

The page cannot be displayed

The page you are looking for is currently unavailable. The Web site might be experiencing technical difficulties, or you may need to adjust your browser settings.

That Which Simmers Is Not to Be Dissed



Jamie Rose for The New York Times

Plato's "Republic" or bodice ripper? A Washington subway advertisement compares the two, and has irked fans of romance novels.

By IAN URBINA
Published: October 10, 2006

WASHINGTON, Oct. 9 — Time was when it seemed safe to regard the works of Plato as intellectually superior to the racy romance novels of, say, Nora Roberts. In underground Washington, those days are over.

Consider the hoo-ha over new subway posters that try to capitalize on the percentage of people with advanced degrees living in the region.

The Greater Washington Initiative, a business group devoted to attracting investment to the area, put up the posters, which feature side-by-side photographs: of a man reading Plato's "Republic," under the caption "Greater Washington Subway Reading," and of the same man poring over a romance novel, under the caption "Average Subway Reading."

More Articles in I

Today's Head

Sign up f every mc misshep Change I



MOST POPULAR

1. An Elepha
2. Where Fai
3. Frugal Tra Barcelona
4. Cat Lovers
5. Operas for
6. Gone for I Southwest
7. Ground Ru

The reaction from romance writers — and readers — was as fast and heated as a steamy sex scene.

“I’m an erotic romance/romance publisher, and I live in your marketing area,” Stephanie V. Kelsey, editor in chief and chief operations officer of Mojocastle Press, wrote to the group. “Despite the erroneous position many take that romance is ‘easy money,’ it requires the same hard work, honing of skill and commitment as any other genre. To insinuate otherwise in a media representation of your company is not recommended, and we are not amused.”

Neither was Ms. Roberts, a Maryland resident and best-selling author eager to defend the genre and its fans. “The fact that Romance novels make up about 50 percent of sales of all mass market fiction should be an indication of how many passengers are reading a Romance novel on the D.C. Metro,” she wrote, “and how many might be insulted by this ad.”

The blogosphere certainly was. In one message to a Web site, an angry reader said romance was dead in Washington because the city itself “is a place that pretty much sucks your soul drier than a stale raisin.”

A second message noted that the readers she saw on most trains were men in suits with Pentagon ID tags, and that they were soaking up Harry Potter, not Plato.

“Must we denigrate any form of literature?” another woman wrote, adding that the Greater Washington Initiative “should be ashamed for perpetuating a stereotype that has no basis in truth.”

All that on a blog whose very name — not printable in most newspapers — refers to the genre as “trashy.”

Though conceding that the advertisements might be seen as snooty, Tim Priest, the business group’s executive director, said it had no intention of removing them.

“We meant no offense,” Mr. Priest said. “Our intention was to poke fun at ourselves for having so many advanced degrees and to highlight the region’s attractive talent pool.”

Attractive — and at times, rather touchy.

8. [In God's Na Outweighs \]](#)
9. [Eye-Catchir Common M](#)
10. [Music Revi Streisand's](#)

[Go to Complete Lis](#)

[A fall TV status r around?](#)

Also in Business:
[DealBook on t](#)
[What is on Ma](#)
[Keep track of alert today!](#)

ADVERTISEMENTS

[Switch to TD AME trade free for 45 d](#)

[Jazz up your busi color printers-stai](#)

[CFOdirect Networ PricewaterhouseC](#)

[Win a dream trip f Anywhere. Enter now.](#)



[More Articles in National »](#)