white. Yet, in a disgusting attempt to sway your readers' emotions to issues of racism, you conveniently omit the fact that a black woman was cast in this role originally. For reasons that are only her and the director's business, the person had to leave us late in the process. I am fairly sure that you were aware of the original casting choice, Mr. Hodges, but I am respectful enough not to bring up that issue in a public forum. You also assert that a scene containing nudity was "cut out." A blatant lie. The scene is there in entirety. True, given the nature of the space we work in, the nudity proved inappropriate, but nudity is not the point of the scene. If you believe that the point of the scene is nudity, you should probably not consider theater criticism as a future endeavor. You most certainly have the right to criticize a show based upon the final product, but when you make personal attacks on a member of our company and accuse others of lying with no rational basis for your attacks, it is disrespectful and childish.

When you must resort to name-calling in your writing, it is a good sign that you lack confidence in your statement. Anyone who truly believes in themselves can assert their opinions respectfully and with dignity and still make a point.

Hypocrisy is the greatest enemy of effective persuasion, Mr. Hodges. It invalidates your arguments and just makes you look stupid. If you had bothered to do your homework, you would have discovered that Bowen is a wonderful director who cares about his company and the message of the show. Rob is a caring individual and one of the best directors that I have ever had the privilege to work with.

It almost seems that you have not really told us why you are so upset. If you truly have a valid criticism, let's hear it. We have worked hard

We deserve it. By the way, "flop" does not usually refer to shows which sell out every performance and receive standing ovations at every curtain call.

Josh Olsen
Sophomore, undeclared

More 'Angels'

Dear Editor,

Having been in the audience for two performances of Theatre UNCA's production of "Angels in America," I feel the need to respond to J.M. Hodges's letter to the editor that appeared in the Feb. 20 issue of *The Banner*.

A total of two African-American students auditioned for the role of Belize, and Rob Bowen did give the role to one of these two. Unfortunately, that actor decided to leave the production for personal reasons approximately two weeks before the show's opening. Given these circumstances, I think Mr. Bowen adapted as well as he possibly could have without canceling or postponing the production.

Mr. Hodges is also correct in stating that (Angels' author) Tony Kushner calls for the character of Prior to appear nude. Mr. Bowen decided to have the actor playing Prior remain in his underwear. The dramatic action of the play is not interrupted or changed by this thin scrap of cotton, and the scene remains as written in every other respect. Mr. Bowen feared that the discomfort the nudity might cause that audience could distract attention from the true issues of the play. Mr. Bowen did not, as Hodges suggests, "cut it (the scene) out."

I am also uncertain what kind of "exploitation" Mr. Hodges is accusing Mr. Bowen of. I cannot speak from the perspective of a Mormon, a homosexual, or an African-American. As a Jew, I saw many aspects of Jewish culture, religious practices, and language treated with accuracy and respect.

It is my impression that the reason why Dr. Grant Hardy was interviewed was that he is the advisor of the Mormon student group that

was actively dealing with and discussing the religious issues in the play. It is sad that Mr. Hodges feels left out for lack of consultation, but activity brings attention. Mr. Hodges accuses someone of making generalizations about Mormons, and then tells us: "...we (Mormons) are all rational, open-minded human beings who accept people for who they are, not what they are." It is always inaccurate to generalize, Mr. Hodges. Even when you do it.

Mr. Hodges complains that Mr. Bowen isn't qualified to direct this play because he "...doesn't understand what it's like to be any of the characters." Presumably, he feels that because Mr. Bowen is not Jewish, Mormon, homosexual, or African-American, he can't possibly direct it well. The beauty of theater is that it allows audiences, actors, designers, and directors, through suspension of disbelief, to leap out of themselves and into the emotional lives of characters on a stage. If you still hold to your theory, you should never direct any play that is not about people like yourself.

Most disturbing are Mr. Hodges' malicious and angry attacks on the behavior and person of Rob Bowen throughout his letter. This is sad not only because it takes away from the important focus of the play itself, but because it slanders a good person. Assistant Professor of Drama Rob Bowen is, in fact, an experienced director who shows great courage in making his UNCA directing debut with a play of such power and significance. I think that it shows Rob's sensitivity for his actors that he closed rehearsals. If you were playing a scene in which you had to strip down to your underwear or kiss another heterosexual man, would you want a lot of strangers at the early rehearsals, Mr. Hodges? The theater is a holy space to actors, and I suggest that in the future you respect it and them.

Congratulations to the cast and crew of "Angels in America." It wasn't easy, but you did admirable work with a brilliant and difficult piece of text. Bravo.

David Rothman
Junior, political science

Theatre UNCA deserves thanks

Dear Editor,

I want to thank Theatre UNCA for their brave and inspired production of "Angels in America" last weekend. It was a necessary, timely, and provocative event. What elegant and dignified performances, and what courage to tackle one of the hardest pieces—both technically and thematically—in the contemporary repertoire.

David Hopes
Professor of Literature

Amnesty International needs you

Dear Editor,

I am writing on behalf of the campus-based chapter of Amnesty International (AI). AI launched numerous information sessions, letter writing campaigns, and topical events during the past two semesters, each of which attracted students and community residents alike. We are now in need of new members who will take an active role in organizing, planning, and scheduling events for next term.

If you are interested, please meet with us in Ramsey Library's Red Oak Room (to the immediate right of the lobby doors) on Friday, Feb. 28 at 4:00 p.m. We will have a general discussion about AI and will answer any questions you may have. We will also show a film on slavery in Sudan, followed by a discussion about ethnic genocide in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, both of which will give you an idea of the type of issues we deal with. There will be free pizza for all attendees.

