Order Number 8824453

Theatre criticism: A minor art with a major problem

Anderson, David James, Ph.D.

The Ohio State University, 1988

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

THEATRE CRITICISM:

A MINOR ART WITH A MAJOR PROBLEM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

David James Anderson, A.B., A.M.

* * * * *

Ohio State University

1988

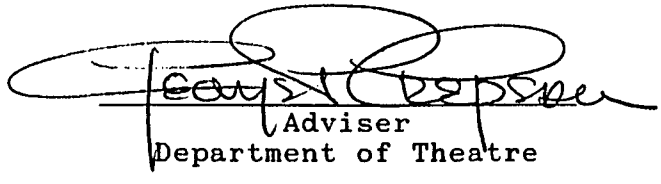
Dissertation Committee:

George P. Crepeau

Firman H. Brown

Russell T. Hastings

Approved by



Adviser

Department of Theatre

To George Crepeau

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my sincere thanks to Donald, Kathleen, and Lawrence for their support. Thanks go to Firman Brown and Russell Hastings for their suggestions and comments about the research. Gratitude is expressed to Gretchen, Carol, Christina, Ellen, William, Geoff, Ann, Boyce, Bev, Judy, Bob, and Julia for their encouragement and friendship. To George, my teacher, thank you for your guidance and insight.

VITA

21 October 1951	Born--Durham, N. Carolina
1973	A. B., Anthropology, University of Missouri at Columbia.
1978	A. M., Speech and Dramatic Art, University of Missouri at Columbia.
1985-Present	Production Assistant, WOSU Stations.

PUBLICATIONS

"Spartan Masks." Theatre Studies 28-29, 1981-82/1982-83: 59-72.

LECTURES

"A Step from behind the Footlights: The Role of Women in the Actors' Fund Fair of 1892." Theatre History Debut Panel, ATA Convention. Minneapolis, 1983.

"Failure and Success: Production History and Critical Response to Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?." History Panel, ATA Convention. Toronto, 1985.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Theatre

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An examination of theatre criticism shows that there is not consensus as to what constitutes theatre criticism and by what standards it can be evaluated. Few persons can explain the difference between "good" theatre criticism and "bad" theatre criticism. The best of theatre critics have trouble explaining theatre criticism. George Bernard Shaw said, "Criticism is, has been, and eternally will be as bad as it possibly can be."[1] It was one of many statements in a speech delivered by Shaw at an annual luncheon of the London Critic's Circle held 11 October 1929.[2] Shaw debunked any sentiment that dramatic criticism in England had achieved greatness during the eighteen-nineties:

> I do feel called upon as a survivor from that time to tell you that dramatic criticism today is not worse than the criticism of that time. It could not be. After all, there are limits to what can be done by incompetence, by ignorance, by carelessness, and by the

---

[1] E. J. West, ed., Shaw on Theatre (New York: Hill and Wang, 1959) 199.

[2] West 198.

> irresponsible, and in those days, several times a week, those limits were reached cheerfully. You may try as hard as you like. You can get no further.[3]

It seems that, for Shaw, criticism even at its best, fell far short of an ideal, even among the best of theatre critics. What this ideal may be and how theatre critics struggle to achieve it, is the focus of this dissertation.

An ideal theatre criticism implies there is a standard of excellence which differentiates "good" theatre criticism from "bad" theatre criticism. Shaw writes in the eighteen-nineties about awakening to the experience of writing a play and getting it produced:

> The man who has had that awakening about one play will thenceforth have his eyes open at all other plays; and there you have at once the first moral with the first technical qualification of the critic--the determination to have every play as well done as possible, and the knowledge of what is standing in the way of that consumation.[4]

Shaw's statement is self-serving; he is launching his career as playwright and admits his playwriting experience has colored his criticism with "personal

---

[3] West 199.

[4] Bernard Shaw, Dramatic Opinions and Essays with an Apology by Bernard Shaw: Containing as well a Word on the Dramatic Opinions and Essays of Bernard Shaw by James Huneker, 2 vols. (New York: Bretano's, 1909) 1: 241-42.

interest and bias" about the production of plays.[5] "That may not be an ideal arrangement," he writes, "but it is the way the world is built; and we must make the best of it."[6] Shaw's "arrangement" as he calls it, may not be ideal, but his desire to see well-produced plays along with his efforts to learn why they are well-produced is a standard which critics try to emulate.

A theatre critic is a critic who devotes his attention to plays in performance. There is more than one type of critic in theatre. The word "critic" often refers to a drama critic who is considered more erudite than the reviewer and better able to discuss the finer points of dramatic art, especially in its textual form. The reviewer has been likened to a journalist, who reports under the pressures of newspaper deadlines and editorial scrutiny. There are some who think these pressures force reviewers to limit the scope and quality of their analysis, and believe the drama critic is better able to conduct an unhurried and more complete investigation.

---

[5] Shaw 242.

[6] Shaw 242.

Stanley Kauffmann says reviewers practice a type of criticism which he calls theater criticism:

> [T]here are two distinct kinds of criticism, theater criticism and drama criticism. The former deals with performance--all elements of the production including text-in-performance; the latter concentrates on text, with appropriate literary and cultural-historical comment. This distinction between theater critics and drama critics, seems to me more helpful, less arbitrary and subjective, than the usual distinction between reviewers and critics.[7]

Kauffmann voices his concern about the way theater critics and drama critics interact with the theater and the theater public. He argues the drama critic is "sheltered by the aegis of literary criticism . . . and, since he has no immediate effect on theatrical production, he runs into little animosity from the theater or the theater public."[8] The theater critic on the other hand, directly encounters feedback from his reviews.

Kauffmann says theater criticism is more demanding than drama criticism and in some ways, more important. The theater critic works under time constraints and psychological pressures brought about by directly interacting with the performance, and Kauffmann writes,

---

[7] Stanley Kauffmann, Persons of the Drama: Theater Criticism and Comment (New York: Harper, 1976) 376.

[8] Kauffmann, Persons 377.

theater criticism is "at least as important as the drama criticism that may follow long after because, to a considerable degree, it determines what that subsequent criticism will be."[9] He says "[t]he theater critic, even if he writes for a quarterly, is what I would call a front-line critic."[10] This critic "has the primary, crucial task of winnowing wheat from chaff--in effect, of selecting the materials that will eventually become the subjects for drama critics."[11]

Kauffmann's ideas about theater criticism define theatre criticism and the role of the theatre critic. For the purpose of this study, the term "critic" will will mean the type of theatre critic who deals directly with play productions on the front lines. No distinction will be made between reviewer and critic. The terms "drama critic" and "dramatic criticism" are commonly used in many sources and their usage here is sometimes unavoidable when quoted directly, but the emphasis of this study centers on the theater critic described by Kauffmann.

---

[9] Kauffmann, Persons 377.

[10] Kauffmann, Persons 377.

[11] Kauffmann, Persons 377.

It is important to define the object with which the critic works. The play initiates dramatic action. The production brings the play to life in performance. The audience interacts with the play and with the production. In this dissertation, the simultaneous interaction of the play, the production, and the audience is called the play event, at which the art of theatre achieves its fullest expression. The play event is also the place where the art of theatre is most exposed to criticism. The performance can collapse at any moment, and all it takes is for one or more of the three elements of the play event to fail. If, however the elements are interacting to their fullest potential, the play event creates an unique experience which Harold Clurman extols as the "theatre experience."[12] He describes attending a preview performance and writes of his feelings at the end of the play when asked, "What do you think?"[13] The question made him suddenly aware that he hadn't cared what he thought about it when he was watching the play:

> While I watched it my mind registered certain objections--the uncertainly articulated theme confusing plot line that might be considered

---

[12] Harold Clurman, The Divine Pastime (New York: MacMillan, 1974) 95.

[13] Clurman 94.

> trite; what was important to me was the fact I was enjoying a certain relation to what I saw that could hardly be defined in terms of opinion.[14]

He felt this relationship offered "a sense of contact with a living thing--noticeably imperfect--hence an experience that was pleasurably ambivalent."[15] He adds, "Only through such contact could I know anything about the play."[16]

Clurman complains that the question, "What do you think?" aroused in him an antitheatrical way of thinking[17] which interfered with his experience of the play event:

> The experience of the play--the sense of each actor on the stage, their struggle with the material which was suggestive and intrinsically absorbing--was being driven from me by something that was not essentially of the theatre.[18]

---

[14] Clurman 94-95.

[15] Clurman 95.

[16] Clurman 95.

[17] Antitheatrical thinking, or antitheatrical prejudice as Jonas Barish describes it, arises from displeasure with the ambiguous nature of theatre performance and the illusionary world it creates (Jonas Barish, The Antitheatrical Prejudice, Berkeley: U of California P, 1981).

[18] Clurman 95.

"It is true," he admits, "that part of the pleasure of the theatre is the arena-spectacle of it."[19] He decides that antitheatrical thinking ignores theatre's greatest strength:

> But what is most characteristic of the theatre experience is the joy of looking into a strange, imaginative world, and observing it with more concentration, love and curiosity than we do our workaday activities.[20]

The theatre experience is an experience which arises through the interaction of the audience and the critic with the play in performance. The critic encounters the play event--a play, a production, and an audience--as an uncommon member of an audience in that he must explain his theatre experience to others. Theatre criticism requires the critic to engage the play event and at the same time re-create and convey the experience through words understandable to theatre creators--playwrights, actors, directors, and designers--as well as the general public. In Dramatic Criticism, A. B. Walkley suggests that theatre creators and audience members "are all critics in their way," but their criticism isn't criticism in a true sense:

> We come now, then, to the class of critics properly called, who differ from all these other classes in that it is their business not

---

[19] Clurman 95.

[20] Clurman 95.

> only like the others, to enjoy, but to appraise and to justify their enjoyment. And this appraising and justification have to be made systematic and to be presented in literary form. Hence the critics proper are in the peculiar position of being at once consumers and producers; they are consumers of one art, the art of drama, and producers of another art, the art of criticism.[21]

Walkley argues that the type of creativity found in criticism is no different from the creativity found in the production of poetry, novels, or plays, and he says critics are no less creative than poets, novelists, or playwrights. "They are all creators," he notes, "and what they create is aesthetic feeling."[22] Then he adds, "And the raw material out of which they create this is the same, namely, themselves."[23] Walkley announces, "Criticism, like any other art--whatever else it may be--is a mode of self-expression."[24]

Walkley is correct in his statement that criticism is an art in its own right, but criticism is an art which serves the greater art of theatre. The critic's raw material involves two unique entities, one of them being the critic and the other being the play event. The play

---

[21] A. B. Walkley, Dramatic Criticism: Three Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution February 1903 (London: John Murray, 1903) 51.

[22] Walkley 52.

[23] Walkley 52.

[24] Walkley 52.

event is a self-contained artwork; it needs only a play, a production, and an audience to exist and nothing more. Orlo Williams, in Contemporary Criticism of Literature, points out that criticism cannot exist on its own:

> Criticism . . . cannot exist apart from the object of criticism, and there is no such thing as "pure" criticism, in the sense of a purely self-sufficient, or self-supporting activity.[25]

Theatre criticism must occur within the context of the play event. It is not a self-sufficient activity, and therefore is a minor art. However this does not diminish the creative stature of the critic. The critic's creative impulse finds its most expressive outlet in re-creating the theatre experience of the play event. "At best, the critic is an artist whose point of departure is another artist's work," writes Clurman.[26] The critic discovers the theatre experience and re-creates moments in the play event where the theatre experience made its greatest impact. This requires the critic to experience the play event as it was created by another artist and at the same time employ his own artistry to re-create important moments in the play event.

---

[25] Orlo Williams, Contemporary Criticism of Literature (New York: Haskell House, 1971) 15.

[26] Clurman 3.

"Beauty is not perfection; but the beauty of an object lies in its permanent possiblity of creating the perfect moment," explains Ethel Puffer in The Psychology of Beauty.[27] She decides the experience of the perfect moment arises from the union of two distinct qualities, one quality being stimulation and the other quality being a state of repose. According to Puffer, stimulation is that which occurs when an artwork produces an "impulse to movement and action," in the observer.[28] In theatre the audience is stimulated by the action of the play unfolding in performance. But stimulation, by itself, cannot create the perfect moment in art because the sensation of action which it produces will remain unfocused, unless it is directed back to the work of art which produced it. Puffer says the factor which limits the sensation of action and directs it back toward the source which produced it, is the state of repose. She says repose is a condition "without tendency to change" and is therefore an impulse which is "antagonistic" to action.[29] In the extreme, repose resembles a state of mind akin to a hypnotic trance, and Puffer says, a repose by itself cannot produce feelings of aesthetic pleasure

---

[27] Ethel Puffer, The Psychology of Beauty (Cambridge: Riverside, 1905) 56.

28 Puffer 50.

29 Puffer 49-50.

because the beholder loses all sense of movement and action arising from the artwork. She concludes the perfect moment in art occurs when there is a "balance of forces" between stimulation and repose, whereby the work of art stimulates impulses of action and at the same time inhibits them in a manner which "fixates us, and arrests us, upon it [the artwork].[30] In theatre, fixation occurs when the mind of an audience member is stimulated and drawn into the world created by the theatre experience. When we as an audience are fixated by the enactment of a character, Michael Goldman says that "we share in the actor's performance through the action of our own":

> Acting has a powerful kinesthetic appeal. As we sit in the theater, we follow the action by internally copying or re-enacting what we see. Here we are not only responding to what the characters do; we are also re-enacting the actions by which the actors possess and project their parts.[31]

Puffer's concept about stimulation and repose illustrates the interaction of the theatre critic in his theatre experience of the play event. The balance struck between stimulation and repose arouses creative impulses in the critic while keeping those impulses focused on the play event. It should be added that the critic is an artist whose point of return is another artist's work.

