

# BEST QUOTES ON LITERARY/ARTS CRITICISM

Again and again I have been attacked for looseness, lack of beauty in my prose, and the one attacking me used, as the vehicle of attack, prose I would have been ashamed to write.

--Sherwood Anderson

If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespeare, If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.

--William Hazlitt

The public is the only critic whose opinion is worth anything at all.

--Mark Twain

The important thing is that you make sure that neither the favorable nor the unfavorable critics move into your head and take part in the composition of your next work.

--Thornton Wilder

The person who is never criticized is not breathing.

--Unknown

It would be idle to deny that a word of praise, a word of thanks, sometimes a word of criticism, have been powerful factors in the lives of men of genius. We know how profoundly Lord Byron was affected by the letter of a consumptive girl written simply and soberly, signed with initials only, seeking no notice and giving no address; but saying in a few candid words that the writer wished before she died to thank the poet for the rapture his poems had given her.

--Agnes Repplier

Charles Dickens, the Shakespeare of the novel, has faced a constant critical attack as a result of his often sensational subject matter, his cheerful fecundity...and, of course, his success with the book-reading groundlings of his time and ours. Critics and scholars have always been suspicious of popular success.

—Stephen King

If criticism had any real power to harm, the skunk would have been extinct by now.

--Fred Allen

You can't try to convince anyone of your story's merit. How the story is received belongs to the reader, fully and unequivocally. It's OK to learn from criticism and consider what you could do better. But if someone truly trashes your work, especially something that's been vetted by skilled professionals in the publishing industry, that person wasn't your audience. Don't let that person's criticism get into your head. Continue to write boldly and fearlessly for the ones who love it.

--Jennifer Zobair

A writer asked a critic:  
'Did you read my last book?'  
The critic replied:  
'I certainly hope so.'

--Michael Larsen

I take no more notice of the wind that comes out of the mouths of critics than of the wind expelled from their backsides.

--Da Vinci

To know how to criticize is good, but to know how to create is better.

--Henri Poincaré

When an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

--Samuel Johnson

Criticism, as it was first instituted by Aristotle, was meant as a standard of judging well.

--Samuel Johnson

The legitimate aim of criticism is to direct attention to the excellent. The bad will dig its own grave, and the imperfect may safely be left to that final neglect from which no amount of present undeserved popularity can rescue it.

--Bovee

There is only one thing worse than a bad review, being ignored altogether.

--Theodore White

Throwing mud at another man only soils your own hands.

--Unknown

Don't criticize the other fellow's plan unless you have a better one to offer.

--Unknown

The best thing you can do about critics is never say a word. In the end you have the last say, and they know it.

--Tennessee Williams

Reviewers are forever telling authors they can't understand them. The author might often reply: Is that my fault?

--J. C. and A. W. Hare

The aim of criticism is to distinguish what is essential in the work of a writer. It is the delight of a critic to praise; but praise is scarcely a part of his duty....What we ask of him is that he should find out for us more than we can find out for ourselves.

--Arthur Symons

It is through criticism...that the race has managed to come out of the woods and lead a civilized life. The first man who objected to the general nakedness, and advised his fellows to put on clothes, was the first critic.

-- L. Godkin

Insects sting, not from malice, but because they want to live. It is the same with critics--they desire our blood, not our pain.

--Nietzsche

A good writer is not per se a good book critic. No more than a good drunk is automatically a good bartender.

--Jim Bishop

'Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle,  
Should let itself be snuffed out by an article.

—Lord Byron

You know who critics are?—the men who have failed in literature and art.

--Benjamin Disraeli

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust, and sweat, and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again because there is no effort without error and shortcomings; but who actually strives to do the deed, who knows the great devotion; who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the high achievement of triumph and who at worst, if he fails, while daring greatly, knows his place shall never be with those timid and cold souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

--Theodore Roosevelt

Criticism is easy; art is difficult.

--Philippe Destouches

If the critics are not less than the authors they criticise, they will at once burst into equal authorship. And being less than the authors they criticise, they must diminish these authors. For no critic can admit anything bigger than himself. And we are all, therefore, no bigger than our little critics.

--D. H. Lawrence

Of all fatiguing, futile, empty trades, the worst, I suppose, is writing about writing.

--Hilaire Belloc

The critics will say as always that literature is decaying. From the time of the first critic up to now they have said nothing else.

--Sir Osbert Sitwell

Nothing is easier than fault-finding; no talent, no self-denial, no brains, no character are required to set up in the grumbling business.

--Robert West

It is the great tree that attracts the wind.

--Chinese Proverb

To escape criticism—do nothing, say nothing, be nothing.

--Elbert Hubbard

Criticism comes easier than craftsmanship.

--Zeuxis

People ask you for criticism but they only want praise.

--Somerset Maugham

Pay no attention to what the critics say; no statue has ever been put up to a critic.

--Jean Sibelius

In judging others, folks will work overtime for no pay.

--Charles Edwin  
Carruthers

Nature, when she invented, manufactured and patented her authors, contrived to make critics out of the chips that were left.

--Oliver Wendell  
Holmes, Sr.

A critic is a man who knows the way but can't drive the car.

--Kenneth Tynan

Any fool can criticize, and many of them do.

--Archbishop C. Garbett

Constantly and incorrigibly we forget how much harder it is to create, even with mediocre results, than to criticize.

--F. L. Lucas

The very essence of the creative is its novelty, and hence we have no standard by which to judge it.

--Carl R. Rogers

The critic creates nothing, he only points out. But his pointing may show you powers that were indeed always there, and that were even effective, but that, once afresh seen, suggest to active passion a thousand devices whereby the world is revolutionized.

--Josiah Royce

Criticism is asserted superiority.

--Henry Cardinal  
Manning

One should never criticize his own work except in a fresh and hopeful mood. The self-criticism of a tired mind is suicide.

