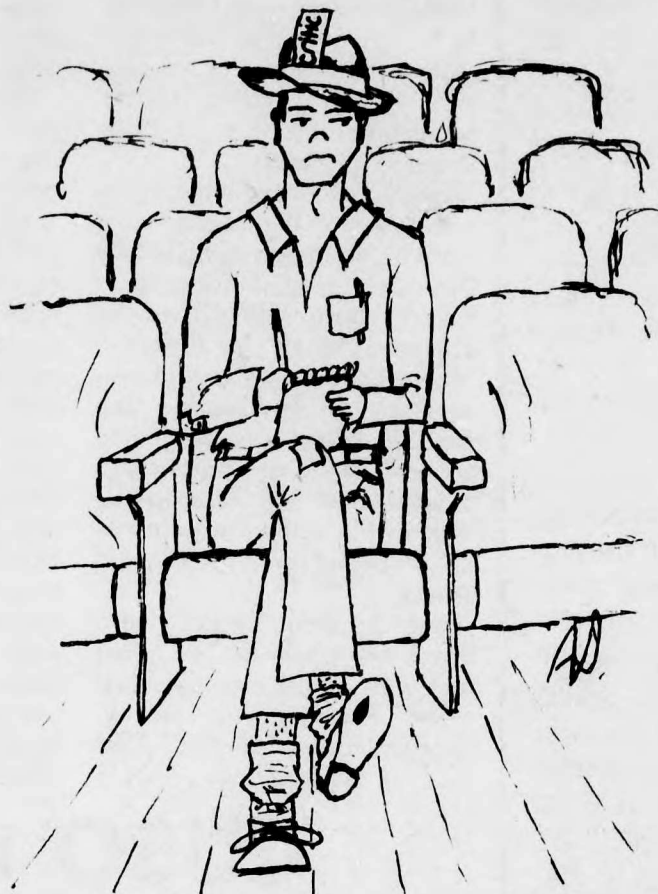


The critic's last stand



I don't get no respect

Nobody likes a critic, or what they say, until they praise the nobody's work. As Somerset Maugham said, "People ask for criticism, but they only want praise."

Perhaps this is at the centre of the ongoing controversy concerning critics and their writing throughout the history of the arts. Here at UNB and many other places, the critic is asked for an objective opinion. Is this not a contradiction in terms? Is there any such creature as the objective opinion? Perhaps. In any critical inquiry there must be a level of distance. A critic must, if he is to be accepted as legitimate, have feelings for a work of art but avoid being caught up in an emotional intensity that will obscure his review.

One must also accept the idea that a critic gives what he sees (and everyone else should see) as his opinion. There are no pretensions that his ideas approach fact and his ideas are no less open to argument than a friend who says "My, this is a

good lollipop." The only difference between a movie reviewer for the New York Times and our friend with the candy is that the Times is read by a little over a million people. A fairly immense difference, I admit.

This readership gives a responsibility, both to the readers and to the artist. This responsibility lies neither in doling out flattery (as is done in one local daily) nor in trying to improve the artist's work through helpful advice. The reviewer must give an educated, open-minded opinion on the work in question.

"An artist is his own fault." -John O'Hara.

The words of O'Hara bring me to the second part of this editorial. The artist. Certainly it is difficult to listen to sharp criticism of one's work and artistic composition, by its very personal nature, is open to even more painful wounds. However the artist, by performing or exhibiting his work, is placing himself in the public eye. This does not mean the artist should

agree with all that is written about him, but it is significant in that the artist should not be defensive about the fact of a negative review (although he may, and probably will, disagree with the content).

In displaying art in any form the artist must realize his work will be reviewed and consider public showing on that basis.

On a more local track, the nature of a university newspaper has suggested to many a divergence from standard newspaper review.

The first seems to be that, somehow, amateur or 'local' talent should be given more favorable write-ups because they are novices. Not so. Amateur productions of any type have to be seen as just that--amateur. This does not suggest a more lenient review is in order, just one in which the writer should look at the experience of the artist(s) as related to the product. A UNB prof will grade first year papers with less severity than he will that of a graduate student; he

won't be nicer, he will be marking in perspective. The same principle applies.

Another point that has been raised is that the quality of writing in a university paper suffers due to lack of experience. Agreed. But the essential characteristics of a potent and intelligent review remain. Perhaps a student writer should be viewed in the same light as an amateur play, that is a beginning.

So controversy reigns and I doubt whether this article will change anyone's mind about the value of a review or about how unfair the article about Gerald Shmuck's kazoo recital at the Groundhog Cafe was, but maybe you'll understand something about the role of the reviewer and how unfair it would be for him to change his opinion for the sake of personal feelings or for the amateur nature of art.

I leave the final word to Voltaire, "I may disapprove of what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

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