---

[30] Puffer 50-54.

[31] Michael Goldman, Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) 10.

Criticism which departs on its own and begins to act independently from the art of theatre is called creative criticism.

The Harper Handbook to Literature defines creative criticism as being an extreme form of impressionistic criticism "wherein the critic creates a new work, imposing his or her imagination upon the literature [work of art] at hand. . . ."[32] In creative criticism, preoccupation with one's own powers of imagination blinds the critic to the theatre experience of the play event. Creative criticism fails to recognize the play event as an unique entity. Instead creative criticism itself becomes its own subject matter, subverting the critic's creative impulses from re-creating the play event and from discovering important moments in the theatre experience.

The theatre experience is that experience which occurs when the critic and the play event are joined at a vantage point.[33] A vantage point is a position--area, attitude, viewpoint--from which the critic can best

---

[32] Northrop Frye, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins, The Harper Handbook to Literature (New York: Harper, 1985) 131.

[33] The vantage point, or "Psychical Distance" as Edward Bullough describes it, arises from the aesthetic distance established between an art work and a beholder. (Edward Bullough, Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays, Ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957).

experience the play event. Vantage points are not fixed points *per se*; instead they are fluctuating positions determined by each play event. The vantage point is the joining together of two unique entities in the theatre experience, one of them being the critic and the other being the play event. The position of the critic around the vantage point is unique to that critic. The critic is constantly adjusting his position in relation to the vantage point. In fact, the vantage point is an area of activity on a much larger continuum of possible interactions. The continuum stretches to opposite extremes from the area of the vantage point. One extreme may locate itself too close to the play event and the other extreme may place itself too far away. The area of the vantage point lies between the two extremes. Theodore Greene offers a description of this process in *The Arts and the Art of Criticism*:

> The common man is too close to life to see it in perspective without subjective prejudice. The scientist is too far removed from life to comprehend its human quality and import. Only the artist is able to mediate between these extremes and to view life as a human being, yet not merely as an individual agent; with passionate intensity, yet with dispassionate lucidity. . . .[34]

---

[34] Theodore Greene, *The Arts and the Art of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1940) 240.

The minor art of theatre criticism conducts itself in a manner similar to the artistic process described by Greene. Criticism which approaches the play event too closely becomes subjectively involved and fails to come to grips with the total complexity of the play event. Criticism at the other extreme becomes detached from any sense of full participation in the play event. This type of detachment is the kind found in the scientist who, according to Greene, is "locked in the frigidity of conceptual abstraction and impersonal calculation."[35]

Criticism which is too involved or too detached indicates the critic has strayed too far from the area of the vantage point. In each extreme the critic violates the parameters of the theatre experience dictated by the play event. Both extremes are loci for creative criticism where the critic strays into antitheatrical behavior. Detached thinking treats the play without feeling, as if it were a lifeless object fit for dissection; the analytical mind suppresses intuition. Involved behavior interacts without understanding how the life of the play works; intuition overrides analysis. Ideally, theatre criticism synthesizes the two extremes so that the critic may observe and, at the same time, feel his way through the interaction of a play, a

---

[35] Greene 240.

production, and an audience during a performance. The chart below illustrates the vantage point continuum.

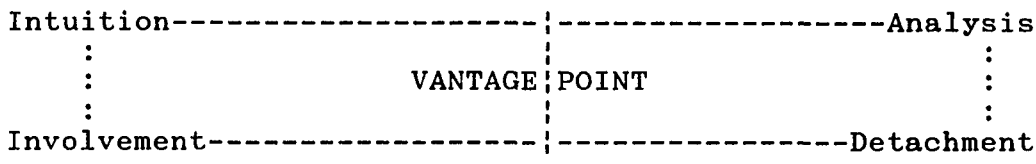


Figure 1. Vantage Point Continuum

The play event itself will affect vantage points. Some plays skew their dramatic action toward the involved side of the continuum and others toward the detached side. Melodrama, for instance, draws upon the involved side of the continuum in its appeal to an audience. Sometimes the vantage point moves back and forth on the continuum during the course of a play event; an audience at a musical play may be involved emotionally with a song and then detached during moments of spoken dialogue.

Theatre criticism fluctuates back and forth in the vicinity of the vantage point, from the involved side of the vantage point to the detached side and back again.[36]

---

[36] The idea that an artist fluctuates back and forth between involvement and detachment is adapted by Theodore Greene from Edward Bullough's statement that artists and critics must constantly struggle to maintain a balance between their "practical needs" [involvement] and their "distanced attitude" [detachment].

There is a great amount of flexibility in the area of the vantage point. Sometimes the critic's attitude may be more involved and at other times it may be more detached. The critic's mind shifts between intution and analysis. Creative criticism is fixed at the extremes and does not move in the area of the vantage point.

Creative criticism does not account for the play nor for the contributions made by theatre creators. It also does not take into consideration the impact theatre criticism makes on the art of criticism itself. Theatre criticism needs critics who respect the artistry of their own work in a re-creative medium. This is complicated by the creative demands placed upon the critic. On the one hand the critic is obliged to express as fully as possible the theatre experience of a play. On the other hand he must curtail any impulse to impose his own creativity on the object of his criticism.

Williams, in a study of different types of literary critics, writes that the critic Middleton Murry felt "criticism is properly creative, primarily, in that it recreates in the reader's mind the peculiar emotion roused in the critic by the work of art."[37] Greene

---

[37] Williams 119. Williams studies self-expressive, practical, and scientific critics but he makes no attempt to apply Bullough's concepts to critics. Williams writes, "The truth is, of course, that good critics reach valuable conclusions whether they be primarily romantic, classic, creative, scientific or practical" (136).

defines the task of re-creation as that "of apprehending imaginatively, through sensitive artistic response, what the artist has actually succeeded in expressing in a specific work of art."[38] But he cautions against unrestrained re-creativity in criticism:

> The re-creative critic will inevitably, and quite properly, also relate what he thus apprehends to his own interests and needs. But this act is not itself integral to re-creative criticism, save in so far as it contributes positively to the critic's understanding of the work of art itself and its expressed content. The prefix "re," in the term "re-creation," is of crucial importance.[39]

The prefix "re" is a significant indicator in the difference between theatre criticism and creative criticism. Creative criticism creates something new and imposes it on the play event. Theatre criticism creates again what has already been experienced in the play event.

Discovery of the appropriate vantage points and re-creation of the play event are augmented by the critic's ability to assess the artistic impact of the play event. In assessment, the critic examines how the play event created its theatre experience. Re-created moments from the play event are explained in terms of how the play, the production, and the audience functioned

---

[38] Greene 370.

[39] Greene 370.

separately and as integrated units. Discovery of the vantage point involves the critic in the theatre experience but assessment evaluates the impact of that experience in ways that explain it to readers. Assessment allows the critic to step back and observe the inner workings of his own interaction with the play event. This explains the constant fluctuation of the critic between the involved and detached regions of the vantage point. The critic involves himself in the discovery of the theatre experience and at the same time detaches himself from the discovery in order to assess the impact of that experience. It is this lively dance back and forth across the vantage point which makes the critic an artist.

Ideal theatre criticism uses these elements--discovery, re-creation, and assessment--to report the play event to the fullest extent possible. These three elements are the standards by which theatre criticism can be evaluated. Together they provide the standard of excellence which differentiates "good" theatre criticism from "bad" theatre criticism. The critic focuses attention on the play, the production, and the audience in his discovery, re-creation, and assessment of the play event. Creative criticism directs attention away from these basic elements.

There are many examples of theatre criticism which fall short of ideal theatre criticism. No two critics are exactly alike and even in the case of a single critic, one review may reflect too much involvement while another review may indicate too much detachment. The following chapters will examine discovery, re-creation, and assessment in greater detail and will evaluate specific reviews in accordance with these standards of ideal theatre criticism.

CHAPTER II

DISCOVERY

In theatre criticism, discovery of appropriate vantage points calls upon the critic to treat theatre artworks as unique entities in respect to their artistic essence and expressive power. Discovery is the step whereby the critic becomes acquainted with the play.

"The process of becoming acquainted with a play," writes Francis Fergusson in The Idea of a Theatre, "is like that of becoming acquainted with a person."[40] The critic approaches the play much in the same sense that people relate to each other as unique individuals. Each play has in it the potential for an unique life of its own. The production brings the play to life in performance. When the critic meets up with the play event it's like meeting someone for the first time. After the "first impression" the critic delves deeper into the personality of the play as it unfolds in the play event. According to Fergusson, the approach

---

[40] Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre: A Study of Ten Plays. The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1949) 11.

"is an empirical and inductive process; it starts with the observable facts; but it instinctively aims at a grasp of the very life of the machine which is both deeper and, oddly enough, more immediate than the surface appearances offer."[41] The observable facts are such as plot, characters, and words, and as the critic gathers in these facts about a play, the play also presents "the very life of the machine" in a fuller dimension. Sensate elements such as movement, sound, and color, emerge from the play and have their collective effects on the critic and the audience. Peter Brook says the sensate power of theatre is such that in creating a theatre experience, the performance of a play has the potential of creating "a world in relief" onstage:

> In theatre there occurs a phenomenon akin to holography (the photographic process that gives relief to objects by the interplay of laser beams). If we receive the convincing impression that a moment of life has been fully and completely caught on stage, it is because various forces emanating from the audience and the actor have converged on a given point at the same time.[42]

Brook's view of the relationship between actor and audience shares a strong similarity to the relationship sought by the critic at the vantage points of the play event. When the critic enters the theatre experience at

---

[41] Fergusson 11.

[42] Peter Brook, The Shifting Point: 1946-1987 (New York: Harper, 1987) 15.

the vantage points, he may meet up with a moment where "life has been fully and completely caught on stage."[43] But if the critic fails to discover the appropriate vantage points, he misses the fuller dimension of the theatre experience. When this happens the critic may stray into creative criticism.

Vantage points vary with the individual artwork. Some plays ultimately demand more distance and others more intimacy. Vantage points and the mind and senses of the critic are constantly in motion during a performance, moving back and forth along the continuum between intuition and analysis, as well as in their distance from the play's demands.

Brook says the theatre audience is "physically placed at a fixed distance."[44] But as the play engages the mind of the audience member, another form of distance occurs; and, according to Brook, this distance becomes unfixed and always varying:

> This distance shifts constantly: it only takes a person on the stage to persuade you to believe in him, for the distance to be reduced. You experience that quality know[n] as "presence," a kind of intimacy. Then there's the contrary movement; when the distance increases, something is relaxed, stretched: you find yourself slightly further away. The true theatrical relationship is like most human

---

[43] Brook 15.

[44] Brook 190.

> relationships between two people: the degree of involvement is always varying.[45]

This distance increases and decreases in the course of a single play. This is why the vantage point must be considered an area of activity, rather than a specific point fixed in time and space. The vantage point is constantly fluctuating as the play changes in degree and intensity. Theatre creators--playwrights, actors, directors, designers--strive to manipulate distance in ways that make the play and the production more distinct in the minds of the audience. For their part, the critics and audience members allow themselves to be manipulated.[46] Audience members and critics who enter into a theatre experience know the world created onstage isn't an ordinary world but they are willing to suspend their normal outlook about everyday life in order to enjoy the theatre experience. Edward Bullough says a momentary suspension of a person's normal outlook may be caused by "Psychical Distance."[47] He defines Psychical Distance as that which exists between "our own self" and "anything which affects our being, bodily or spiritually,

---

[45] Brook 190.

[46] Samuel Coleridge speaks about the willingness of audiences to accept manipulation by stage illusions.

[47] Edward Bullough, Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays, Ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957) 93-95.

e.g. as sensation, perception, emotional state or idea."[48] His concept sheds additional light on the manner in which the critic discovers appropriate vantage points. To illustrate his concept, Bullough describes sensations of being aboard a ship lost in a fog at sea. From a practical point of view the very real danger of shipwreck and possible drowning strikes terror in the hearts of the passengers. But at the same time, the fog at sea can also attract a very different type of outlook from some of the passengers who experience the fog as a source of beauty in spite of the terror it produces. For these passengers, the sensuousness of the fog's mist produces an element of distance from normal surroundings and brings about the condition by which the experience of Psychical Distance can take place. The feelings of terror still exist in both viewpoints. But unlike the passengers who experience the fog only in terms of their immediate need for survival, the passengers who are struck by its beauty, experience a balance of forces between stimulation and repose, wherein their fears are inhibited by their comprehension of the perfect moment. According to Bullough the experience of the fog becomes "in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavour of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast

---

[48] Bullough 94.

sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects."[49] Bullough says this "difference in outlook" is brought about by Psychical Distance:

> Thus in the fog, the transformation by Distance is produced in the first instance by putting the phenomenon . . . out of gear with our practical self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends. . . .
>
> The working of Distance is, accordingly, not simple, but highly complex. It has a negative, inhibitory aspect--the cutting out of the practical side of things and of our practical attitude to them--and a positive side--the elaboration of the experience on the new basis created by the inhibitory action of Distance.[50]

In theatre, the production and the play create conditions which are designed to induce Psychical Distance in the theatre experience of the audience. In some performances the darkened auditorium serves to diminish background distractions and helps to focus attention on the artwork. The play draws attention to itself by luring the audience with the metaphorical power of words. But neither a play nor a production will succeed in creating a theatre experience if an audience is unable or unwilling to suspend its normal outlook.