--Charles Horton Cooley

I don't see how anyone has a right to resent criticism, if they write for the public. As well put yourself in a shopwindow, and think it hard that people don't admire your goods.

--Mother Francis Raphael

Of course I like to be praised, or rather understood. But I am neither pained nor surprised if critics do not like my books, and they are welcome to say what they feel about them. I greatly believe in Dr. Johnson's dictum, that no one was ever written down except by himself.

--A. C. Benson

It's not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

--*Bible*

Don't tell me I stink till you've walked a mile in my socks.

--John Caldwell

You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables.

--Samuel Johnson

I have never found, in a long experience of politics, that criticism is never inhibited by ignorance.

--Harold Macmillan

We find fault with perfection itself.

—Blaise Pascal

No man can be criticised but by a greater than he. Do not, then, read the reviews.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

The real connoisseurs in art are those who make people accept as beautiful something everybody used to consider ugly, by revealing and resuscitating the beauty in it.

--Edmond de Goncourt

What the mulberry leaf is to the silkworm, the author's book, treatise, essay, poem, is to the critical larvae that feed upon it. It furnishes them with food and clothing.

--Oliver Wendell  
Holmes, Jr.

Nature fits all her children with something to do,  
He who would write and can't write can surely review.

--James Russell Lowell

The critic, to interpret his artist, even to understand his artist, must be able to get into the mind of his artist; he must feel and comprehend the vast pressure of the creative passion.

--H. L. Mencken

There is no reward so delightful, no pleasure so exquisite, as having one's work known and acclaimed by those whose applause confers honour.

--Molière

Critics are like brushers of noblemen's clothes.

--Francis Bacon

There is no fate more distressing for an artist than to have to show himself off before fools, to see his work exposed to the criticism of the vulgar and ignorant.

--Molière

Criticism is the windows and chandeliers of art: it illuminates the enveloping darkness in which art might otherwise rest only vaguely discernible, and perhaps altogether unseen.

--George Jean Nathan

Works of art are of an infinite loneliness and with nothing so little to be reached as with criticism.

--Rainer Maria Rilke

With an artist no sane man quarrels, any more than with the colour of a child's eyes.

--George Santayana

When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself.

--Oscar Wilde

Don't judge any man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins.

--American Indian  
Proverb

Every man is entitled to be valued by his best moment.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Do not measure another's coat on your own body.

--Malay Proverb

When we come to judge others it is not by ourselves as we really are that we judge them, but by an image that we have formed of ourselves from which we have left out everything that offends our vanity or would discredit us in the eyes of the world.

--W. Somerset Maugham

Always keep in mind the part that mood can play in affecting one's judgment of a piece of work; be cautious of enthusiasm when the sun shines bright, and slow to dismissal when the clouds hang low.

--J. Donald Adams

The man who acts the least, upbraids the most.

--Homer

You should not say it is not good. You should say you do not like it; and then, you know, you're perfectly safe.

--James McNeill Whistler

Never judge a work of art by its defects.

--Washington Allston

Critics are like horse-flies which prevent the horse from ploughing.

--Anton Pavlovitch

A poet that fails in writing, becomes often a morose critic. The weak and insipid white wine makes at length excellent vinegar.

--Shenstone

Silence is sometimes the severest criticism.

--Charles Buxton

If we were without faults, we should not take so much pleasure in remarking them in others.

--La Rochefoucauld

The strength of criticism lies only in the weakness of the thing criticised.

--Longfellow

Critics are sentinels in the grand army of letters, stationed at the corners of newspapers and reviews to challenge every new author.

--Longfellow

Criticism often takes from the tree caterpillars and blossoms together.

--J. P. Richter

A shoemaker should not judge above his shoes.

--Apelles

Criticism is a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.

--Matthew Arnold

Criticism should not be querulous and wasting, all knife and root-puller, but guiding, instructive, inspiring, a south wind, not an east wind.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson



A critic is a man who expects miracles.

--James Huneker

Criticism is the art wherewith a critic tries to guess himself into a share of the artist's fame.

--G. J. Nathan

The critic is only the secretary of the public, but a secretary who does not wait to take dictation, and who divines, who decides, who expresses every morning what everybody is thinking.

--Sainte-Beuve

Let none presume to measure the irregularities of Michael Angelo or Socrates by village scales.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

To stop criticism they say one must die.

--Voltaire

He could gauge the old books by the old set of rules,  
And his very old nothings pleased very old fools;  
But give him a new book, fresh out of the heart,  
And you put him at sea without compass or chart.

--J. R. Lowell

Since we cannot equal it, let us avenge ourselves by abusing it.

--Montaigne

They damn what they do not understand.

--Quintilian

Reviewers are usually people who would have been poets, historians, biographers, if they could: they have tried their talents at one or the other, and have failed; therefore they turn critics.

--S. T. Coleridge

There is a certain race of men that either imagine it their duty, or make it their amusement, to hinder the reception of every work of learning or genius, who stand as sentinels in the avenues of fame, and value themselves upon giving Ignorance and Envy the first notice of a prey.

--Samuel Johnson

When I take up the end of a web and find it pack-thread, I do not expect, by looking further, to find embroidery.

--Samuel Johnson

The opinion of a great body of the reading public is very materially influenced even by the unsupported assertions of those who assume a right to criticise.

—Thomas Babington  
Macaulay

It is impossible to think of a man of any actual force and originality...who spent his whole life appraising and describing the work of other men.

--H. L. Mencken

It is as hard to find a neutral critic as it is a neutral country in time of war. I suppose if a critic were neutral, he wouldn't trouble to write anything.

--Katherine Anne Porter

Listen carefully to first criticisms of your work. Note just what it is about your work that the critics don't like—then cultivate it. That's the part of your work that's individual and worth keeping.

--Jean Cocteau

In the finest critics one hears the full cry of the human. They tell one why it matters to read.

--Harold Bloom

From my close observation of writers... they fall into two groups: 1) those who bleed copiously and visibly at any bad review, and 2) those who bleed copiously and secretly at any bad review.

—Isaac Asimov

Fear of criticism is the kiss of death in the courtship of achievement.

--Unknown

One of the easiest things to find is fault.

--Unknown

Literary people are forever judging the quality of the mind by the turn of the expression.

--Frank Moore Colby

The first man who objected to the general nakedness and advised his fellows to put on clothes, was the first critic.

--Edwin L. Bodkin

The critic should describe, and not prescribe.

--Eugene Ionesco

Critics of literature have the same essential function as teachers of literature; this is not to direct the judgment of the audience, but to assist the audience in those disciplines of reading on which any meaningful judgment must rest.

--Mark Schorer

Stop abusing my verses, or publish some of your own.

--Martial

Blowing out the other fellow's candle won't make yours shine any brighter.

--Unknown

It doesn't take brains to criticize; any old vulture can find a carcass.

--Unknown

Many people have the mistaken idea that they can make themselves great by showing how small someone else is.

--Unknown

A person usually criticizes the individual whom he secretly envies.

--Unknown

Don't mind criticism. If it's untrue, disregard it; if it's unfair, keep from irritation; if it's ignorant, smile; if it's justified, learn from it.

--Chinese Proverb

If your head sticks up above the crowd, expect more criticism than bouquets.

--Unknown

One of the hardest things to take is one of the easiest things to give—criticism.

--Unknown

Sometimes criticism is nothing but a mild form of envy.

--Unknown

Don't mind the fellow who belittles you; he's only trying to cut you down to his size.

--Unknown

The person who is always finding fault seldom finds anything else.

--Unknown

Before finding fault with another person, stop and count ten—of your own.  
--Unknown

Fear of criticism is the kiss of death in the courtship of achievement.  
--Unknown

It is easier to point the finger than to offer a helping hand.  
--Unknown

If it were not for the doers, the critics would soon be out of business.  
--Unknown

A critic is one who finds fault without a search warrant.  
--Unknown

Criticism should always leave a person with the feeling he has been helped.  
--Unknown

Small minds are the first to criticize large ideas.  
--Unknown

If you're not mature enough to take criticism, you're too immature for praise.  
--Unknown

The trouble with most of us is that we'd rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.  
--Unknown

You can be 100 percent certain of being a success if you decide to go into faultfinding.  
--Unknown

The best way to criticize the other fellow's work is to do yours better.  
--Unknown

A true critic ought to dwell rather upon excellencies than imperfections, to discover the concealed beauties of a writer, and communicate to the world such things as are worth their observation.  
--Joseph Addison

One sees the critic as the real helper of the artist, a torchbearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother.  
--Henry James

To criticize is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with the criticized thing and to make it one's own.

--Henry James

The good critic is one who tells of his mind's adventures among masterpieces.

--Anatole France

Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticisms.

--Aldous Leonard  
Huxley

A man must serve his time to every trade  
Save censure—critics all are ready-made.

--Lord Byron

As soon  
Seek roses in December, ice in June;  
Hope constancy in wind, or corn in chaff;  
Believe a woman or an epitaph,  
Or any other thing that's false, before  
You trust in critics.

--Lord Byron

I am bound by my own definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.

--Matthew Arnold

Every intellectual product must be judged from the point of view of the age and the people in which it was produced.

--Walter Pater

Criticism occupies the lowest place in the literary hierarchy; as regards form, almost always; and as regards "moral value," incontestably. It comes after rhyming games and acrostics, which at least require a certain inventiveness.

--Gustave Flaubert

Many critics are like woodpeckers, who, instead of enjoying the fruit and shadow of a tree, hop incessantly around the trunk pecking holes in the bark to discover some little worm or other.

--Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

A critic is a legless man who teaches running.

--Channing Pollock

A young critic is like a boy with a gun; he fires at every living thing he sees. He thinks only of his own skill, not the pain he is giving.

--Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Criticism is properly the rod of divination: a hazel switch for the discovery of buried treasure, not a birch twig for the castigation of offenders.

--Arthur Symons

All criticism is dominated by the outworn theory that the man is the cause of the work as in the eyes of the law the criminal is the cause of the crime. Far rather are they both the effects.

--Paul Valery

Criticism is never inhibited by ignorance.

--Harold Macmillan

It is ridiculous for any man to criticize the works of another if he has not distinguished himself by his own performances.

--Joseph Addison

Silence is sometimes the severest criticism.

--Charles Buxton

The strength of criticism lies only in the weakness of the thing criticized.

--Longfellow

The severest critics are always those who have either never attempted, or who have failed in original composition.

--William Hazlitt

There are some literary critics...who remind me of a gong at a grade crossing clanging loudly and vainly as the train roars by.

--Christopher Morley

Critic: one who finds a little bad in the best of things.

--Joseph P. Ritz

Nobody casts stones at a fruitless tree.

--Armenian Proverb

They condemn what they do not understand.

--Latin Proverb

Live by admiration rather than by disgust. Judge people by their best, not by their worst.

--Henry Van Dyke

The rule in carving holds good as to criticism; never cut with a knife what you can cut with a spoon.

--Charles Buxton

Even the lion has to defend himself against flies.

--Unknown

Remember that nobody will ever get ahead of you as long as he is kicking you in the seat of the pants.

--Walter Winchell

The strength of criticism lies in the weakness of the thing criticized.

--Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Blame is safer than praise.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

I find that the pain of a little censure, even when it is unfounded, is more acute than the pleasure of much praise.

--Thomas Jefferson

He who would acquire fame must not show himself afraid of censure. The dread of censure is the death of genius.

--William Gillmore  
Simms

Censure is the tax a man pays to the public for being eminent.

--Jonathan Swift

He is always the severest censor of the merit of others who has the least worth of his own.

--Elias Lyman Maggon

Ponder well the maxim: Never do to other persons what would pain thyself.

--Panchatantra

The highest and most lofty trees have the most reason to dread the thunder.

--Charles Rollin

More and more people think of the critic as an indispensable middle man between writer and reader, and would no more read a book alone, if they could help it, than have a baby alone.

--Randall Jarrell

Analysis kills spontaneity. The grain once ground into flour springs and germinates no more.

--Henri Frédéric Amiel

We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing, while others judge us by what we have already done.

--Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.

--Albert Einstein

A movie audience is your best and worst critic. If you ask them outright to tell you what's wrong, they'll be hopeless. But if you sneak in and listen to them, they'll tell you everything.

--Harold Lloyd

Criticism is dangerous, because it wounds a man's precious pride, hurts his sense of importance and arouses his resentment.

--Dale Carnegie

Taking to pieces is the trade of those who cannot construct.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

Criticism is prejudice made plausible.

--H. L. Mencken

One man's work is another man's target.

--Unknown

People who speak disparagingly of minor poetry are either stockbrokers and lawyers and rich practical people who don't understand, or reviewers in the Press, who are always young men fresh from a university with souls so stuffed full of intellectual pride that they might as lightly speak of minor roses or minor sunsets.

--Rupert Brooke

The test of democracy is freedom of criticism.

--David Ben-Gurion



Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values the science ignores. The touchstone is emotion, not reason. We judge a work of art by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion, and nothing else. All the critical twiddle-twaddle about style and form, all this pseudo-scientific classifying and analysing of books in an imitation-botanical fashion, is mere impertinence and mostly dull jargon.

--D. H. Lawrence

Critics are like eunuchs in a harem. They're there every night, they see it done every night, they see how it should be done every night, but they can't do it themselves.

--Brendan Behan

You damn every poem I write,  
Yet publish not one of your own.  
Now kindly let yours see the light,  
Or else leave my damned ones alone.

--Martial

I am sitting in the smallest room in my house. I have your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me.

--Max Reger

Do not remove a fly from your friend's forehead with a hatchet.

--Chinese Proverb

Find the grain of truth in criticism—chew it and swallow it.

--D. Suttan

The world has so many critics because it is so much easier to criticize than to appreciate.

--Unknown

The manner in which we respond to negative criticism is a clue to the level of our self-esteem. If we harbor a feeling of inadequacy, negative criticism can wipe us out.

--Elisabeth Ruedy and  
Sue Nirenberg

The critic's job is...confining, frequently enervating, often beguiling, and generally exposed. There is some resemblance to working in a coal mine. The work is done in the dark, it is done alone, and the roof keeps falling in.

--Richard Eder

Asking a working writer what he thinks about critics is like asking a lamppost what it feels about dogs.

--Christopher Hampton

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain—and most do.

--Dale Carnegie

Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger.

--Franklin P. Jones

Two and two the mathematician continues to make four, in spite of the whine of the amateur for three, or the cry of the critic for five.

--James McNeill Whistler

The covers of this book are too far apart.

--Ambrose Bierce

A man's mind is hidden in his writings; criticism brings it to light.

--Solomon Ibn Gabirol

The man who can't dance thinks the band is no good.

--Polish Proverb

No matter how well you perform there's always somebody of intelligent opinion who thinks it's lousy.

--Laurence Olivier

Literature is strewn with the wreckage of men who have minded beyond reason the opinion of others.

--Virginia Woolf

Amid all the easily loved darlings of Charlie Brown's circle, obstreperous Lucy holds a special place in my heart. She fusses and fumes and she carps and complains. That's because Lucy cares. And it's the caring that counts. When we, as youngsters, would accuse our mother of picking on us her wise reply was, 'All you'll get from strangers is surface pleasantries or indifference. Only someone who loves you will criticize you.'

--Judith Crist

The path you must take, none but you must know. The critic can never tell you.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

When a work lifts your spirits and inspires bold and noble thoughts in you, do not look for any other standard to judge by: the work is good, the product of a master craftsman.

--La Bruyère

If you are ready to criticize a system, be equally prepared to offer assistance to improve it.

--Armando Sanchez

At ev'ry word a reputation dies.

--Alexander Pope

As learned commentators view  
In Homer more than Homer knew.

--Jonathan Swift

Criticism is a study by which men grow important and formidable at very small expense.

--Samuel Johnson

Once you censor Snoop, why not Public Enemy? Censorship is merely putting a band-aid on cancer. What we should be doing is addressing the deterioration of the community that this music stems from.

--The X-Man, Disc Jockey

Unless your ideas are ridiculed by experts they are worth nothing.

--Reg Revans

I criticize by creation, not by finding fault.

--Cicero

Find the grain of truth in criticism—chew it and swallow it.

--D. Suttan

Unless the bastards have the courage to give you unqualified praise, I say ignore them.

--John Steinbeck

My native habitat is the theatre. I toil not, neither do I spin. I am a critic and a commentator. I am essential to the theatre—as ants to a picnic, as the boll weevil to a cotton field.

--Joseph L. Mankiewicz

A critic is a gong at a railroad crossing clanging loudly and vainly as the train goes by.

--Christopher Morley

A bad review may spoil your breakfast but you shouldn't allow it to spoil your lunch.

--Kingsley Amis

A critic is a man created to praise greater men than himself, but he is never able to find them.

--Richard Le Gallienne

Most critics act on the principle that a writer is ruined by praise and saved by criticism.

--Unknown

A critic writes because he has to say something, not because he has something to say.

