

# On Criticism

Upon perusing my latest issue of Writer's Digest (if you're truly serious about writing, you should subscribe to this magazine, every issue is like having a writing professor always at the tips of your fingertips) I came across an article on the subject of criticism.

The article opened with a quote from the poet Christopher Perricone from his essay *Shooting the Wounded: An Essay on Criticism*: "The critic is the kind of person who watches the battle from the sidelines. When the battle is over and the smoke clears, he goes down to the battlefield and shoots the wounded." I have no doubt that every writer who has been the victim of the critic's pen agrees with this.

I mean, the writer, whether writing a short story, a poem or a novel, spends countless hours trying to perfect his work for public consumption. He sweats over a line of dialogue, he worries if that metaphor works or if it's too subtle, he bleeds from the ears trying to make sure the point of his piece is properly executed. And rightfully so, the writer should make these sacrifices for his art but no matter how hard he works and no matter how pleased he is with the final product, there's always that creeping doubt in the back of his mind, that nagging internal critic, that he didn't accomplish this goal or that level of quality correctly. Then, if he's lucky enough, good enough, to get his work published, out of the blue he gets a cold, callous note from a faceless critic on an Amazon review page or in some glossy magazine that confirms all those doubts the writer has had from the start.

All those bricks in the wall of confidence the writer has built up over the years begin to crumble and fall. I've known talented writers who were so damaged by the supposed sharp wit of a critic that they've completely given up on their dream. How many future Hemingways, Twains or Bradburys has the world been cheated of because of this?

Could this be Nature's way of thinning the author herd, leaving only those strong writers that bull-headedly charge on through the miasma, standing? *The survival of the fittest*. Maybe, maybe not.

That same Writer's Digest article said that "The true purpose of criticism is to correct, not to condemn." That's fine except that many of those online critics haven't read this bit of wisdom yet. Many of them, since they can't grasp how to correctly write a criticism or make their point in an intelligent, respectful way, get personal in their attacks.

The only solution to this is to read them then ignore them.

When I write a story, I give the story a reason for being, such as: This story is designed to be humorous; this story should explore the depths of the human psyche when it concerns going insane, etc. I sometimes assign two or more things I want to explore in a story. And when I finish the story I go back through it and see if I've accomplished the particular goal(s) I'd laid down to justify the story's existence. If I have, then the story is a success and no amount of criticism is going to change that. That's how I deal with negative reviews, which, to my eternal gratefulness, have been few and far between.

And when/if you decide to put on the critic's hat, keep what I've discussed above in mind, for the same person you are criticizing may someday criticize your own work.

Thanks for your time,  
GC Rosenquist