The critic's responsibilities go beyond that of ordinary spectators. Peter Brook writes, "In both cinema and theatre, the spectator is usually more or less

---

[49] Bullough 94.

[50] Bullough 95.

passive, at the receiving end of impulses and suggestions."[51] He implies that the cinema spectator is made even more passive due to the overwhelming power of the image on the screen. But in theatre criticism, the critic approaches theatre actively, seeking out vantage points to better sense the theatre experience. "For those who were on hand, the critic must be the uncommon observer, supplying an overview and yet citing details of interest and significance," writes John English in Criticizing the Critics.[52] Like other critics, theatre critics are uncommon observers. They must position themselves to experience and explain the "very life of the machine" at work in the play event.

If we turn again to Bullough's "fog at sea" analogy, we can pretend that the critic becomes analogous to an "expert seafarer."[53] The fog may be no less terrifying to him than to the other passengers, but his practical knowledge of the sea allows him to deal with it in a practical manner. He treats the fog in terms of how it fits into its normal surroundings. The swell of the sea and the mist that surrounds him are part of the "tools" of his trade. This is not to say the expert seafarer

---

[51] Brook 190.

[52] John English, Criticizing the Critics (New York: Hastings, 1979) 206.

[53] Bullough 93.

can't experience his own form of Psychical Distance. It does mean that as he works his way through the fog, he must simultaneously direct his attention away from the practical demands of his work in order to achieve Psychical Distance. His distancing process is twofold in that he puts Psychical Distance between himself and his normal feelings of terror and, at the same time, he suspends his normal outlook as an expert seafarer who is accustomed to dealing with fogs at sea. Bullough notes that in art this same phenomenon commonly occurs among critics:

> It is on account of the same difficulty that the expert and the professional critic make a bad audience, since their expertness and critical professionalism are practical activities, involving their concrete personality and constantly endangering their Distance. (It is, by the way, one of the reasons why Criticism is an art, for it requires the constant interchange from the practical to the distanced attitude and vice versa, which is characteristic of artists.)[54]

The critic is an uncommon observer whose normal outlook includes a working knowledge of how a play, a production, and audience come together in performance. But in his search for vantage points the critic also relies on intuition to discover other dimensions in the theatre experience. A "difference in outlook" occurs in theatre criticism when the critic distances himself from

---

[54] Bullough 99.

his normal outlook. It allows him to experience insights independent from insights based exclusively on analytical knowledge or solely on intution. Theatre criticism demands the flexibility to employ analytical knowledge and, at the same time, proceed ahead unthinkingly into intuitive exploration of the play event. During the performance, the critic's mind fluctuates between analysis and intuition as he shifts back and forth between detachment and involvement in his attitude toward a play event. The fluctuations in his mind coincide with the shifts in his attitudes. The critic becomes more practical as he becomes more detached and more intuitive as he becomes more involved. The chart below illustrates this process.

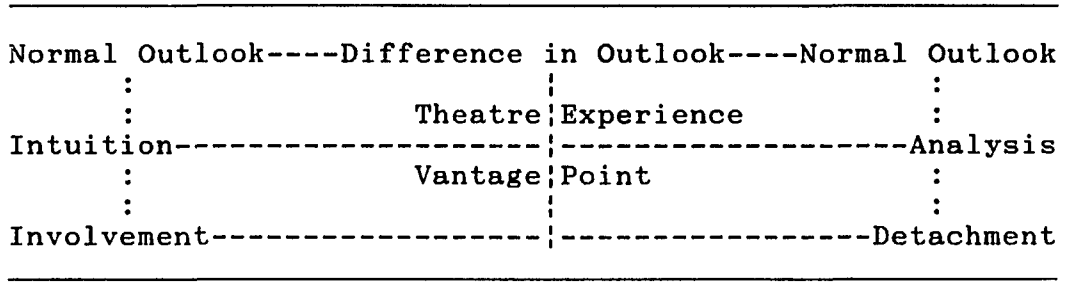


Figure 2. Difference in Outlook

In creative criticism the mind of the critic becomes inflexible. It either locks onto analysis only or launches into intuitive speculations which have no coherent application. Theatre criticism mixes the analytical with the intuitive, balancing the two

qualities in the mind of the critic so that he does not stray into creative criticism. Intuition which does not engage the theatre experience in its total complexity often suffers from too much involvement. Analysis which is inflexible in its expectations may stray too far into detachment. Plays often establish their vantage points between the two extremes. Even if the vantage points of a play skew more toward one extreme than the other, most plays demand a Psychical Distance which requires the critic to focus his practical and intuitive faculties at the appropriate vantage points.

The approach used by Clive Barnes in his review of Sam Shepard's Fool for Love is creative criticism at the involved side of the vantage point continuum. He imposes insights which are irrelevant to the "very life of the machine," at work in the play event. His opening remarks indicate his struggle to discover the appropriate vantage points:

> It is a motel room--I'm attempting to describe the experience rather than simply reviewing a play--a motel room of some kind of final extremity. Not by chance it is placed in the Mojave Desert.
>
> The play, by the way, is Sam Shepard's incredible Fool for Love, which opened last night at the Circle Repertory Company, and already I am using too much cheap journalistic technique to describe its honesty.[55]

---

[55] Clive Barnes, "Fool for Love--powerful play about a divided U.S.," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10 (1983): 213.

Barnes's review becomes more confusing as he continues to express his intuition about the play. He writes about the "starkness" of the motel room which "demonstrates its reality beyond its symbolism."[56] He follows with a brief description of the two main characters and then suddenly offers this bewildering comparison:

> You're not going to believe this--although I am immodest enough to hope that Sam Shepard will--what we have here is a special replay of Noel Coward's Private Lives.
>
> Shepard has a great deal in common with Coward--and, of course, much more with Coward's English successor Joe Orton, but the special quality of this play is its density.
>
> It moves with a deathless effortlessness through planes of meaning. Everything--and I am trying to get this right--is always what it seems but then a little bit more.[57]

Barnes is offering insights which have no meaningful relationship with the play event. His intuition tells him the play "is always what it seems but then a little bit more," but he has not discovered how the play event produces this effect. Barnes proceeds with a brief series of comments about the characters and then he offers this overview of the play event:

> I don't want to say much more about the play itself. Half-brother-half-sister-two lovers-one-father-an intervening friend. By now you must have the picture. And it is intended to be a picture of a divided America.

---

[56] Barnes, "Fool" 213.

[57] Barnes, "Fool" 213.

> This is not Shepard's best play. Conceivably True West--still running Off Broadway--is his best play to date. But what matters--because structurally the play does fall apart at the end--but then so does Hamlet and I never had the privilege of reviewing that first performance--is Shepard's sense of our country and its polarized dichotomy.[58]

Barnes expands his statement about the play's meaning but his effort offers no insight into the "planes of meaning" he mentioned earlier. He begins with a cautionary note:

> Maybe I am attempting to see too much into it--critics usually see either too little or too much--but see it as a symbol of a national agony. But see it for yourself.
>
> What you'll find here, and Shepard dangerously, I suppose, has directed it himself, is staging of enormous force and vitality. Even if you don't like the play--and if you didn't like the play I wouldn't like you--you had to respond to the staging and the acting.[59]

Barnes includes a sweeping generalization about acting which he tries to apply to his insights about the play event:

> Some playwrights tend to close actors down. Ibsen did. Other playwrights--and I am dangerously and intentionally talking from the top--such as Chekov and Shakespeare need to open actors up.
>
> Shepard can do this. He is, after all, an actor himself.[60]

---

[58] Barnes, "Fool" 214.

[59] Barnes, "Fool" 214.

[60] Barnes, "Fool" 214.

Barnes seems unable to support his intuitive insights with any analysis of the inner workings of the theatre experience. Lehman Engel, in The Critics, says many of Barnes's reviews suffer this problem:

> Barnes has the ability to write interestingly. Nevertheless, one seldom knows exactly what he thinks or recommends or condemns. When he exhibits genuine enthusia[s]m, he is apt to spew out adjectives that, though certainly heartwarming to the people involved in the particular production, are unsupported by argument.[61]

Christopher Sharp reviews the same production of Fool for Love but he drifts to the detached extreme of the vantage point continuum:

> Watching a Sam Shepard play can sometimes remind you of listening to family jokes. If you are a member of the family, then each new joke builds on the context of others that are fresh in the memory. If you are a visitor, you wonder if you have missed something.
>
> In any case, a good play or a good joke should have the autonomy to draw an effect without reference to a past body of work. "Fool for Love" at the Circle Rep is ineffective largely because it is addressed so specifically to Shepard audiences. The characters act as if they have stepped out of other plays to enact an epiphany in a drab motel room. Shepard assumes we know enough about his kind of people to fill in what he has left out. In effect, he has written a play in code.[62]

Sharp is inflexible in his discovery process. He says that he expects the play to be autonomous from the

---

[61] Lehman Engel, The Critics (New York: MacMillan, 1976) 22.

[62] Christopher Sharp, "Fool for Love," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10 (1983): 214.

playwright's other plays and that he expects the play to be broader in its audience appeal. But his effort to impose these standards leaves him too detached to experience anything beyond his expectations. He admits the actors "give spirited performances."[63] But he cannot suspend his hostility to the playwrighting:

> Unfortunately, the characters are so silly that the performers look as if they are joking rather than acting, giving the impression of an improvisation. We would be more patient with 90 minutes of improvisation without a break if the evening had created a credible artistic excursion.[64]

Barnes and Sharp have each failed to discover anything beyond their first impressions of Fool for Love. Barnes remains caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment without understanding what it is that excites him. Sharp, on the other hand, finds no moment worth remembering. He prefers to write-off the play as if it were a bad joke and not worthy of his consideration.

Frank Rich offers a more credible review of Fool for Love because he employs both his intuition and his analytical expertise:

> No one knows better than Sam Shepard that the true American West is gone forever, but there may be no writer alive more gifted at reinventing it out of pure literary air. Like so many Shepard plays, "Fool for Love," at the

---

[63] Sharp, "Fool" 214.

[64] Sharp, "Fool" 214.

> Circle Repertory Company, is a western for our time. We watch a pair of figurative gunslingers fight to the finish--not with bullets, but with piercing words that give ballast to the weight of a nation's buried dreams.[65]

Here Rich has discovered a vantage point which speaks clearly to "the many planes of meaning" to which Barnes alludes. Like Sharp, he recognizes that the American West is a theme which runs through many Shepard plays but he does not ask that each play be strictly autonomous. Further into his review, Rich writes about the motel room:

> But if the West is now reduced to this--a blank empty room with an unmade bed--Mr. Shepard fills that space with reveries as big as all outdoors. When the play's fighting lets up, we hear monologues resembling crackling campfire tales.[66]

Rich allows himself to be drawn into the tales and into the lives of the characters who tell them and, at the same time, he experiences the stories beyond their immediate first impression:

> In "Fool for Love," each story gives us a different "version" of who May, Eddie and the old man are, and the stories rarely mesh in terms of facts. Yet they do cohere as an expression of the author's consciousness: as Shepard's people race verbally through the debris of the West, they search for the

---

[65] Frank Rich, "Fool for Love, Sam Shepard Western," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10 (1983): 212.

[66] Rich, "Fool" 212.

> identities and familial roots that have disappeared with the landscape of legend.[67]

Rich praises the actors for creating "their own elusive yet robust world--feisty, muscular, sexually charged--and we either enter it or not."[68] He implies that some audience members may not choose to enter the theatre experience. Rich admits that "Fool for Love isn't the fullest Shepard creation one hopes to encounter," and he reminds his readers that "we see his plays as a continuum: they bleed together."[69] He notes too that "[t]he knockabout physical humor sometimes becomes excessive both in the writing and the playing."[70] But finally he decides his purpose in criticizing Fool for Love is to experience the playwright's work, not to change it:

> It could be argued, perhaps, that both the glory and failing of Mr. Shepard's art is its extraordinary afterlife: His works often play more feverishly in the mind after they're over than while they're before us in the theater. But that's the way he is, and who would or could change him? Like the visionary pioneers who once ruled the open geography of the West, Mr. Shepard rules his vast imaginative frontier by making his own ironclad laws.[71]

---

[67] Rich, "Fool" 212.

[68] Rich, "Fool" 212.

[69] Rich, "Fool" 212.

[70] Rich, "Fool" 212.

[71] Rich, "Fool" 212.

Rich's review of Fool for Love illustrates how appropriate vantage points are discovered in theatre criticism. Rich is constantly balancing his intuition against his analysis and vice versa. In his balance between involvement and detachment, he is able to recognize appropriate vantage points arising from his interaction with the play, the production, and the audience in the play event.