--Unknown

The main use of criticism is in showing what manner of man the critic is.

--Frank Moore Colby

Criticism is the art of writing about yourself while appearing to be writing about another man's work.

--Unknown

In the arts, the critic is the only independent source of information. The rest is advertising.

--Pauline Kael

Too many of our countrymen rejoice in stupidity, look upon ignorance as a badge of honor. They condemn everything they don't understand.

--Tallulah Bankhead

Criticism, like rain, should be gentle enough to nourish a man's growth without destroying his roots.

--Frank A. Clark

A cynic can chill and dishearten with a single word.

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help.

--Abraham Lincoln

A good review from the critics is just another stay of execution.  
--Dustin Hoffman

If Attila the Hun were alive today, he'd be a dramatic critic.  
--Edward Albee

I've seen more excitement at the opening of an umbrella.  
--Earl Wilson

Before you criticize someone you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way when you criticize them you are a mile away from them and you have their shoes.  
--Frieda Norris

We are not trying to entertain the critics. I'll take my chances with the public.  
--Walt Disney

How much easier it is to be critical than to be correct.  
--Benjamin Disraeli

Don't pay attention to what they write about you. Just measure it in inches.  
--Andy Warhol

Critics are our friends, they tell us our faults.  
--Benjamin Franklin

People ask for criticism, but they only want praise.  
--W. Somerset Maugham

If you are not criticized, you may not be doing much.  
--Donald H. Rumsfeld

They who are to be judges must also be performers.  
--Aristotle

Never answer a critic, unless he's right.  
--Bernard M. Baruch

Don't be distracted by criticism. Remember—the only taste of success some people have is when they take a bite out of you.  
--Unknown

Any fool can criticize, condemn, and complain—and most fools do.  
--Dale Carnegie

To find a fault is easy; to do better may be difficult.

--Plutarch

Movies are obligated to please only the people who pay for the tickets, and not the critics.

--Unknown

Critics go jargon-crazy 'out of insecurity'—in other words, to show that they're smart and in-the-know.

--Stephanie Zacharek

A bad review is even less important than whether it is raining in Patagonia.

--Iris Murdoch

No passion on earth, neither love or hate, is equal to the passion to alter someone else's draft.

—H. G. Wells

Writing criticism is to writing fiction and poetry as hugging the shore is to sailing in the open sea.

--John Updike

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.

--Mark Twain

A work of art that one has to explain fails...its mission.

--Henry James

Any reviewer who expresses rage and loathing for a novel is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae.

--Kurt Vonnegut

When you judge another, you do not define them, you define yourself.

--Wayne Dyer

Deal with the faults of others as gently as with your own.

--Chinese Proverb

It's hard to say who gets criticized the most, the successful person, or the failure but it's mighty close.

--Joe Moore

With highly refined sensibilities and unparalleled depth of knowledge and insight, critics are uniquely qualified to provide astute, relevant assessments of an artist's work. Nobody likes them.

--*Earth (The Book) A  
Visitor's Guide to  
the Human Race*

The artist doesn't have time to listen to the critics. The ones who want to be writers read the reviews, the ones who want to write don't have the time to read reviews.

--William Faulkner

Without the meditative background that is criticism, works become isolated gestures, historical accidents, soon forgotten.

--Milan Kundera

Never react emotionally to criticism. Analyze yourself to determine whether it is justified. If it is, correct yourself. Otherwise, go on about your business.

—Norman Vincent Peale

Whatever I do is done out of sheer joy; I drop my fruits like a ripe tree. What the general reader or the critic makes of them is not my concern.

—Henry Miller

Critics! Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame.

—Robert Burns

The pleasure of criticizing robs us of the pleasure of being moved by some very fine things.

—Jean de la Bruyere

Having the critics praise you is like having the hangman say you've got a pretty neck.

—Eli Wallach

Either positive or negative comments are good because it shows I am still relevant.

—Justin Guarini

No degree of dullness can safeguard a work against the determination of critics to find it fascinating.

—Harold Rosenberg

He that would live in peace and at ease, must not speak all he knows nor judge all he sees.

—Benjamin Franklin

Critics search for ages for the wrong word, which, to give them credit, they eventually find.

—Peter Ustinov

Doubtless criticism was originally benignant, pointing out the beauties of a work rather than its defects. The passions of men have made it malignant, as a bad heart of Procrustes turned the bed, the symbol of repose, into an instrument of torture.

—Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Pay no attention to what the critics say... Remember, a statue has never been set up in honor of a critic!

—Jean Sibelius

By taking a job as a writer and writing and publishing stories, you implicitly accept a position in this national conversation. That means that you, as a writer, have the freedom to write and share with the world what you think, and the world has the right to say what they think about it. You don't have to agree with what the world says about you and what you've written. You're free to think—and publicly argue—that the world's position makes the world a god damn moron. But you do have to accept the right of everyone else to have thoughts and say them. It is the same right you've reserved for yourself, by becoming a writer.

—Hamilton Nolan

Anyone who writes something arguing that a bad writer wrote a bad thing is probably holding out hope that as a result there might be less bad writing in the future. It rarely works, but there's nothing wrong with being optimistic.

—Hamilton Nolan

By publishing a work, a writer automatically invites the world to think critically about that work; people who critique a writer's work may be unpleasant or wrong in their opinions, but they are not wrong for having and writing opinions; and, in the broadest sense, this messy process of all of us talking about what all of us are saying is what moves the world's intellectual development forward, at an often imperceptible pace.

—Hamilton Nolan

Everybody who does anything for the public can be criticized. There's always someone who doesn't like it.

—Imogen Cunningham



Few people have the wisdom to prefer the criticism that would do them good, to the praise that deceives them.

—Francois de La  
Rochefoucauld

I dislike literary jargon and never use it. Criticism has only one function and that is to help readers read and understand literature. It is not a science, it is an aid to art.

