

ESSAYS

WHY OYSTERS ARE SO VERY GRITTY

Each era broods within it irritant particles: those disposed or compelled to criticize, either out of their very nature or because of their logical perceptions of the relationships in their era. Whether critics are born or made is within the scope of science, not art.

A critic must be swift of foot, lest he be swept away by the raging currents of opinion and everyday events which threaten to wipe his mind and will clean of all filthy doubts and threats; this tendency may be enhanced at times by the wish of the critic himself to accomplish the same end and return to that happy animal state of complicity.

The critic really prefers not to speak at all, but when by some misfortune he falls to the clutches of conversation, he is called upon to explain himself. What took more than a lifetime to conclude, he must elucidate in a few minutes or pages, preferring to verbalize tersely, without concern for life or limb, assuming always that his hearer might have more intelligence than ever he has had evidence to expect.

What a vile, repugnant, comedic creature he is, as he screeches his eerie bewares. His protest is an activity as meaningless as its subject; as he squirms and wriggles like a live frog run-through with a coathanger, roasting over a hot fire at a boy scout camp, his real longing is to be murdered for the Good before a crowd of sycophants.

The critic is the enemy of all; doctrines are anathema to him. Though at his best in action, his traditional weapon is the written word, but he ever regrets that his position appears there to be defined, frozen in time, limited.

There was a time, I guess, when criticism was accepted philosophically but not socially; now, however, in our mass culture, I think the obverse is true: critics are socially tolerated and philosophically neutered. Plainly, today's mercenary critics aren't critics at all; why the very act of critiquing indicates a want of discrimination. The critic has become a player in theatre; the result of which is that the ingenuous artist, the willful eccentric, is the only bona fide critic.

For the critic, at the bottom of the mud, the only way to move is to slide and the only direction is sideways. So my best advice to you is to step out or check your pockets when a critic's around: he's been hacking away at your shade tree for a very long time.

All that tripe aside, the true everyday critic obliterates by simply ignoring.

But don't unguardedly content yourself with the confines within which I have clothed the critic. Here, ask counsel of Mr Swift:

— G. D. M.

Now, 'tis certain, the institution of the true criticks, was of absolute necessity to the commonwealth of learning. For all human actions seem to be divided like Themistocles and his company: one man can fiddle, and another can make a small town a great city, and he that cannot do either one or the other, deserves to be kick'd out of the creation. The avoiding of which penalty, has doubtless given the first birth to the nation of criticks. . . .

. . . A true critick, in the perusal of a book, is like a dog at a feast, whose thoughts and stomach are wholly set upon what the guests fling away, and consequently, is apt to snarl most, when there are the fewest bones.

. . . For it hath been observed both among antients and moderns, that a true critick hath one quality in common with a whore and an alderman, never to change his title or his nature. . . .

(From Section III of 'A Tale of a Tub' by Jonathan Swift, Oxford Edition)

WORDS WORDS

*Though I never saw you walk on water
That's no bother,
And since I have your 8 by 10 glossy
It doesn't matter if I never see you.
Anyway that last afternoon when you said
– before you put on your pants –
That God must be awfully weary by now
Of being feared and worshipped so long,
All I could do was to stare lovingly
At what you covered up
And with a silly grin say,
'It is a lonely job, I'm sure.'
And from that moment
You refused to walk on water for me.
It really doesn't matter if I never see you
– I've got your 8 by 10 glossy.*

by Brad McMillan

*A yoyo we go
out and back
back and out
Fancy now
watch this trick
around the world
and back
always back
and out
Look at me
defying gravity
up, straight up
and back*

*I'll do a flip
turning, twisting
a loop
more string!
Gad! How grand!
and back
But – oh!
something cut the string
by twos!*

by William Thornton

Plumbait and Lesly Catchal, the bureaucrats directed to absorb, postpone and excuse all interaction between Molehill activists and City Hall, performed that task admirably, saying nothing one could put a finger on. And there were several notables among the audience — most of whom were non-aligned, suffering from a manifestation of identity deficiency, a malady I call proximal abhorrence: meaning they totally agreed with one side or the other but completely despised whomever they agreed with. Prominent among these was Fret Stormby; Fret is a professional snob in charge of community deception for the Bankers' Bank and he is also president of the Molehill Good Art in Good Homes Society. Fret has been busy deluding both the Snappers and the -Losers.

Eventually the Aldermen got their words in on the proposal. Alderman E was adamant that the section entitled 'Headdress and Coiffures' exclude toupees. Alderman C emphasized that 'getting into one's dress is the most blatant intrusion into one's privacy.' Alderwoman V hastily concurred, adding, 'This question of confusing hairstyles with hats is particularly disconcerting.' Alderman F interjected his usual eye-opening comments: 'All this discussion is pointless; now what is the question we're discussing?'

All of this continued in much the same vein for an hour more with many persons stepping out of the chamber for 'refreshment' after having their say. Then, hush broke the proceedings as Dullipp Slipshod, a building maintenance man not reputed for either his sobriety or his status in the community, ventured timidly to the rostrum. He apologetically asked: 'I ain't educated much as you all, but, uh, I thought maybe since everybody here look so different anyhow, why don't Molehill just leave everythin' to go just like it is? And besides, this all don't sound right to me: ain't this all agains' the law — telling others how to appear?'

The City attorney was summoned and he confirmed the illegality of the measure. At that, most everybody left without a resolution. But there was little doubt that each, being unappased, would continue to pursue his or her private purpose — yet in a more concealed fashion.

— Gibbin Nash

(Molehill Continued Next Pinch)

POSTSCRIPT

WHIPLASHING

Please permit me to broadcast my severest disapproval of the brazen shenanigans of Gibbin Nash — to say nothing of our pathfinder Uncle Merthmill. The rococo has been dredged up once more by Nash's writings, but this time tarnished beyond redemption. His manipulations of history reveal his deep contempt for event and personality alike. One might justifiably wonder if his complaining was to have been a punitive device or if it was to have served some instructive intent. I can only query: what vacancy calls forth such distortion and embroidery from his needle? He should have been a dress-maker.

Only a mole-person digs in this sort of dirt and shoves it around for all to witness. With his obtuse vision, Nash has staged a puppet show for us, and it is completely devoid of the descriptiveness and the delicacy of characterization which might have animated his cardboard settings and paper dolls. This first chapter reads like a farce from some degenerate era; there is not a single saving parable in his entire hovel of castoff words and sentiments.

— B. Sterner

How true! (This man Sterner has a fanatical distemper, a priggish lunacy — we must humor him as best we can.)

— Hastings M. Eaton