The critic is an uncommon observer who discovers vantage points as he works through a theatre experience of a play. The key to the discovery process rests in the critic's flexibility to move back and forth between intuition and practical knowledge in his distance from the play's demands. The critic, as an uncommon observer, is able to pinpoint important moments in the play event to which he may refer in his descriptions and judgements. The critic, in his discoveries, struggles to come to grips with the life of a play as it unfolds in performance. The struggle is everlasting and always challenging for the critic as each play brings its own uniqueness to life on the stage.

CHAPTER III

RE-CREATION

The critic provides another set of eyes through which the interaction of a play, its production, and an audience can be seen again. John Gassner notes that the critic "penetrates to the very heart of the theatre by speaking to its creators."[72] The critic shares his own theatrical vision of the play event with other artists of the theatre--playwrights, actors, directors, and designers--as well as the general audience. The play event is a source of artistic stimulation which widens a critic's theatrical vision and guides his insights.

The interplay of mechanical and sensate elements is the subject matter of the critic's re-creative efforts. The play's mechanics, plot, characters, and words, and the sensory patterns of color, movement, and sound are considered along with the mechanics of blocking, stage business, and design. Also considered is the interaction of the audience as it displays pleasure and displeasure

---

[72] John Gassner, Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage (New York: Holt, 1960) 113.

through expressions of laughter, tears, silence, and applause. The critic brings together all that he has observed and felt about the interaction of the play, the production, and the audience and uses this information to re-create the event of the play in his own words.

A certain amount of distortion occurs in the organization process no matter how faithfully the critic attempts to re-create the play event. According to Walkley, distortion is common in criticism:

> In the very act of describing and appraising the methods of another art he [the critic] has to follow the methods, the very different methods of his own. A criticism is a picture with its own laws of perspective and composition and "values," and the play which furnishes the subject for this picture has more often than not to be "humoured" a little, stretched here and squeezed there, in order to fit into the design. The salient points in the pattern of the play may not suit the salient points in the pattern of criticism--though, no doubt, the good critic is he who most often gets the two sets into perfect coincidence.[73]

The critic re-creates within the limitations imposed by conceptual prose. There are elements in the play event which are difficult to transform into the medium of conceptual prose and, although the critic tries to make these elements live again in his re-creation, he can never fully duplicate them as they occurred in performance. Walkley says the problem of having to use conceptual prose in criticism is "purely a technical

---

[73] Walkley 62-63.

difficulty, the difficulty of transposing the effects of one art into the effects of another."[74]

Some critics have been accused of too much distortion in their choice of words. Lehman Engel blames Clive Barnes for being the type of critic who "misleads creative people and audiences by employing an identical vocabulary to describe both the best and the most immature. . . ."[75]

Barnes's ambiguous vocabulary surfaces in a review of Macbeth, starring Christopher Plummer and Glenda Jackson. The production went through set changes, cast changes, and three directors before it opened on Broadway. Barnes says, "Whether all these shenaningans . . . affected the final result, who truly knows?"[76] Then in the next two paragraphs of his review he offers this speculation about the production:

> The setting by Daphne Dare and the dusky costuming by Patricia Zipprodt is as Spartan as one could imagine. It looks as though no economy has been spared.
>
> Yet this platform-like approach, well lit by Marc B. Weiss, makes up something in clarity what it lacks in glamor. There may be nothing fancy, but there is nothing fussy either.[77]

---

[74] Walkley 62.

[75] Engel 3.

[76] Clive Barnes, "Mixed Brew of Macbeth," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6 (1988): 300.

[77] Barnes "Macbeth" 300.

The words "clarity" and "fussy" as well as "glamor" and "fancy" are not descriptive enough to re-create the effect produced by the set and lighting design. The words, as used here, are weak and unclear in their meanings and the reader cannot discern if the "platform-like approach is a positive or negative element in Barnes's theatre experience of the play event.

John Beaufort praises Macbeth for its "impressive Broadway production."[78] But in his re-creation of the designers' approach he makes a confusing statement about the distancing effect of the set:

> The towering production . . . features a multi-level platform surmounted by an assemblage of mobile granite panels and columns. The effect is to distance the spectator from the tension-filled events of the tragedy. When thunder, lightning, and mist are required, Miss Dare and lighting designer Marc B. Weiss collaborate effectively. Patricia Zipprodt's solidly colored costumes strike one as medieval-timeless. William Penn and Louis Applebaum composed a score that ranges from drums and trumpets to ominous sound effects.[79]

Beaufort's comment that the effect of the set is to "distance the spectator from the tension-filled events of the tragedy," needs elaboration and description. Left as it is, the statement could even be interpreted to mean

---

[78] John Beaufort, "Macbeth in an impressive Broadway production," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6 (1988): 301.

[79] Beaufort, "Macbeth" 301.

the set produces too much distance from the play. "In fact," remarks Linda Winer, in her review of the same production, "given the drab neutrality of Daphne Dare's set--three convertible walls and some steps--one wonders what the Macbeths were lusting for in this kingdom."[80]

Frank Rich in his re-creation notes the lack of direction in this production of Macbeth. He complains that "[t]he piecemeal production which moves gamely along without ever finding a shape or tone, gives Mr. Plummer no base on which to build the hero's pathology."[81] In his opinion there is no unity nor any point of view in the production. He re-creates the lackluster impact of the special effects and of the set in order to illustrate how the production works at cross-purposes to the life force of the play:

> Shakespeare's text is full of creepy events and images to match Macbeth's inner state: as the usurper outruns reason and inverts the moral order, so nature in emulation lets loose the terrifying hurlyburly of stormy nights and supernatural visions, of shrieking owls and crazed horses. Some cheesy lightning-and-thunder effects and low-rent horror movie music notwithstanding, the show at the Hellinger never creates the tempest-tossed atmosphere that should mirror Macbeth's spiritual turmoil. It typifies the production's abdication of

---

[80] Linda Winer, "Tempest-Tossed, Star-Crossed Macbeth," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6 (1988): 302.

[81] Frank Rich, "A Macbeth Starring Plummer and Jackson," New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6 (1988): 298.

> theatrical point-of-view that its set, by Daphne Dare, is a rigidly symmetrical arrangement of light-wood panels and pillars. Discordant, murky and violent, "Macbeth" is anything but a play about spotlessness and order. Nor do the drab costumes and perfunctorily nightmarish lightning . . . relieve the antiseptic blandness.[82]

Rich's re-creation captures the experience of the design problems. His words are clear and precise. He shows how the set fails to support the play's dramatic action. The reader experiences the sensation of the set at cross-purposes with the play.

Distortion also occurs when the critic tries to organize his thoughts and feelings about a play. Walkley points out that "[t]he critic must have his 'general idea,' his leading theme, which gives his criticism its unity, something to hold it together."[83] But in Walkley's opinion, "[t]his general idea, however legitimately it may have been derived from the play criticized . . . will assume a much more important part in the criticism than it actually did in the play itself."[84] Critics who re-create according to general ideas about a play occasionally ignore other aspects of a play event or even misread the real meaning of a play.

---

[82] Rich, "Macbeth" 298.

[83] Walkley 63.

[84] Walkley 63.

An instance of a critic misreading a play occurred among some critics who viewed the premiere of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?. In his review of the production, Tom Driver of the Reporter expresses his opinion that George and Martha are surrogate characters standing in for two homosexuals. He insists the "mutual sado-masochism" aggressively displayed by George and Martha, belongs to a homosexual world, and not a heterosexual world.[85] In directing a revival of the play in 1976, Edward Albee made his intention clear about the play's meaning and dismissed the charge that the play was written about homosexuals:

> I remember one critic saying that the only way he could accept the play was if he didn't have to see it as a heterosexual relationship. I re-read the play to see if it can function on the homosexual level and it can't. In fact, I asked Uta Hagen, Elizabeth Taylor and others who had played Martha if they thought they were playing a man. Well it never occurred to them.[86]

Albee remembered those critics who said they were puzzled by the illusionary son of George and Martha, noting that, "[t]hey found it hard to accept the notion that two such rational and articulate people believed

---

[85] Tom Driver, "What's the Matter with Edward Albee," The Reporter, 7 January 1964: 38.

[86] Daniel Stern, "I Want My Intent Clear," New York Times 28 March 1976, late city ed.: 5D.

they had a kid when they didn't.[87] In his revival of the play, Albee wanted to make clear his meaning that "the death of the child is the death of a metaphor--a metaphor [with] which these two have been sustaining and torturing themselves."[88] In adding a homosexual twist to his experience of the play, Tom Driver imposes a personal prejudice which creates an entirely new meaning unrelated to the play event.

Distortion can be minimized by the careful choice of words and by sensitive organization of subject matter according to appropriate vantage points. But even if the critic succeeds in minimizing distortions of this sort, Walkley says criticism "tends to systematise what may not be systematic, to follow out its own logic and to expand its own formulas, rather than to conform strictly to the outline and proportions of the thing criticized."[89] The fact that criticism has its own methods of operation which it applies in the re-creation of subject matter makes distortion unavoidable. But the fact that every critic distorts when he organizes his subject matter does not negate the value of the critic or his work.

---

[87] Stern 5D.

[88] Stern 5D.

[89] Walkley 64.

Sometimes the critic distorts his re-creation with too much theory. Some critics who digress into theory may occasionally build expectations about playwriting, acting, designing, or directing which cannot be matched in the actual play event. They are, in effect, organizing a methodology which may better serve drama criticism. John English cites the following statement from Eric Bentley to illustrate how theoretical expertise can influence a critic's attitude toward a play event:

> You take a highly educated critic and you take the ordinary Broadway play, and the contest is too uneven. There's nothing to criticize, it's too easily a target, and becomes unworthy exercise for the reviewer. It doesn't require his education, his faculties, to explain that this little nothing is a little nothing.[90]

Bentley is recognized as one of the premiere critics of our time. He has also written and directed plays and yet, his desire to see a form of drama, which might conform to his theoretical expectations, leads him to generalize about the value of Broadway plays and to judge their value in terms of his preconceived standards.

Stanley Kauffmann warns that mediocre productions of mediocre plays make up the bulk of the critic's subject matter, but he argues that is no reason for the critic to ignore his responsibilities as a critic:

---

[90] English 155. Eric Bentley, "Portrait of the Critic as a Young Brechtian," Theatre Quarterly 2 (1976): 8-9.

> The critic learns that, on the one hand, there is the theater, with good and bad productions and, on the other hand, there is criticism, which ought to be good about both good and bad productions. Life is the playwright's subject, and he ought to be good about its good and bad people; the theater is the critic's subject, and he ought to be good about its good and bad plays.[91]

Kauffmann's statement refutes Bentley's complaint that some plays are not worthy of the critic's attention. Any theory in theatre criticism must take into account the experience of a bad play event as well as the experience of a good play event.

Some observers consider Walter Kerr to be the type of critic who digresses into theory in his reviews. Kerr is a highly educated critic who has a strong theoretical background based in playwriting, teaching, and directing. William Kimes believes Kerr is well-grounded in his knowledge of the theatre, but he says Kerr's greatest talent as a theatre critic rests in his re-creative abilities:

> This talent for reconstructing the vividness of performance is a particular and special critical faculty that Kerr has possessed since his earliest writing for Commonweal. Somehow, Kerr has sufficient command of word and imagery so as to be able to reproduce in the mind's eye (and ear) the sights and sounds of the live performance before an audience.[92]

---

[91] Kauffmann, Persons 380.

[92] William Kimes, "Walter Kerr: The Critic as Theorist, A Study of Aesthetic, Theatrical, and Dramatic Principles," diss., U of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976, 258.

Robert Bladel states that Kerr "has been clearer and more persuasive in his appraisal of specific plays than in his discussion of drama in general."[93] Gordon Rogoff argues that Kerr becomes inflexible in his dealings with plays which do not conform to his theoretical principles:

> Informed about the ways plays are developed and rehearsed, he is at his best when describing what he actually sees. When assessing what he hasn't known before or what isn't immediately visible, he scolds and threatens like the White Queen: he could see Bert Lahr's Gogo as funny, but he couldn't forgive Beckett's radical redefinition of playwriting or his apparent obscurities.[94]

An example of Kerr's re-creative abilities can be found in his comments about The Phantom of the Opera at the Majestic Theater in New York. He first complains about the lack of clarity in the plot and decides that the drawing power of this production rests in its visual images:

> Visual images, that's what it is. People have, locked in their heads indelibly, certain pictures that pop up the minute the title is mentioned, pictures they fancy they'd like to see "live" again, pictures that function persuasively in lieu of plot. They are the plot, or become it, in a manner of speaking.[95]

---

[93] Robert Bladel, Walter Kerr: An Analysis of his Criticism (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1976) 181.

[94] Gordon Rogoff, Theatre is not Safe: 1962-1986 (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1987) 280.

[95] Walter Kerr, "Now, about that Chandelier that goes Crashing," New York Times 14 February 1988, late ed., sec. 2: 5.

But after Kerr has lodged his complaint about the plot, he suspends any further discussion about it and offers instead a list of the visual images which have been associated with the story of The Phantom of the Opera. His purpose is to match his memories of these images with the images created in this production. Kerr has pinpointed the play's appropriate vantage points as being visual images and not the inner structure of plot. "All right," he says. "You can't really miss with race memories like that to trade on, can you?[96] Then he answers with this statement:

> Well, you can, but let's hold that question at bay for a moment while we make fair-minded note of certain images that director Harold Prince and designers Maria Bjornson and Andrew Bridge have nailed down nicely.[97]

His memory of "[t]he Phantom, in silhouette, racing across a swaying catwalk high in the heavens," is more than matched in this production:

> It allows the lovesick Phantom to hurry his stolen singer to the very top of the stage and clean across it with perfect security and then--this is where the fun comes in--it promptly transforms itself into a kind of free-floating ramp that tilts downward to the left and then downward to the right until the fleeing figures have covered the entire dizzying distance from roof to floor. And they

---

[96] Kerr, 5.

[97] Kerr, 5.

> don't seem mechanized; they seem actively windblown.[98]

Kerr has discovered and re-created the visual image of the Phantom on the catwalk. His choice of words, his recognition of the visual meanings of the play, and his decision to suspend his own theoretical prejudices about the plot have enabled Kerr to keep distortion to a minimum. The result is a re-creation which captures the theatre experience of the play event. This is only one of several stunning re-creations in a commentary which ends in a negative response to the overall effect of the production's visual images.

Robert Brustein is a theatre critic who has experience teaching and directing theatre. Like Kerr, he responds negatively to The Phantom of the Opera, but his re-creation of what happens at the play event is short on description and long on distortion. He argues that "we no longer have theater in America, we only have Events," and he angrily points to the play's box office success as being a product of media hype and not artistic achievement:

> Under such conditions, what can criticism do but fall into lockstep, praising what it has no power to alter? Even with bad reviews, the blockbuster continues to play to full houses and huge advance sales. . . .

---

[98] Kerr 5.

> The critic-proof Event has resulted in a whole new theater genre which I call the "Schlepic."[99]

Brustein, in his opening remarks, steps beyond the play's vantage points to a detached position and remains aloof to the theatre experience of The Phantom of the Opera. His use of the term "Schlepic" implies the production is unworthy of his criticism. "Often originating in England," he writes, "and always costing millions, it takes New York by storm and runs for centuries to standing ovations."[100] He lumps The Phantom of the Opera with other Schlepics--Cats, Les Miserables, Starlight Express--and then dismisses the production and the play:

> Costing $8 million to produce, The Phantom of the Opera is not a musical play so much as the theatrical equivalent of a corporate merger. We follow the plot with less interest than its box office reports; we can barely hear the music above the jingle of the cash register.[101]

Unfortunately, Brustein distorts his own re-creation by focusing as much attention on the matter of the box office receipts as he does on the play event itself. He distorts his re-creation of the chandelier effect with another reference to the production costs:

---

[99] Robert Brustein, "The Schlepic," New Republic 14 March 1988: 33.

[100] Brustein, "Schlepic" 33.

[101] Brustein, "Schlepic" 33-34.

> What a piece of work! It may look like an ordinary object, sitting there lumpishly on the floor as you enter, but just when you're wondering why the set looks so drab, it rises laboriously from its mooring, like Old Deuteronomy's neon-flashing tire in Cats, and sails over your head to take its place amidst transformed scenery to the gasps of the audience. I'll say this for The Phantom of the Opera: you're never in doubt about where the production budget went. Most of it must have been lavished on this redoubtable piece of stage machinery, which makes another entrance at the end of the first act, gliding over our heads, executing a few barrel rolls and Immelmanns, then dropping gently, if anti-climatically to the stage. I was disappointed when it failed to take a personal bow at the curtain call.[102]

Brustein's writing style captures the sensation of the chandelier as it moves above the audience, but he fails to re-create the visual meaning of the chandelier in terms of the play. He lets his readers know it is a centerpiece of the production but he doesn't say why the chandelier is an intrinsic part of the play and why it belongs in the production. Kerr's re-creation of the chandelier effect is less distorted than Brustein's version, although he is, like Brustein, disappointed with the outcome of the visual effect:

> The entertainment begins with the gold-encrusted, multi-tiered, peach-tinted glory resting onstage just above the orchestra pit. As its coverings are removed, the chandelier swings out toward the audience and then shifts direction somewhat abruptly to rise, slowly and elegantly, to its place in the

---

[102] Brustein, "Schlepic" 34.

> Majestic's ceiling. The glowing ascent is quite striking, and it's too bad the show can't leave it at that.[103]

Kerr says the terrifying crash of the chandelier is a traditional visual image in The Phantom of the Opera. But in this production the effect fails:

> That chandelier has got to come down, and, the moment it's loosed, it's got to scare the living daylights out of everyone watching. Yet the present one neither drops nor frightens. Come the time when the Phantom must make good his dastardly threat, it sways a bit in its elevated position, looking for all the world like the biggest cream puff you ever saw. Then it begins to float downward like a sigh, flowing gently as Sweet Afton on its downward but discreet journey. When it reaches balcony level--more or less--it does a little zigzag of a curtsy and alters course to head for the stage, where it makes a perfect, perfectly genteel, three-point landing. So much for terror.[104]

Even when Kerr expresses disappointment in the crashing chandelier effect, his re-creation captures the flaw in words which help his readers experience the visual image of the chandelier as if they, themselves were witnessing the effect at the production.

Theatre critics need to maintain enough flexibility to account for variations in the plays they review. The critic needs to differentiate between his theoretical speculations and expectations which properly belong to the play event. Brustein, in his review of The Phantom

---

[103] Kerr 26.

[104] Kerr 26.

of the Opera organizes his re-creation around a prejudice against a certain type of musical play, and he allows his hostility to dominate his approach toward this and similar musical plays from England. He expresses too much theory and not enough description of what happened in the play event.

Sometimes a critic's desire for organizing reviews around theory leads to indiscriminate borrowing of ideas from disciplines other than theatre. Bonnie Marranca, founding editor of the Performing Arts Journal and winner of the 1983-84 George Jean Nathan Award for dramatic criticism, advocates the free exchange of ideas but at the same time, she cautions that an influx of new ideas and theories may cause confusion and misinformation:

> What tends to happen in the theatre world is that a new theory or approach comes along, say Grotowski's "paratheatrics," or "the theatre of images," or "postmodern theatre," or "ritual," and so forth, and critics, scholars, audiences alike will begin to use the terminology, and absorb the concepts, unquestioningly.[105]

Some of these new ideas and theories may escape close scrutiny because they make no real impact on the art of theatre in terms of the play event, and therefore evoke no reason for meaningful debate. Marranca's call for more "critique of the philosophies, ethical issues, values and social conditions that shape theatre

---

[105] Bonnie Marranca, "PAJ, A Personal History," Performing Arts Journal 26-27 (1985): 37.

discourse," is not without merit.[106] She warns that "[t]here is no analysis of the channels through which new ideas enter theatre criticism. . . ."[107]

Creative criticism is one channel through which new theories enter theatre criticism. In creative criticism, ideas are free to enter whether or not they are applicable to theatre. Borrowing from psychological theories, for example, may add insight to the overall experience of a play. But it can also be used to impose psychological interpretations, which distort the critic's re-creation of the dramatic action. A new idea finds expression in creative criticism because the critics are under no constraint to verify their speculations in terms of the play event. Theories from psychology can be channeled into creative criticism at both extremes of the vantage point continuum. In the case of too much detachment, the critic may want to borrow ideas from psychology because these ideas allow him to analyze human behavior without getting caught up emotionally in the play event. Psychological theories may also appear at the involvement side of the vantage point continuum where they are used by the critic to support his intuitive speculations.

---

[106] Marranca 37.

[107] Marranca 37.

Semiotics, like psychology, has entered the theatre. Some advocates who are pushing for new theoretical approaches to theatre criticism have borrowed directly from semiotics with mixed results. The Harper Handbook to Literature defines semiotics as being "the study of signs, including words, other sounds, gestures, facial expressions, music, pictures, and other signals used in communication between people, between people and animals . . . and so on."[108] One of the problems of applying semiotics to theatre is that a play event as a communication device, abounds with many different signs at any given moment. The emphemeral nature of theatre complicates the sitution further. In conducting a semiotic re-creation of the play event, the critic is forced to define signs which change from one production to the next. This causes the critic to adjust his semiotic approach by bundling together similar signs and classifying them according to type, as Martin Esslin has done recently in The Field of Drama. He borrows the idea of semiotics and from it, he fashions a theory which is specifically designed to help his readers better understand drama as a living art in both cinema and theatre. He admits that the success of his study depends on adjusting semiotics to theatre:

---

[108] Frye 424.

> There has been a great upsurge of interest and research in the semiotics of theatre in recent years and much valuable work has been done by a number of semioticians, above all in France, Germany and Italy. The present study proposes to make use of their results, but to maintain, at the same time, a certain critical distance from their methods and aims.[109]

From the outset of his study, however, Esslin reduces drama to the level of communication, which he must do in order to apply semiotics to drama:

> If we look at a work of art, semioticians argue, as an act of communication among human beings and if we can analyse the actual process by which this communication takes place, we might arrive at a more thorough and perhaps more objective method of talking about works of art.[110]

After Esslin has led his readers through a semiotic analysis of what happens in drama "between the originator of the communication and its recipient," he admits that at its highest level of experience, the art of drama contains in itself, a power, akin to spiritual power, which transcends any attempt to reduce a dramatic performance to a fixed system of codes or meaning. "In that sense," he writes, "there is more to drama than mere communication."[111] This application of semiotics to drama is mixed in its value to theatre creators and

---

[109] Martin Esslin, The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen (London: Methuen, 1987) 17.

[110] Esslin 18.

[111] Esslin 177.

theatre critics. It could be that the true value of his study is to show how semiotics does not apply to theatre.

Semiotics needs further testing in theory and performance before it will enter the mainstream of critical thought in theatre. For now, Esslin cautions his readers against indiscriminate borrowing:

> Where, in my opinion, the more fanatical adherents of this methodology in the field of drama go to far, is their assumption that by using a methodology analogous to that of linguistics it would be possible to produce something akin to an exact science, grammar and syntax of signification in drama.[112]

Esslin offers his version of semiotics to make it less scientific and more amenable to theatre criticism. But even a diluted version of semiotics will produce distortions in theatre criticism. Further testing of semiotics in drama criticism may eventually determine if semiotics can enter the mainstream of critical thought in theatre.

Aristotelian poetics remains entrenched as the dominant theory in theatre criticism. The resilience of Aristotle is due in part to the elasticity of his terminology as it applies to theatre. Critics still use his terminology in their reviews. Plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle continue in the mainstream of discussion about theatre because these

---

[112] Esslin 18.

are terms which help critics describe what is happening onstage with a minimum amount of distortion. Aristotle interlocks these terms in a systematic approach to tragic poetry; he arranges them in a hierarchical order of importance beginning with plot and descending through character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle. The gap between plot and spectacle worries some theorists and critics who argue that spectacle deserves an important place on the hierarchial ladder. But all of these terms describe elements which are essential to theatre. In the performance, the physical movements of spectacle help the audience experience the dramatic action in the plot; without spectacle there would be no production, and consequently no play event.

The terminology of Aristotle's Poetics is part of the everyday language of theatre criticism. But its usage varies according to the attitude of the critic. Some critics who are prone toward too much involvement or too much detachment are unable to discern how plot and spectacle interact with each other in the play event. In the case of too much involvement, the critic fails to observe the dramatic action of the plot and gives too much attention to the elements of character, thought, diction, and song as they relate to spectacle. In detachment, the critic ignores the visual and spatial meanings of spectacle and examines the play in terms of

how character, thought, diction, and song relate to plot. The polarity of plot versus spectacle matches the polarity of detachment versus involvement. Spectacle appeals to the intuitive mind of the critic. Plot appeals to the analytical mind of the critic. Ideally, attributes from all of these polarities come together in the area of the vantage point.

Good theatre criticism emerges from the synthesis of its extremes. The critic employs both his intuitive mind and analytical mind in discovering the theatre experience of the play. The merging of intuition with analysis also figures in the critic's efforts to re-create a theatre experience. The critic's discovery and re-creation efforts encompass both the plot created in the play and the spectacle created in the production.

Michael Ratcliffe, theatre critic for The Observer writes, "Most people who read a Sunday theatre column will never see the shows, so one of my first responsibilities is to make them almost feel as if they had: criticism as empathy and impersonation."[113] The empathy and impersonation of which Ratcliffe speaks, is re-creation. The critic reaches out empathically to the life of the play as it is performed in the play event. He also offers to others, his impersonation of the

---

[113] Michael Ratcliffe, "Non-Parochial View," Plays International April 1988: 22.

experience arising from this interaction. He achieves an honest re-creation by striking a balance in his attitude between involvement and detachment. From this position the critic can minimize the inevitable distortions which arise from the re-creation process. Too much distortion will occur if a critic uses confusing words, misreads meanings, or applies too much theory. The critic brings together all that he has felt and observed about a play event and uses this information in his re-creation. Walter Kerr's re-creation of The Phantom of the Opera illustrates re-creation at its best. His words sparkle as he captures the interplay of mechanical and sensate elements in performance. And he is able to speak clearly about the plot of the play and the spectacle of the production to both theatre creators and the general audience. These are the standards of honest re-creation. Kerr's mastery of these standards enables him to re-create his experience of the interaction of a play, a production, and an audience in the minds of his readers.