—Anne Stevenson

Coughing in the theater is not a respiratory ailment. It is a criticism.

—Alan Jay Lerner

A dramatic critic is a man who leaves no turn unstoned.

—George Bernard Shaw

Criticism really used to hurt me. Most of these critics are usually frustrated artists, and they criticise other people's art because they can't do it themselves. It's a really disgusting job. They must feel horrible inside.

—Rosanna Arquette

Every human being is entitled to courtesy and consideration. Constructive criticism is not only to be expected but sought.

—Margaret Chase Smith

The world have payed too great a compliment to critics, and have imagined them men of much greater profundity than they really are.

—Henry Fielding

To write a book is to open one's mind for all to see, judge, and criticize.

--Dan L. Miller

Literature should not be suppressed merely because it offends the moral code of the censor.

—William O. Douglas

If, however, you take a moment to observe how you actually feel immediately after you criticize someone, you'll notice that you will feel a little deflated and ashamed, almost like you're the one who has been attacked. The reason this is true is that when we criticize, it's a statement to the world and to ourselves, 'I have a need to be critical.' This isn't something we are usually proud to admit.

—Richard Carlson

Criticism, like swearing, is actually nothing more than a bad habit.

—Richard Carlson

I don't think anyone could ever criticize me more severely than the way I viciously criticize myself.

—*wattpad.com*

Where humor is concerned there are no standards—no one can say what is good or bad, although you can be sure that everyone will.

—John Kenneth  
Galbraith

Too much is demanded by the critic, attempted by the poet.

—John C. Ransom

When we judge or criticize another person, it says nothing about that person; it merely says something about our own need to be critical.

—Richard Carlson

The very essence of the creative is its novelty, and hence we have no standard by which to judge it.

—Carl Rogers

Criticism is an art form in its own right; that it exists to enhance the glory of the other arts; that it is an impossible activity; that it is necessary and vital to human self-understanding; that it can never die; that it is in perpetual danger of extinction.

—A. O. Scott

Write how you want, the critic shall show the world you could have written better.

—Oliver Goldsmith

Prolonged, indiscriminate reviewing of books is a quite exceptionally thankless, irritating and exhausting job. It not only involves praising trash but constantly inventing reactions towards books about which one has no spontaneous feeling whatever.

—George Orwell

Critics and scholars have always been suspicious of popular success. Often their suspicions are justified. In other cases, these suspicions are used as an excuse not to think.

—Stephen King

And here is the natural place to confess that any poet, dramatist, or novelist, who declares that he is indifferent whether or not people give him attention, is either an ass or a liar; anyhow, he is not natural.

—H. M. Tomlinson

Reviewing motion pictures, like reviewing new cars, may or may not be a useful consumer service (since people respond to a lighted screen in a dark room in the same secret and powerfully irrational way they respond to most sensory stimuli, I tend to think much of it beside the point, but never mind that); the review of pictures has been, as well, a traditional diversion for writers whose actuarial work is somewhere else.

—John Didion

The only people who find what they are looking for in life are the fault finders.

--Foster's Law

For every action there is an equal and opposite criticism.

—Unknown

Your critics have information that your friends are withholding.

—Mark Demoss

Making judgments on films is in many ways so peculiarly vaporous an occupation that the only question is why, beyond the obvious opportunities for a few lecture fees and a little careerism at a dispiritingly self-limiting level, anyone does it in the first place.

—Joan Didion

Time is the only critic without ambition.

—John Steinbeck

In most cases you just let the criticism go. Anyone who is good at what they do already is self-critical. I have a pretty good handle on when I've done as well as I am able or when I have fallen short of my own standards. While some criticism can be thoughtful and constructive, in the present atmosphere, much of it is merely snarky or just plain false.

—Bob Costas

The can say what they want [about my legacy]. They've been saying everything anyway. I don't give a hoot. I am who I am. I don't apologize for any of it. But I do hope that what I do in my art inspires people—that it makes 'em happy and makes 'em think.

—Cyndi Lauper

I wouldn't listen to the naysayers and haters. Who cares? The people who succeed are the people who don't quit.

—Cyndi Lauper

Every actor in his heart believes everything bad that's printed about him.  
--Orson Welles

To many people dramatic criticism must seem like an attempt to tattoo soap bubbles.

--John Mason Brown

To be able to write a play, for performance in a theater, a man must be sensitive, imaginative, naive, gullible, passionate; he must be something of an imbecile, something of a poet, something of a liar, something of a damn fool. He must be a chaser of wild geese, as well as of wild ducks. He must be prepared to make a public spectacle of himself. He must be independent and brave, and sure of himself and of the importance of his work; because if he isn't he will never survive the scorching blasts of derision that will probably greet his first efforts.

--Robert E. Sherwood

The (theater critic) whose reaction to a play is contained in such ejaculations as 'electrifying,' 'inspired,' 'a thunderbolt,' 'a mighty work,' 'a dismal bore,' may in each instance be right, but his being right does not by itself make him a critic. For these epithets only indicate effects: pleasure or displeasure. The true critic is concerned with causes, with the composition of human, social, formal substances which have produced the effect.

--Harold Clurman

I divide all productions into two categories: those I like and those I don't like. I have no other criterion.

--Anton Chekhov

When I attack a role, be it TV, film or stage, the first thing I say is, I don't want to know anything. If it's good I don't want to hear it; if it's bad I don't want to hear it. The only thing either thing can do is distract me. I like to stay focused.

--Cicely Tyson

A woman's flattery may inflate a man's head a little; but her criticism goes straight to his heart, and contracts it so that it can never again hold quite as much love for her.

--Helen Rowland

What is to give light must endure burning.

--Viktor Frankl

Do just once what others say you can't do, and you will never pay attention to their limitations again.  
— James R. Cook

Perfectionism is simply putting a limit on your future. When you have an idea of perfect in your mind, you open the door to constantly comparing what you have now with what you want. That type of self criticism is significantly deterring.

--John Eliot

There is only one justification for universities, as distinguished from trade schools. They must be centers of criticism.

--Robert M. Hutchins

A successful man is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks others have thrown at him.

—David Brinkley

You're going to have naysayers, and I'll tell you, you will throughout your life have people who will tell you you're not good enough. Maybe they're jealous. Maybe they think you aren't. Maybe they've had a bad day. But ultimately you have to believe in yourself.

—Meredith Vieira

Do what you feel in your heart to be right, for you'll be criticized anyway.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

You have got to prepare for a lifetime of the pillory, for whatever you do will be seen as wrong by total strangers, up until and including the time when whatever your child does will be seen as wrong by total strangers.

—Sonia Taitz

Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it.

—E. B. White

You can calculate the worth of a man by the number of his enemies, and the importance of a work of art by the harm that is spoken of it.

—Gustave Flaubert

If you accept the expectations of others, especially negative ones, then you never will change the outcome.

—Michael Jordan

Never react emotionally to criticism. Analyze yourself to determine whether it is justified. If it is, correct yourself. Otherwise, go on about your business.

—Norman Vincent Peale

There has already been published by the bucketfuls such brazen lies and utter fictions about me that I would long since have gone to my grave if I had let myself pay attention to that.

—Albert Einstein

Some people do really find fault like there's a reward for it.

—Zig Ziglar

There are two types of people who will tell you that you cannot make a difference in this world: those who are afraid to try and those who are afraid you will succeed.

—Ray Goforth

Writers shouldn't fear criticism. Instead, they should fear silence. Criticism is healthy. It gets people thinking about your work and, even better, it gets them talking and arguing. But as for silence—it is the greatest killer of writers. So if you hate a book and want to hurt it—don't talk about it. And if you hate my books—please, for God's sake, shout it from the hills!

—Robert Fanney

Your function as a critic is to show that it is really you yourself who should have written the book, if you had had the time, and since you hadn't you are glad that someone else had, although obviously it might have been done better.

—Stephen Potter

Accept criticism. If you do not offer your work for criticism and accept that criticism, meaning give it serious thought and attention, then you will never improve.

—Theodora Goss

What a sense of security in an old book which Time has criticized for us!

--James Russell Lowell

A good book deserves an active reading. The activity of reading does not stop with the work of understanding what a book says. It must be completed by the work of criticism, the work of judging. The undemanding reader fails to satisfy this requirement, probably even more than he fails to analyze and interpret. He not only makes no effort to understand; he also dismisses a book simply by putting it aside and forgetting it. Worse than faintly praising it, he damns it by giving it no critical consideration whatever.

—Mortimer J. Adler

Ultimately one has to pity these poor souls who know every secret about writing, directing, designing, producing, and acting but are stuck in those miserable day jobs writing reviews. Will somebody help them, please?

—David Ives

An ad for cigars appears in 100,000 newspapers; sales of that brand increase by 3% for a short time thereafter. A new play receives a viciously negative review in a theatrical journal that prints 500 copies; the playwright shoots himself. Who's the better writer?

—Jason Lutes

Most of the people dishing out judgment have no working experience of the theatre, have not written a professional play, a sketch, or even a joke; have never worked in a theatre, taken an acting class, or published any extended piece of work. They are creative virgins; everything they know about theatre is book-learned and second-hand.

—John Lahr

The lasting and ultimately most important reputation of a film is not based on reviews, but on what, if anything, people say about it over the years, and on how much affection for it they have.

—Stanley Kubrick

I do not mean to object to a thorough knowledge of the famous works we read. I object only to the interminable comments and bewildering criticisms that teach but one thing: there are as many opinions as there are men.

—Helen Keller

In literary criticism the critic has no choice but to make over the victim of his attention into something the size and shape of himself.

—John Steinbeck

The idea of some kind of objectively constant, universal literary value is seductive. It feels real. It feels like a stone cold fact that *In Search of Lost Time*, by Marcel Proust, is better than *A Shore Thing*, by Snooki. And it may be; Snooki definitely has more one-star reviews on Amazon. But if literary value is real, no one seems to be able to locate it or define it very well. We're increasingly adrift in a grey void of aesthetic relativism.

—Lev Grossman

The trade of critic, in literature, music, and the drama, is the most degraded of all trades.

—Mark Twain

To literary critics a book is assumed to be guilty until it proves itself innocent.

—Nelson Algren

My dis-interest in what people speak of as ‘women’s problems,’ ‘women’s literature.’ Have women a special sensibility? No. There are individuals uniquely talented & uniquely equipped to interpret the complex symbolism of the world but they are certainly not determined by gender. The very idea is astonishing. [...] Energy, talent, vision, insight, compassion, the ability to stay with a single work for long periods of time, the ability to be faithful (to both one’s writing and one’s beloved)--these have nothing to do with gender. [...] The sensibility of a Virginia Woolf, for instance. It’s her own, it’s uniquely hers. Not because she is a ‘female’ but because she is, or was, Virginia Woolf. Not more sensitive than Henry James or Proust or James Joyce, consequently not more ‘feminine’ in the narrow & misleading sense people use that term today....But then I suppose critics must have something to write about. [...]

—Joyce Carol Oates

To read a book well, one should read it as if one were writing it. Begin not by sitting on the bench among the judges but by standing in the dock with the criminal. Be his fellow worker, become his accomplice....But now, when the book is finished, the reader must leave the dock and mount the bench. He must cease to be the friend; he must become the judge....Every book...has the right to be judged by the best of its kind.

