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Letters

To the Editor:

In her review of *The Biographical Dictionary of Dance* by Barbara Naomi Cohen-Stratynner, Deborah Jowitt faulted the book for the many errors she identified in the areas she knows something about. "To what extent can I trust Cohen-Stratynner on matters I'm ignorant of? . . . what of students consulting this book for accurate information. . . . It seems to me unconscionable that a book of this impressive scope, offered at such a hefty price, shouldn't have been read by committees of experts prepared to do the kind of nit-picking I'm doing now *before* the book was published" (*Dance Research Journal* 15(2):41).

Because the written word becomes "God's truth" for some readers, Jowitt's concern is applicable beyond a book of breadth and high cost. The key question is, *how does a serious writer get constructive feedback on work prior to publication?*

On the basis of five book manuscripts and about fifty articles, I can report that I have never published anything without soliciting critical comment from experts. Some colleagues were helpful, most were too busy, and others feared upsetting a positive relationship by making negative remarks. University and other presses send manuscripts under consideration to reviewers (anonymous to the authors) for evaluation. If remuneration to the reviewer is involved, feedback of some sort is likely. (Presses have limited resources for one or two readers at most.) Reports have taken from two weeks to over a year. Comments have ranged from a few paragraphs of useless labels to 16 single spaced pages of invaluable assistance. Sometimes comments reflected the reviewer's dismay at the challenge to her theory and methods or political ideology. If a press's first reader is negative, the press usually declines to further consider the manuscript and the author must seek another publisher. Sometimes editors require changes they or their reviewers think necessary and the author believes to be wrong.

So, what is the answer to publishing the best possible material?

Judith Lynne Hanna