CHAPTER IV

ASSESSMENT

The critic assesses the ways in which the sensate and mechanical elements of a play, come to life onstage in a production and in the minds of an audience. The The critic simultaneously (1) discovers, (2) re-creates, and (3) assesses his theatre experience of a play event as the play, production, and audience interact. Discovery by the critic of appropriate vantage points shapes the critic's vision of the theatre experience of a play event and his re-creation of it. The critic's re-creation of a play event transposes into words the critic's theatre experience of the play, production, and audience. In assessment the critic evaluates how well the interaction of a play, a production, and an audience create theatre experience.

Basically speaking, assessment is a judgement about the quality of life encountered in a play event. As S. R. Littlewood points out, "daily-paper dramatic criticism" entails an essential responsibility, "It is to decide whether or not a play is worth going to."[114]

---

[114] S. R. Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism (New York:

But in deciding the artistic value of a play event, the critic may suddenly encounter hostility from readers who disagree with his assessment. Mel Gussow notes that in some cases, a reviewer who is negative in his assessment can provoke an exteme response:

> Stung by criticism, actors, playwrights and directors have been known to respond with brickbats--or worse. . . . Those engaged in the craft of criticism have all been subjected to outraged letters and telephone calls, and some have been slapped or punched in public or had foodstuff flung in their faces. Occasionally, a messenger arrives bearing objects expressing derision.[115]

Gussow considers these incidents of animosity to be the "hazards of the trade."[116] The animosity is grounded in the belief that critics are virtually unrestricted in their power to pass judgement on the artistic value of a performance. Robert Brustein argues that critics have been granted too much power and should be challenged when they are wrong in their assessments:

> Without such challenges, theater artists will continue to be among the few figures in our culture without either champions or lobbyists, helpless targets for whoever controls the critical arsenal. Playwrights, directors, and actors, of course, have the right to respond

---

Pitman, 1939) 282.

[115] Mel Gussow, "Hazards of the Trade: Fish and Flying Pickles," New York Times 6 March 1986, late. ed.: C22.

[116] Gussow, "Hazards" C22.

> personally to what they perceive to be unjust press treatment. But those who avail themselves of this privilege are usually thought to be harvesting sour grapes.[117]

Brustein says artists' frustrations with critical judgements are compounded by the indifference of the general public in this country toward theatre productions:

> American audiences continue to let critics determine the pastures where sheep may safely graze. The absolute power of critics has often been noted and occasionally deplored. But like all such autocracies, it is maintained only when good people remain silent. The result of this deafening silence is critical authority based neither on credentials nor accountability, which leaves the artist feeling like a convicted felon without an appeals court, doomed by judgement with no basis in law--the victim, in short, of artistic injustice.[118]

These are harsh words coming from a critic; but Brustein speaks from the perspective of producing as well as criticizing theatre. And he points out that much of his hostility toward today's criticism arises from his concern that too many critics are caught up in the trends of the moment and are unable to properly evaluate a play or a production in terms of its long-range impact on the art of theatre.

---

[117] Robert Brustein, "Artistic Injustice," New Republic 16 May 1988: 22.

[118] Brustein, "Injustice" 22.

Ian Herbert, editor of the London Theatre Record is much less harsh than Brustein in his feelings about critics and their capacity to properly judge the artistic worth of a play event:

> As I discovered myself when I tried it for a while on the short-lived Review, there is a considerable art in being able to order your thoughts after watching anything up to three hours of concentrated stage action and dialogue, let alone trying in the next half hour to turn those thoughts into entertaining prose, that will both describe and assess what's gone on. Add to this the need to remain perpetually enthusiastic about theatre, and receptive to new stimuli, when for three nights out of five every week you may well be trapped with a load of incompetents peddling arrant rubbish, and you see some of the problem.[119]

The problem outlined by Brustein and touched on briefly by Herbert centers on doubts about the critic's ability to formulate anything substantial beyond snap judgements about a play event. The problem is complicated further by the fact that no two play events are exactly alike. Different productions of the same play will differ in their vantage points; and to a lesser degree, the play event itself, will change from performance to performance. The critic is faced with the overwhelming task of assessing a play event which is always open to change and new interpretation.

---

[119] Ian Herbert, "The noble art?," Plays and Players January 1987: 8.

Benedict Nightingale says theatre criticism involves a constant struggle by the critic to keep himself "alert and open" to changes as they occur in the play event:

> What's exhilarating about the theater is that it shifts, changes, dives, soars, and from the stance of the reviewer, that's precisely what's frustrating about it, too. When you recommend a play to your readers, you know that they themselves will see something at least slightly different. It may be better, perhaps because the strains of the press night are over; it may be worse, perhaps because the relaxation has transformed itself into automatic acting; it can never, ever be quite the same.
>
> How to allow for this as a critic? That's hard to answer. But at least one can try to distinguish one's own feelings from those of the audience, struggle to differentiate the production from the play.[120]

Nightingale believes that "distinguishing one's own feelings from those of the audience" is easier to achieve than the act of separating the production from the play. He describes how the critic separates himself from an audience. "The critic's duty," he writes, "is perhaps to be part, yet apart; to surrender, yet hold back; to ensure that there's at least some tiny, guarded bit of himself watching himself in his more unguarded moments."[121] His description of being "part and yet apart" from the feelings of the audience speaks about the way in which the critic interacts as an uncommon observer

---

[120] Benedict Nightingale, Fifth Row Center: A Critic's year on and off Broadway (New York: Random, 1986) 234-35.

121 Nightingale 235.

with the play event during the discovery process. "All the same," writes Nightingale, "the tougher task is assessing the extent to which the director and his cast are doing justice to the play."[122] The task of separating the play from the production is intrinsical to assessment. Critics who fail in this task may encounter animosity from theatre creators and from the general public. Lee Morrow and Frank Pike in their interviews with theatre creators and critics, asked playwrights, directors, and critics if they thought critics are able to distinguish the difference between a play and a production. Most of the playwrights and directors answered "no" to the question; and some of the critics admitted that the task is difficult.[123] Nightingale notes that separating the play from the production "is, of course, less of a problem when you're already familiar with the text and considerably less so when you're familiar with that text in performance."[124] He decides the most difficult task in assessment is separating a new play from its production.

---

[122] Nightingale 235.

[123] Lee Alan Morrow and Frank Pike, Creating Theatre: The Professional's Approach to New Plays (New York: Vintage, 1986).

[124] Nightingale 235.

When a critic assesses a production of a new play he must guard against mistaking weaknesses in the production for weaknesses in the script and vice versa. Such was the case in the New York premiere of Sam Shepard's True West. The production was surrounded by controversy. Robert Woodruff, the production's director, resigned in protest before opening night and requested that his name be removed from the production credits. Woodruff said, "I'm trying to make public that what is on stage isn't my vision of the play or Sam's."[125] Joseph Papp, the show's producer, stepped in to fill the gap left by Woodruff's departure. Papp said, I watch the show and am cleaning up places not yet finished, but I haven't taken over."[126] Woodruff's name remained on the show credits despite his protest. Shepard sided with the director and blamed Papp for miscasting the show and for interfering in the rehearsal of the production.[127]

The quarrel about the show caused critics to take a close look at the merits of the play and the merits of the production. Robert Brustein writes about the production saying, "It is heartbreaking in its failed

---

[125] "Woodruff Disclaims Public's True West," New York Times 13 December 1980, late city ed.: 18.

[126] "Woodruff" 18.

[127] Fred Ferretti, "Joseph Papp: A 'Divisive Force' or a 'Healing' One?," New York Times 20 December 1980, late city ed.: 16.

opportunities."[128] He thinks the casting decisions came about from Papp's overwhelming desire for a hit at the box office:

> The play rehearsed to the accompaniment of a lot of fanfare . . . New York was primed for a serious "hit." Under these pressures, you don't go with the San Francisco equivalent of an off-off-Broadway cast, even if the director and playwright demand it; you go for movie actors. The result? Tommy Lee Jones and Peter Boyle.[129]

Brustein argues that Boyle's praiseworthy performance is to no avail. "The production," he writes, "has no unity, no style, no control."[130] Then he focuses on the play:

> It's a wonder the actors aren't bumping into each other. Even so, the first act of True West comes through, largely because of Shepard's stubborn neo-Pinteresque power. It is a dazzling piece of writing--terse, suggestive, mystifying, intense. In the second act, however, when Shepard's inspiration flags, the faults of the production become glaring.[131]

Brustein claims the second act runs out of steam thanks to weaknesses in the play as well as weaknesses in the production. He writes, ". . . the play looks thin, even emaciated, like a healthy organism turning anorexic

---

[128] Robert Brustein, "Crossed Purposes," New Republic 31 January 1981: 22.

[129] Brustein, "Crossed" 22.

[130] Brustein, "Crossed" 22.

[131] Brustein, "Crossed" 22.

before your eyes."[132] The play's "epic battle" of brother against brother is too predictable and too "symetrical" for Brustein's taste:

> I suspect the work will ultimately be of interest mainly to Shepard's biographers, for it is possible to detect in the tension between the two brothers a personal meaning for the playwright.[133]

Brustein in his assessment judges that the play is weak in spite of the overwhelming "sloppiness" of the production. But one wonders if Brustein has made an accurate assessment of the play. The play may appear "thin" and "anorexic" but it could be starving for a good production.

"Some day," writes Frank Rich, "when the warring parties get around to writing their memoirs, we may actually discover who killed True West."[134] Rich notes that Shepard's strength as a writer rests in an ability to create powerful visual images:

> The playwright also provides motifs involving dogs, crickets, desert topography, cars, household appliances (especially toasters and television sets) and the brothers' unseen, destitute father. As the play progresses, these images keep folding into one another

---

[132] Brustein, "Crossed" 22.

[133] Brustein, "Crossed" 22.

[134] Frank Rich, "Shepard's True West," New York Times 24 December 1980, late city ed.: C9.

> until we are completely transported into the vibrant landscape of Shepard's imagination.[135]

Rich says the play "slips only when Mr. Shepard, a master of ellipses, tries to fill in the blanks."[136] Rich wonders if Shepard needs to use lines such as, "There's nothing real here now, at least for me," or "There's no such thing as the West anymore."[137] But Rich hesitates in passing a final judgement on the play:

> Still these judgements must be tentative. It's impossible to evaluate a play definitively when it hasn't been brought to life on stage. There's nervous energy at the Public, but it leads nowhere. Mr. Boyle, a loping, ill-shaven figure in baggy clothes, is engagingly sleazy for a while, but his performance trails off into vagueness and repetition just as it should begin to build. Mr. Jones is kinetic and finally frantic as he tries and fails to get a handle on the screenwriter. We never believe these actors are mirror-image brothers locked into a psychological cat-and-mouse game. Theatergoers who venture to the Public must depend on their own imaginations to supply the crackling timing and the violent tension that are absent.[138]

It is appropriate that Rich suspends final judgement about the artistic worth of the play. His hope is to experience the play in a better production before he renders a verdict.

---

[135] Rich, "True West" C9.

[136] Rich, "True West" C9.

[137] Rich, "True West" C9.

[138] Rich, "True West" C9.

Rich's assessment proved to be accurate. Less than two years later, a revival of True West at the Cherry Lane Theater in New York gave the play new life. Mel Gussow, in his review, admits the revival does much to change his negative opinion about the play:

> The production of Sam Shepard's True West that opened last night at the Cherry Lane Theater is an act of theatrical restitution and restoration. Two seasons ago, the Public Theater presented the New York premiere of this comedy--a production that was disclaimed in abstentia by the playwright--and the work seemed, for the freewheeling Mr. Shepard, uncharacteristically heavy-handed.
>
> Seeing the play in revival, one realizes that it was the production not the play that was originally at fault. The new version--using the same script--is an exhilarating confluence of writing, acting, and staging.[139]

Gussow decides that the actors in the New York premiere were miscast. "The main problem with the first New York production," he writes, "was that the actors cast as the brothers were too similar in type and temperment."[140] He decides the play demands two opposite types: one being "a seedy scrounger" and the other being "sober and respectable."[141] Gussow compliments John Malkovich for creating a "comic original in his portrayal of the "seedy" brother:

---

[139] Mel Gussow, "Shepard's West Revived and Restored," New York Times 18 October 1982, late ed.: C18.

[140] Gussow, "West" C18.

[141] Gussow, "West" C18.

> With perfect timing and inexhaustible expressiveness, he is amusing and menacing at the same instant--bumping into Mr. Sinise [sober brother] as if trying to bounce him across the room; opening a can of beer so close to his brother's nose that the fizz clouds the other man's spectacles, and doing a flamenco on pieces of burnt toast. . . .
>
> The quieter Mr. Sinise keeps his character from becoming a milquetoast; this worm has to be capable of turning violent.[142]

Gussow's change in sentiment about the play is echoed by Edith Oliver who writes, "The production of Sam Shepard's True West at the Cherry Lane is not so much a revival as a transformation, after its unsatisfactory presentation at the Public. . . ."[143] In her review of the premiere at the Public, Oliver expresses boredom with the play's subject matter:

> Even in a semi-dud like this, Shepard's monlogues are winners. But the subject--decline of the Old West into freeways and Safeways--is familiar stuff by now, however ingeniously written, and inside jokes about writers and scripts and producers are a bore. It is so unlike Shepard to be predictable and obvious, and so like him to subtly change a comic mood into a threatening one before we know what is happening.[144]

Oliver, in her review of the revival, remembers the boring jokes and the too familiar lines about the Old

---

[142] Gussow, "West" C18.

