

Sony - Jerry P has chora copy

9/11/71

Mr. John Leonard, Editor (editor?)  
Sunday N.Y. Times Book Review (review?)  
Times Square, N  
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Mr. Leonard,

Your letter of 9/9 reads, in full: "Apparently everyone in the country is without honor except you. I don't think we have anything useful to say to one another."

If I believed you had a soul, I could call you the soul of brevity.

Taken by itself (and at some length is less ungenerous) your "letter" would not credit a fourth-string high-school debater in Mississippi's most blighted school. Taken in the context of what you have done and not done and of the serious accusations to which you make no response, this being your first "answer" to detailed letters going back more than five months, you have provided one of the more convincing self-defensations. Considering the nature of the beast who is most acceptable in a function such as yours, this is not an inconsiderable achievement.

I am not aware of having represented myself as an expert on honor, whatever that word may mean to you if, from your record, it can mean anything. As I understand it, I regret I have become and will, to you, here and now, represent myself as an authentic expert on dishonor. I have made a longer, deeper, closer and more detailed study of one of the greater dishonors in our history. I claim to be an expert in that. Without the dishonor of and in the press, this great blight on our national honor would not have been possible. "Ironstone" here, I think I can without exaggeration allege, have made me an expert in this, too.

Thus I accredit both of us, each for his own role. I have never enjoyed that of the victim of the rape who is then charged with being an attractive nuisance, which seems to be the concept of the Sunday Times and its special sections.

My first letter to you was written before your necessary abatement of the intellect and his once-honorable calling was on the streets. I had been sent a copy by a political enemy you have converted for me. I have since been told that on receipt you expressed deep sympathy and disclaimed personal responsibility (as my "editor?" in the opening is not a mere vice-crank). You would have to find some way of rectifying this terrible thing you said, agonizing as only "reviewer?" can. Your "rectification" was not long delayed, a further libel by a one-sided man who exposed himself where I, having deemed his descent in our earlier dealings (if not the highest exemplification of the "honorably" journalist, for he confessed taking dishonorable orders from an editor since, if politely denounced, by his own paper, for just such things - copy on request) was careful to hide his identity. When I sent you an original carbon of my contemporaneous letter establishing exactly what I had said to be accurate, as a close reading of his falsity also establishes, asking that you forward a copy to him and return the original to me, you were silent. If you have, as is normal, sent my communications to the man <sup>you</sup> whom I sorrow, Wolff, and the shameless Kaplan, both have failed to display the most elemental candor and self-respect, neither having written me. They could denounce me as a liar, or claim I misinterpreted or took out of context, or maintain that they had been honorable and truthful. What you published from Kaplan, which I believe can safely be taken as his best, addresses nothing, responds to nothing, and ignores the subsequent letters I sent you.



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So there is a record, oh dictator's handmaiden, mine and yours, two records.

I believe that the writer above all should live by Polonius' advice. "Living this way means more to me than the favor of the Times and its <sup>editors</sup> sycophants. Quite obviously, I do not seek yours. As I did not start this fight, so do I not abandon it. I take time I do not have from work that is without end to meet any challenge to my integrity. This, obviously, is not your policy. I think I have more peace of mind in the poverty you and your ilk have guaranteed for me than you in your lofty and respected position in your calling.

Your comment "I don't think we have anything useful to say to one another" is one with which I disagree, and not only here. I think it is useful to make you look at yourself and I could not bear to look at myself. There will be other books on other taboos, and perhaps you may remember me and this shameful thing you have done and be less the most subservient any representative of any element of the media can be, an unofficial arm of government that can be made honest only by exposing its dishonesty.

Moreover, especially taken with earlier history of which you may be unaware, I think the Sunday Times has crossed the malice line. You did not respond when I asked that you do what is still possible to undo the damage you have done, to my work and to my reputation. Meaning, of course, to my future writing, too.

Although I am without income or resources and owe then \$30,000 in debt, I do intend to explain this, as best I can with such handicaps. It is an obligation I think I owe to more than myself.

You may wonder whether at some point we may have "anything...to say to one another", but in another medium than letters, another forum than the literary criticism you control. We may then learn whether or not it can also be "useful".

Personally, I look forward to the possibility.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg