

## LETTERS TO



## WHO KILLED LAIUS?

## The Editors:

As TDR's Advisory Editor most closely associated with Greek drama, I should like to make it clear that the article "Who Killed Laius?" by Karl Harshbarger (T28) was printed against my advice and protest. It would be pleasant to regard the piece as merely a critical *jeu d'esprit* in the spirit of Samuel Butler's lively "Who Killed Lucy?" (Wordsworth himself, concluded Butler, with an analysis of the poem that parodied the New Criticism before it existed); but this is unfortunately not the case. It is a piece of tiresome and perverse ingenuity, humorlessly devoted to demonstrating that the Chorus killed Laius. Its "proof" is in my opinion untheatrical and unconvincing; moreover, if Harshbarger is right, *Oedipus* is merely an unusually silly play. Admittedly, literary criticism of Greek tragedy is in a bad way these days, largely because very few classicists have the slightest respect for literature. It is therefore saddening to see TDR encouraging critical illiteracy of a newer, but no less unliterary, variety.

*William Arrowsmith*

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**The Editors:**

I was engrossed by the provocative article, "Who Killed Laius?", though I must confess to having enjoyed it more in its original version several years ago when it was first published under the title of "The Macbeth Murder Mystery." We are indebted to you for this post-humorous piece, though you must realize that "Karl Harshbarger" is a pretty transparent pseudonym for James Thurber.

*Albert Cohn*

**HOMOSEXUALITY****The Editors:**

The growing recognition of the desperate sickness of American society has been accompanied, naturally enough, by a growing recognition of the desperate sickness of the American theatre. But recognition of sickness demands diagnosis; this in its turn requires unblinking analysis, but the necessity is met instead

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by hysteria, anxiety, and blind flight accompanied by the desperate attempt to shift attention and blame onto the nearest acceptable scapegoat.

Just as the present ills of the culture are being blamed on the Communist and fellow-travelers, the ills of the theatre have come more and more to be blamed on an insidious infiltration of homosexuals, an accusation in which even Howard Taubman has joined. To accept such an accusation uncritically is bigotry, but to dismiss it out of hand is blindness, for homosexuality has come to play an extremely important role in every aspect of contemporary American theatre. Is this influence genuinely detrimental to the theatre, and if so, how? Is it the *cause* of the ills of the theatre?

Donald M. Kaplan, in his essay, "Homosexuality and American Theatre," (T27) quite rightly demonstrates that the question is far deeper than one of mere correlation of overt actions, and that the ill is characteristic of current American theatre in general, not just a subgroup within it. Unfortunately, his argument proves in the end to be the current theatre is governed by a single prevailing ideology, which is homosexual ("For all the difference it makes those responsible for the emotional and intellectual climate of current theatre might as well be overtly homosexual") it is an ideology, he suggests, which "perpetuates the fraud of rebellion without revolution," and he sets out to show via the psychoanalytic vocabulary how this "homosexual theatre can succeed with a heterosexual audience."

The essay is replete with psychoanalytic jargon, phraseology, and criteria, as well as extensive quotation from such as Marcuse, Fenichel, and Camus; its very weight tends to overwhelm and bemuse the lay reader. Yet far from lending scientific support to the thesis that it is, if not homosexuals, then certainly homosexuality that is crippling our