[143] Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," New Yorker 29 November 1982: 160.

[144] Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," New Yorker 12 January 1981: 81.

West, but this time she is far less hostile to the play in her assessment and much more pleased with the production:

> The trite references to the decline of the West into Safeways and freeways just go by the board, as do the boring inside jokes about Hollywood and producers. Much of Shepard's writing here is absolutely splendid. There is a monologue . . . about the brothers' destitute father losing his teeth one by one, first on his mattress and then on a blacktop road to Mexico, and eventually misplacing his false teeth in some takeout chop suey, which is vintage Shepard, whether it sounds funny or not, and there are other memorable passages as well. What is lost is Shepard's subtle shifts from the comic to the poetic to the sinister (as the howling of coyotes is heard outside), or maybe they are just drowned in the laughter; at any rate, I didn't miss them.[145]

Oliver's expression of enjoyment about the play in the revival exceeds her reserved attitude about the play in the New York premiere. Her opinion about the play in the revival is very different from her opinion about the earlier production.

The problems encountered by some critics assessing two different productions of True West are evidence that critics must be careful in determining what is truly happening in the interaction of a production with a new play. Nightingale's statement that productions of new plays are difficult to assess is true to the extent that the critic is unfamiliar with a new script and therefore

---

[145] Edith Oliver, "The Theatre," New Yorker 29 November 1982: 160.

has a harder time distinguishing it from a production. But sometimes critics are unable to adjust to a new production of a familiar play. The problem is made worse if the critic has experienced the play in a "definitive" production. The memory of such a production may produce expectations which interfere with the critic's ability to assess the revival. This may have been the case in some critics' response to a revival of A Streetcar Named Desire at the Circle in the Square in New York. Although the critics felt comfortable in their abilities to distinguish the play from the production, what made some of them uncomfortable with the production, was the memory of Marlon Brando's definitive characterization of Stanley. Critics took extra care to distinguish Brando's definitive performance from the interpretation of Stanley offered in this revival. John Simon, for instance, claims that his assessment of the actor playing Stanley is not biased by Brando's performance:

> Some roles have been given the stamp of definitiveness by their creators, which is surely the case with the Stanley Kowalski of Marlon Brando. I pity any actor who must follow in those footsteps: He is damned if he imitates and damned if he doesn't. But Aidan Quinn is a singularly poor choice for the part. Exceedingly Irish-looking for a Pole, not especially winning of face or athletic build, a

> competent but uncharismatic actor, he neither charms nor threatens, and is too babyish to boot.[146]

Mel Gussow wonders if there are any actors capable of taking the role of Stanley and stretching it beyond the stamp given to it by Brando. "The performance [Brando's]," he writes, "has been widely regarded as an exact meeting of actor and character."[147] He searches in his mind to find a Stanley among the present-day field of young actors and comes up with a few possibilities. But at the same time, he seems to imply that none of the actors, whom he suggests, can muster the strength to carry the role as Brando did. "No doubt," he concludes, "somewhere there is an unknown actor with the required weight."[148]

The problem confronting an actor like Aidan Quinn as he struggles against an overpowering image of a Stanley which has preceded his, also poses a problem for the critic, who must suspend his own memory of a powerful performance in order to better assess the role in a new production. The only satisfactory solution is the one offered by John Simon, who recognizes Brando's influence

---

[146] John Simon, "When Does the Next One Leave?" New York 21 March 1988: 90.

[147] Mel Gussow, "Has Stanley Kowalski Become an Unactable Role?" New York Times 14 March 1988: C13.

[148] Gussow, "Stanley" C13.

on the role and at the same time, tries to suspend his prejudices and takes this factor into account as he turns his attention to Aidan Quinn's struggle with the role.

The act of assessing a play event places the critic in a vulnerable position with theatre creators and the general public. The critic, in assessment, is making a statement about the artistic worth of a play event. But his assessment is open to criticism from others; just as the actor puts himself at risk on the stage, so to does the critic put himself at risk on the printed page. Proper assessment involves more than expressing an opinion or making an educated guess. The critic comes to grips with the life of the play, itself, through discovery, re-creation, and assessment. Benedict Nightingale sums up the situation this way:

> Again and again I've emphasized the need for reviewers to be open, receptive, even passive, and so perhaps have given the impression they were more vegetable than animal: plants bending to whatever creative wind hits them; leaves rustling in response to the artistic breeze. Though that seems to me a good corrective to the widely held notion that critics are piranhas or carrion crows or slavering hyenas, there is, of course, something disingenuous in so unqualified a claim. What's wanted is an active passivity, a busy and even strenuous openness. Imagine, if you can, being simultaneously run down by a car and explaining

> the complexities of its inner machinery. Criticism can be a punishing business, not to say hard work.[149]

The critic, above all else, must be ever willing to

(1) reach out and engage the play event on its own terms,

(2) describe fully the experience of that engagement, and

(3) decide the artistic value of the experience.

---

[149] Nightingale 237.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

If theatre criticism is to remain a vital part of the theatre it must learn to criticize itself. The process of self-evaluation in theatre criticism begins by examining how well critics discover, re-create, and assess play events. The key to artistry in theatre criticism is flexibility among all three elements. Too much rigidity may lock the critic into extremes which are far removed from appropriate vantage points. The standards established in discovery, re-creation, and assessment are flexible enough to help the critic move in accordance with the art he criticizes.

But beyond the problems encountered when the critic remains inflexible in his approach to theatre, there are additional problems in theatre criticism today. Three areas of concern are the values critics place on the entertainment aspects of theatre, the values readers and theatre creators place upon the opinions of critics, and the value critics place upon the standards of theatre criticism.

The ongoing demise of Broadway theaters has led some people to speculate about the death of Broadway as a

theatre center and to question the entertainment values of commercial theatre in the United States. According to Kauffmann even the Broadway musical is threatened with extinction:

> Broadway, for self-evident reasons, has been the mecca for musical talent. My chief worry about Broadway now is not whether it is a help or a hindrance to serious playwriting but whether it will continue to summon those musical talents. I hope that the shift in cultural energy, from Broadway to film and radio and TV and now MTV, will not weaken the continuance of the Broadway musical, as grand and splashy as the off-Broadway musical is said to be intimate.[150]

Robert Brustein notes the gloomy atmosphere during the 1983 Tony Award Ceremonies and offers reasons why he thinks "the awards have turned into a gigantic commercial for a dying enterprise."[151] He says one of the reasons for the demise is the lack of consideration given to serious drama:

> What the Tony Awards invariably celebrate is not theatre but box-office returns, with the blockbuster musical . . . monopolizing the honors by virtue of being the biggest potential gold mine. Because of its limited popular appeal, serious drama excites very little interest, especially, since two of the shows nominated this year for Best Play award had since expired and the two survivors were commercially marginal.[152]

---

[150] Stanley Kauffmann, "Why We Need Broadway: Some Notes," Performing Arts Journal 26-27 (1985): 197.

[151] Robert Brustein, Who Needs Theatre: Dramatic Opinions (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1987) 186.

[152] Brustein, Who 183-84.

The complaint voiced by Brustein is not new to theatre criticism or to drama criticism. In the opinion of many critics, serious drama often suffers from the public's desire for more spectacle and entertainment. But this complaint also reflects uncomfortable feelings on the part of the critic about the artistic impact of lighter forms of theatre. These feelings of discomfort with the entertainment aspects of Broadway correlate with Walkley's notion that "good plays, plays which rightly please the public, often make bad copy--that is to say, unworkable material--for the critic."[153] Walkley argues that the subject matter of serious plays provides better subject matter for criticism than the lighter fare offered in melodrama. "It is for a kindred reason," he writes, "that the drama of ideas is apt to be overpraised in print--which is a good medium for ideas."[154]

Some critics think the importance given to lighter forms of entertainment in commercial theatre underscores a more serious problem: the notable lack of concern about the quality of serious play writing. Here the critics blame not only the industry but the playwrights as well. Complaints by critics about playwriting are chronic in theatre. The most common complaint arises from the

---

[153] Walkley 61.

[154] Walkley 61-62.

expressed desire for a drama which elevates itself to the critic's level of taste. In many cases the complaining critic attacks the playwright's choice of subject matter although sometimes the critic focuses on the ways in which the subject matter is put together. Shaw, for example, complains about the form and content of the well-made play. But what critics seem to forget is the importance of dealing with "trash" as Kauffmann puts it.[155] The perception that much of today's playwriting is mediocre and therefore unworthy of criticism is moot if the critic practices his art in accordance with the standards of discovery, re-creation, and assessment.

The second area of concern for critics relates to judgements of readers and theatre creators about the value of theatre criticism. Mel Gussow writes about the rage of theatre creators "stung by criticism."[156] "Criticism is an impossible task," answers Christopher Durang to a question on the subject.[157] John English, in conducting a survey about readers' response to critics in film, music, dance, drama, and television, discovered that dance and drama reviews "were judged less meaningful

---

[155] Kauffmann, Persons 380.

[156] Gussow C22.

[157] Morrow and Pike 68.

and less enriching than other types of criticism."[158] When the survey asked about understandability of reviews, English reports, "dance and drama criticism ranked again lowest on all variables."[159] According to English one of the more interesting results showed up from questions about "content analysis" and "reader interaction":

> Curiously, though drama reviews ranked lowest on content evaluation, they rated highest on reader interaction. Clearly, drama reviews, on the whole, were rated more often unfavorable in relation to the art being considered than others. If respondents perceive negative reviews as valuable, intense, interesting and involving, they reinforce the public attitude of criticism as negative comments on art.[160]

English reports readers were asked to value the empathy they found in the critics' attitudes toward the object of their criticism:

> Art and music reviews exhibited the highest level of interaction between critic and art, readers said. Film and drama reviews were judged more pragmatic than others, but generally were ranked lowest on other variables. . . .[161]

The information from English's survey is cursory but it seems readers of theatre criticism want insightful commentary, not just glib appraisals or rigid elitism.

---

[158] English 121.

[159] English 121.

[160] English 123-24.

[161] English 121.

Gordon Rogoff asks, "If theatre seems like an endangered species, could it be that its only unique component--the collision of textual complexity with the live actor--plays very little part in criticism?"[162] Rogoff's question appeared in an article which he titled "Theatre Criticism: The Elusive Object, the Fading Craft." The article covers critics of the past and present, praising some and chastising others for being either to aloof or too indiscriminate in their reviews. But Rogoff's main concern in the article centers on today's critic and the lack of focus in today's criticism:

> It's a battlefield out there, one good reason why critics often lose sight of their own vision. Before the dust settles, however, critics might pause to reflect on one power they possess that isn't shared by producers, press agents, or publishers: the gift of language.[163]

The critic is an artist who shapes words to fit the actions experienced in the play event. The art of theatre needs critics who can speak clearly and directly. As Walkley points out, "criticism is literature, an art intended to interest, to give pleasure in itself."[164]

---

[162] Gordon Rogoff, "Theatre Criticism: The Elusive Object, the Fading Craft," Performing Arts Journal 26-27 (1985): 141.

[163] Rogoff, "Theatre Criticism" 141.

[164] Walkley 64.

The critic's ability to shape his words depends on his abiding by the standards of discovery, re-creation, and assessment. Sometimes the critic pays lip service to these standards. A critic like Rogoff might bewail the lack of attention given to "the collision of textual complexity with the live actor" in other critics' reviews. But does he give this type of attention in his own criticism? His review of a revival of John Guare's House of Blue Leaves reveals his own shortcomings.[165]

Rogoff opens his review with a brief description of the characters in the first sentence. His second sentence identifies the play as being a comedy. After telling his readers that, "Guare knows that nothing is funnier than the clash between American dreams and the American ways of death," Rogoff follows up with a discussion about the absurd and dark humor in the plot.[166] Here, he complains about a "lapse" in an otherwise delightful script:

> [W]hen Artie's wife, Bananas, addressing the audience, tells about her effort to stuff Cardinal Spellman, Bob Hope, Jackie Kennedy, and President Johnson into her gypsy cab, she finishes mournfully with a question that momentarily dislodges the play from its deliriously unsentimental moorings--"Why," she asks, "can't they love me?" Guare has to know

---

[165] Rogoff, Theatre 260-62.

[166] Rogoff, Theatre 260.

> that his theatrical vocabulary can't accomodate the voicing of conventional solutions: what he is continually unearthing is the thought normally left unspoken, the horrible decision made when hypocrisy no longer works. Blue Leaves is not about the failure of love, it's about the failure of wisdom and the absence of conscience.[167]

Rogoff's criticism up to this point describes the action of the play script. He continues to write about the actions of the characters in terms of the script and then finally, after he has passed the half-way mark in his review, Rogoff addresses the actions of the actors, but only indirectly. He begins with a statement about the director:

> Keeping those thoughts and images alive while letting the whacky details careen into place must be a director's nightmare, but Jerry Zaks is not only a master of bang-on comic accumulation, he's also a vigilant guardian of actors' freedom--meaning he gives them a chance to fill in spaces, play their reveries, act out plainly and with dignity their absurd, terrifying obsessions.[168]

Rogoff's statement about the director is well-written but it doesn't say how the director put together the production. For instance, Rogoff might describe how the director handled the one moment where Bananas's "Why can't they love me?" line "dislodges the play from its deliriously unsentimental moorings."[169]

---

[167] Rogoff, Theatre 260-61.