Andre Mack
Senior, international relations

Feminism was ill-defined

Dear Editor,

I appreciated Ms. Tracy Wilson's clarification of the false stereotypes

of "feminists" as necessarily lesbians and men-haters, and I agree that far more women are "feminist" in their thinking and action, as she asserts, than are willing to admit. However, granting Ms. Wilson these accurate insights, I have one question directed, not at her assertions, but at the presuppositions of her thinking in general. The first is simply this: who says men and women are equal? It's one thing to assert and argue for this, but why should anyone believe you? What is your source of authority? Is it your own intuition, instinct, common sense, or empirical investigation? Societies throughout history have argued for such particular social understandings (Nazi Germans of Jews; American whites of blacks) without any other reason than that their self-derived philosophies told them so. I believe that your argument for equality lacks a very important component—authority.

So, where do we find authority on what the relationship between men and women is? The best authority is the very designer of the genders. Now, for the sake of argument, let's say that this authority, higher than yours and my say-so, decreed that men and women were in fact equal in one sense, but not interchangeable and not the same (which is really what seems to be at the heart of your argument). How would you respond to that? In fact, what if this authority designed their very natures to act, respond, and think in different ways—in short, to be different! If that were the case, which I believe it is, then women wouldn't be acting with timidity at all when they decline to join the "equality" bandwagon. They'd be simply delighting to live as they have been designed, equal in value and worth to a man, but different in gifts, roles, and functions. With this understanding of women, then "authority," "roles," "submission," and "leadership" don't carry the albatross image that you paint upon them. Structure designed by the author of men and women becomes good and, hold on, even natural.

Berry Stubbs
Campus Pastor
Reformed University Fellowship

The fountain of youth may be in a convertible



Dave Barry
columnist

I got a convertible. Now, I know what you're going to say. You're going to say: "Dave, you pathetic fool, you're 49 and you're having a mid-life crisis. Trade that thing in immediately and get a car more suitable for a person your age, such as a 1910 Hupmobile with air bags." No, darn it! I love my convertible! I've always wanted a convertible! For 33 years I've been driving boring cars, starting with my mom's Plymouth Valiant, which was a Ferrari compared with my dad's car, a Nash Metropolitan powered by a motor the same size as the one found inside Tickle Me Elmo.

I am a member of the small, select group of automotive losers who purchased both a Ford Maverick and a Chevrolet Vega—cars manufactured when the motto of

the U.S. auto industry was: "We're Working Hard To Make You Buy An Import."

For the past seven years I've driven a practical, box-shaped car. The auto industry calls it a "sport utility vehicle," which suggests that it's sporty. This concept is reinforced by TV commercials showing such vehicles racing up mountainsides, splashing across rivers, winning the Olympic pole vault, etc.

In fact, this vehicle is a station wagon. Admit it, sport-utility-vehicle owners! It's shaped a little differently, but it's a station wagon! And you do not drive it across rivers! You drive it across the Wal-Mart parking lot!

When I went to trade in my sport utility vehicle, I was going to buy another practical car; I truly was. But I ran into a salesperson named Jerry. Jerry's former profession

was—really—powerboat racer. Currently, in addition to selling cars, he is co-producing a kick-boxing movie.

In terms of mature practicality, Jerry is not Mr. Both Feet On The Ground. I think that, if he could have, he would have sold me an F-

used convertible with a 5-speed stick-shift transmission.

Immediately after I bought the car, I put the top down and took my wife, Michelle, and my son, Rob, for a ride. They both wanted to know why anybody would want a stick shift, seeing as how you have



16. ("Dave, if you're willing to do business today, we're going to throw in the floor mats AND the heat-seeking missile package.") But I was firm, and in the end we compromised on him selling me a sporty

to spend a lot of time shifting it. "Well," I explained, in my Knowledgeable Guy voice, "it's actually very practical, because by depressing the clutch you can more precisely control how fast the r.p.m.s

go through the carburetor, which produces your ignition."

The actual truth, of course, is that a stick shift makes you feel like a major automotive stud. You crank up the song "Little Deuce Coupe" by the Beach Boys, and when they sing, "I get pushed out of shape, and it's hard to steer, when I get rubber in all four gears," you sing along at the top of your lungs as you push the clutch in, put the car in gear, ease out the clutch and—Kiss my exhaust pipe, automatic-transmission weenies! You back out of your space in the Wal-Mart parking lot.

One thing I'm a little concerned about is bullets. I live in Miami, where it is customary to celebrate certain special events (such as night-fall) by firing guns into the air. When bullets come down, they sometimes injure people. It's such a problem that the *Miami Herald* recently printed a letter to the editor, which I swear I am not making up, from a Miami man who suggested—and I don't think he was joking—that we would have a safer community if people would do what he does, namely, shoot at the ground.

Here is an actual quote from this man's letter: "There are enough bullets in my yard to throw off a

Boeing 747's compass, but they are all buried where they were fired, not to come down miles away."

Unfortunately, many Miami residents are not as thoughtful as this man. So for me, the fun of driving a convertible is dampened by the nagging concern that maybe I should be wearing a steel hat.

Another concern I have is that Rob, who has a driver's license despite being only 16, which from my perspective is the same thing as being a fetus, wants to drive my car. I figured learning the stick shift would slow him down; I know it took me a while.

My mother taught me, and I can remember the two of us yelling at each other a lot as the car, with me at the controls, would lurch forward two feet, then stall, two feet, stall, two feet, stall, and so on, causing our heads to be flung violently back and forward, like human windshield wipers. To travel just one mile that way would have required several weeks and thousands of aspirin.

But Rob picked it right up. The second try, vroom, he was off. So of course he wants to use the convertible. My feeling is, sure! He can use it whenever he wants. The only condition is that first he has to drive for 33 years. Until then he gets the Hupmobile.