[168] Rogoff, Theatre 261.

[169] Rogoff, Theatre 260.

Rogoff's description of the production set is much too brief:

> Perhaps the production could be less splendid and less realistic: that panoramic Queens behind the apartment suggests a musical called Sunnyside-Up, while the kitchen-living room suggests an Odets scream-up.[170]

If this is all he can write about the set then he should not write about it at all. His single sentence offers no concrete information about the set.

Next Rogoff tackles the actions of the actors. His statements about them make up less than twenty percent of his review. They are included here in their entirety:

> But the actors are buoyantly superb, even Stockard Channing as Bunny, always on the edge of impersonation or a weird detachment from the others. John Mahoney's Artie, with his failure to ingratiate and his shit-eating grin while singing, has a vacant charm which never disguises his pain. Julie Hagerty is a lanky dreamscape as Corrinna, good will and desperation sprinkling from her creamy surfaces. Ben Stiller's Ronnie, left eye twitching, his body pummeling the air like his own choreographed explosive, is an impressive presence at the play's epicenter.
>
> Best of all, however, in the most completely realized comic performance I've seen in years, is Swoozie Kurtz as Bananas. Like a stray gazelle, legs splayed, eyes gazing on memories of a sweetness that never was, she strolls in and out of these proceedings as if she ought to belong.[171]

---

[170] Rogoff, Theatre 261.

[171] Rogoff, Theatre 261.

The description of the actors is well-written, the best part being Rogoff's description of Ben Stiller's Ronnie. Here he has captured the action of the actor creating the role of the character. But I want to "see" more of the actors' actions. Rogoff needs to explain why he says Swoozie Kurtz's Bananas is "the most realized comic performance I've seen in years."[172]

When Rogoff ends his review talking again about the action of the play script he fails to discuss in detail "the collision of textual complexity with the live actor."[173] It seems even some of the better theatre critics suffer an occasional lapse from their own standards.

The standards by which we evaluate theatre criticism center on the critic's ability to discover, re-create, and assess the theatre experience of the play event. In his review of The House of Blue Leaves, Rogoff was strong in his discovery of the world of the play event, but less than adequate in his re-creation of the experience and his assessment of it. The same standards can be used to evaluate any theatre critic. Robert Brustein reviewed the same revival of The House of Blue Leaves but he

---

[172] Rogoff, Theatre 261.

[173] Rogoff, "Theatre Criticism" 141.

engaged the play from a more detached perspective than did Rogoff. Brustein begins his review with praise for John Guare and then points to a problem he sees in the play event and he wonders if the problem is the fault of the play or the production or both:

> I can't recall, when I first saw this play in the early seventies, that it worked so hard to ingratiate itself with the audience, so part of the problem may be Jerry Zaks's curiously coy production (surprising in the light of Zaks's much more hard-nosed approach to the sharper style of Christopher Durang). Whatever the reason, the intervening years have turned House of Blue Leaves from a provocative off-Broadway comedy into an eager-to-please middlebrow commodity.[174]

At this juncture in his review Brustein suspends any further discussion about the production and continues to write about the play script which he says "is a black comedy seen through rose colored glasses."[175] He re-creates the actions of the play's major characters in the plot and concludes, "It's too bad that Bananas gets killed in the end, because the dramatis personae of The House of Blue Leaves is cute enough, and the plot sufficiently contrived, to be recycled for a TV sitcom. . . ."[176] Then he latchs onto a line from the play in which Billy tells Artie that "the greatest talent

---

[174] Brustein, Who 96.

[175] Brustein, Who 96.

[176] Brustein, Who 97.

in the world--to be an audience--anybody can create."[177] Brustein uses this line from the play to key into the interaction of the play, the production, and the audience:

> This flattering nod to the noncreative consumer, unequaled on the stage until Salieri's tribute to mediocrity in Amadeus, is the assumption underlying mass culture, and it spells the difference between art created out of need and kitsch created out of need for endorsement. The very good actors in this production--and Swoosie Kurtz, Stockard Channing, and Julie Hagerty are especially fine American performers--have also been directed to sniff out that endorsement. Virtually nobody--the exception is Christopher Walken's silken suffering Billy--behaves normally, because virtually everybody is behaving for the sake of audience approval. Just once, a character--the assassin Ronnie--gives the spectators the raspberry. But even that mild breach of conviviality is followed by a quick "Sorry."[178]

The final paragraph of Brustein's review is a rehash of his earlier statements about liking John Guare but not liking the ingratiating attitude in his play. The strength of Brustein's review lies in his ability to discover an appropriate vantage point which sheds light on the interaction of the play, the production, and the audience. Brustein discovers how the world of the play ingratiates itself to the audience and permeates through the production. His assessment is strong because the

---

[177] Brustein, Who 97.

[178] Brustein, Who 97-98.

accuracy of this discovery enables him to expand his understanding of the inner workings of the play event. play event.

In his review of the musical play Cats, Brustein offers his readers a complete re-creation of the play event. "This spectacle could have been manufactured in Disney World," he complains, "using audio-animatronics instead of actors; I perceive no sign of flesh-and-blood behavior beneath the glitter and flash."[179] He blames John Napier, the designer for helping to create "a multi-million dollar exercise in junk culture."[180] Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Brustein's assessment of Cats, he offers enough information in his re-creation of the event so that the reader may decide for himself whether or not to see the musical. Brustein's description of Napier's set design provides a strong re-creative image to the reader:

> He has broken through the proscenium for the purpose of turning the entire theatre into a huge garbage dump decorated with a wide variety of found objects--boxes of cat chow, high-heel shoes, tennis rackets, paper plates, TV sets, Coke signs, you name it. Seen from the perspective of small felines, everything is naturally outsize. But apart from being unpleasantly garish, the design has the effect of dwarfing any other activity. Clearly, the set is intended to be the star of this show. . . . It is always being encouraged to

---

[179] Brustein, Who 165.

[180] Brustein, Who 165.

> perform, particularly during the overture when thousands of cats' eyes strobe in the darkness and a mammoth lighting fixture rises to the ceiling, and at the climax when Old Deuteronomy ascends to heaven on an enormous tire that flashes spotlights through fog effects like an extraterrestrial chandelier. One could feel the audience fighting back the impulse to wave goodbye through flooding tears. . . .[181]

Brustein's re-creation of the actions of the actors in Cats supports his assessment that this production is artificial and overblown:

> For all the tails and whiskers and fur, few of the performers have actually bothered to study feline behavior. The acting reinforces the impression that, despite all the money and effort expended on exterior artifacts, little attention was being paid to the cat beneath the skin.[182]

Brustein's review reflects his own discomfort with spectacular entertainment. He concludes his review quoting Ben Jonson's complaint about the dominance of spectacle over poetry in the masque. Brustein suggests that Cats, like the masque, "continues to bury poetry and sense beneath the carpentry and the show."[183] Even if a reader disagrees with Brustein's biases, he has offered a complete re-creation which lets the reader draw his own conclusions about the theatre experience.

---

[181] Brustein, Who 165-66.

[182] Brustein, Who 166.

[183] Brustein, Who 167.

The reviews of Brustein and Rogoff illustrate how the standards of discovery, re-creation, and assessment can be used to evaluate theatre criticism. The more often theate criticism adheres to these standards, the more it will contribute to the art of theatre. When theatre criticism deviates from its standards into creative criticism, the art of theatre suffers as does the minor art of theatre criticism. Creative criticism does not accurately account for the play event and the contributions made by theatre creators. It also does not take into consideration the impact theatre criticism makes on criticism itself. Theatre criticism needs critics who respect the artistry of their own re-creative medium. Theatre criticism is a re-creative art in the sense that it creates again the experience of a play event. The creative impulse of the critic is focused on re-creating his sense of a theatre experience for his readers. But without accurate discovery and proper assessment of the play event, the critic's creative impulses may direct him toward creative criticism. Discovery, re-creation, and assessment are as necessary to the minor art of theatre criticism as the play, production, and audience are necessary to the art of theatre. Take one of the elements away and you have something less than art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barish, Jonas. The Antitheatrical Prejudice. Berkeley: U of California P, 1981.

Barnes, Clive. "Fool for Love: powerful play about a divided U.S." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10, 1983: 213-14.

-----"Mixed Brew of Macbeth." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6, 1988: 300-01.

Beaufort, John. "Macbeth in an impressive Broadway production." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6, 1988: 301.

Bladel, Robert. Walter Kerr: An Analysis of his Criticism. Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1976.

Brook, Peter. The Shifting Point: 1946-1987. New York: Harper, 1987.

Brustein, Robert. "Artistic Injustice." New Republic 16 May 1988: 22-23.

-----"Crossed Purposes." New Republic 31 January 1988: 21-23.

-----"The Schlepic." New Republic 14 March 1988: 33+.

-----Who Needs Theatre: Dramatic Opinions. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1987.

Bullough, Edward. Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1957.

Clurman, Harold. The Divine Pastime. New York: MacMillan, 1974.

Driver, Tom. "What's the Matter with Edward Albee?" The Reporter January 1964: 38.

Engel, Lehman. The Critics. New York: Macmillan, 1976.

English, John. Criticizing the Critics. New York: Hastings, 1979.

Esslin, Martin. The Field of Drama: How Signs of the Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen. London, 1987.

Fergusson, Francis. The Idea of a Theatre: A Study of Ten Plays. The Art of Drama in Changing Perspective. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1949.

Ferretti, Fred. "Joseph Papp: A 'Divisive Force' or a 'Healing' One?" New York Times 20 December 1980, late city ed.: 16.

Frye, Northrop, Sheridan Baker, and George Perkins, The Harper Handbook to Literature. New York: Harper, 1985.

Gassner, John. Theatre at the Crossroads: Plays and Playwrights of the Mid-Century American Stage. New York: Holt, 1960.

Goldman, Michael. Acting and Action in Shakespearean Tragedy. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

Greene, Theodore. The Arts and the Art of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1940.

Gussow, Mel. "Has Stanley Kowalski become an Unactable Role?" New York Times 14 March 1988: C13.

-----"Hazards of the Trade: Fish and Flying Pickles." New York Times 6 March 1986, late ed.: C22.

-----"Shepard's West Revived and Restored." New York Times 18 October 1982, late ed.: C18.

Herbert, Ian. "The Noble Art?" Plays and Players January 1987: 8.

Kauffmann, Stanley. Persons of the Drama: Theatre Criticism and Comment. New York: Harper, 1976.

-----"Why We Need Broadway: Some Notes." Performing Arts Journal 26-27, 1985: 193-97.

Kerr, Walter. "Now, about that Chandelier that goes crashing." New York Times 14 February 1988, late ed.: 5+.

Kimes, William. "Walter Kerr: The Critic as Theorist, A Study of Aesthetic, Theatrical, and Dramatic Principles." diss., U. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1976.

Littlewood, S. R. Dramatic Criticism. New York: Pitman, 1939.

Marranca, Bonnie. "PAJ, A Personal History." Performing Arts Journal 26-27, 1985: 23-42.

Morrow, Lee Alan, Frank Pike. Creating Theatre: The Professional's Approach to New Plays. New York: Vintage, 1986.

Nightingale, Benedict. Fifth Row Center: A Critic's year on and off Broadway. New York: Random, 1986.

Oliver, Edith. "The Theatre." New Yorker 12 January 1981: 81.

-----"The Theatre." New Yorker 29 November 1982: 160.

Puffer, Ethel. The Psychology of Beauty. Cambridge: Riverside, 1905.

Ratcliffe, Michael. "Non-Parochial View." Plays International April 1988: 22+.

Rich, Frank. "A Macbeth starring Christopher Plummer and Jackson." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6, 1988: 298-99.

-----"Fool for Love, Sam Shepard's Western." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10, 1983: 212.

-----"Shepard's True West." New York Times 24 December 1980, late city ed.: C9.

Rogoff, Gordon. "Theatre Criticism: The Elusive Object, the Fading Craft." Performing Arts Journal 26-27, 1985: 133-41.

-----Theatre is Not Safe: 1962-1986. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1987.

Sharp, Christopher. "Fool for Love." New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 10, 1983: 214.

Shaw, Bernard. Dramatic Opinions and Essays with an Apology by Bernard Shaw: Containing as well a Word on the Dramatic Opinions and Essays of Bernard Shaw by James Huneker. 2 vols. New York: Bretano's, 1909.

Simon, John. "When Does the Next One Leave." New York 21 March 1988: 88+.

Stern, Daniel. "I Want My Intent Clear." New York Times 28 March 1976, late city ed.: 5D.

Walkley, A. B. Dramatic Criticism: Three Lectures delivered at the Royal Institution February 1903. London: John Murray, 1903.

West, E. J. ed. Shaw on Theatre. New York: Hill and Wang, 1959.

Williams, Orlo. Contemporary Criticism of Literature. New York: Haskell House, 1971.

Winer, Linda. "Tempest-Tossed, Star-Crossed Macbeth" New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 6, 1988: 302.

"Woodruff Disclaims Public's True West." New York Times 13 December 1980, late city ed.: 18.