--Virginia Woolf

The chief difficulty with modern poetry is not so much the poetry itself as what is written about it. Poems are so often riddled by so many interpreters that nothing remains but the interpretation. The expositors tend to examine a poem as though it were a process instead of a product, an exercise rather than an experience.

--Louis Untermeyer

It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers.

—William Hazlitt

Poetry is better understood in the verse of the artist than in the prose of the critic.

--Matthew Arnold

I have spent a good many years since—too many, I think—being ashamed about what I write. I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction and poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. If you write (or paint or dance or sculpt or sing, I suppose), someone will try to make you feel lousy about it, that’s all. I’m not editorializing, just trying to give you the facts as I see them.

—Stephen King

There’s only one person a writer should listen to, pay any attention to. It’s not any damn critic. It’s the reader.

--William Styron



Painting, n. The art of protecting flat surfaces from the weather and exposing them to the critic.

--Ambrose Bierce

That which probably hears more stupidities than anything else in the world is a painting in a museum.

--Edmond and Jules  
de Goncourt

An artist who theorizes about his work is no longer artist but critic.

--H. G. Wells

Interpretation is the revenge of the intellectual upon art.

--Susan Sontag

Those trying to explain pictures are as a rule completely mistaken.

--Pablo Picasso

He that listens after what people say of him shall never have peace.

--Thomas Fuller

Sandwich every bit of criticism between two thick layers of praise.

--Mary Kay Ash

People try so hard to believe in leaders now, pitifully hard. But we no sooner get a popular reformer or politician or soldier or writer or philosopher—a Roosevelt, a Tolstoy, a Wood, a Shaw, a Nietzsche, than the cross-currents of criticism wash him away. My word, no man can stand prominence these days. It's the surest path to obscurity. People get sick of hearing the same name over and over.

--F. Scott Fitzgerald

Let the refining and improving of your own life keep you so busy that you have little time to criticize others.

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

She is a beautiful piece of broken pottery, put back together by her own hands. And a critical world judges her cracks while missing the beauty of how she made herself whole again.

—J. M. Storm

An audience is never wrong. An individual member of it may be an imbecile, but a thousand imbeciles together in the dark—that is critical genius.

—Billy Wilder

The self-centered man will always expect nothing but praise. He will hope and expect all incoming criticism to be mere self-projection from the critic because when you're self-centered, self-projection is all you can imagine one can do.

—Criss Jami

One of the surest marks of good character is a man's ability to accept personal criticism without feeling malice toward the one who gives it.

--Unknown

You should also know that there are external forces out there that are holding you back from really owning your success...I've experienced this firsthand. When I first joined Facebook, there was a well-read blog out in the Valley that devoted some incredibly serious pixels to trashing me... In the end, my best and only response was just to do my job and do it well. When Facebook's performance improved, the trash talk went away.

—Sheryl Sandberg

Criticism may not be agreeable but it is necessary. It fulfills the same function as pain in the human a body. It calls attention to an unhealthy state of things.

—Winston Churchill

Half of the secular unrest and dismal, profane sadness of modern society comes from the vain ideas that every man is bound to be a critic for life.

—Henry Van Dyke

Criticism and pessimism destroy families, undermine institutions of all kinds, defeat nearly everyone, and spread a shroud of gloom over entire nations.

--Gordon B. Hinckley

Rebuffs are merely rungs on the ladder of success.

--Robert Service

To succeed in life, it takes ignoring so many people who tell you it's not possible.

--Taylor Swift

The people who actually do things always suffer the slings and arrows of those who don't.

--Craig Bruce

Criticism is nothing more than other people's opinion.

—Clint Eastwood

Even the great writers of our time have tried and failed and failed some more. Vladimir Nabokov received a harsh rejection letter from Knopf upon submitting *Lolita*, which would later go on to sell fifty million copies. Sylvia Plath's first rejection letter for *The Bell Jar* read, 'There certainly isn't enough genuine talent for us to take notice.' Gertrude Stein received a cruel rejection letter that mocked her style. Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* earned him a sprawling rejection letter regarding the reasons he should simply give up writing all together. Tim Burton's first illustrated book, *The Giant Zlig*, got the thumbs down from Walt Disney Productions, and even Jack Kerouac's perennial *On the Road* received a particularly blunt rejection letter that simply read, 'I don't dig this one at all.' So even if you're an utterly fantastic writer who will be remembered for decades forthcoming, you'll still most likely receive a large dollop of criticism, rejection, and perhaps even mockery before you get there.

—Cody Delistraty

The actor Michael Chekhov (in his book *To the Actor*) went so far as to advise those who wish to be creative to remove overly negative people from their lives. Creativity requires being open to the new, the spontaneous, the uncertain—and doing that becomes impossible around those who are by nature scornful, shaming or defeatist.

—David Corbett

The actress America Ferrara has said that when accepting her 2007 Emmy for her role in 'Ugly Betty,' she heard a mean, scared voice inside her head telling her: 'Who do you think you are? You don't belong here. No one here thinks you deserve this.' Why work so hard, she wondered, if this internal critic could steal away the joy of success? Eight years of therapy ensued, with some positive results. But what finally helped her silence that caustic, undermining voice was a seemingly unrelated endeavor: training for a triathlon. The training proved incredibly challenging, but she developed a mantra: Every time the inner voice said, 'You can't,' she answered back, 'Yes, I can,' and just kept going.

—David Corbett

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.

—Christopher Perircone

The greater one's love for a person the less room for flattery. The proof of true love is to be unsparing in criticism.

—Molière

Generally speaking, when a woman offers unsolicited advice or tries to help a man, she has no idea of how critical and unloving she may sound to him.

—John Gray

Every race and every nation should be judged by the best it has been able to produce, not by the worst.

--James Weldon Johnson

I love America more than any other country in the world and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.

—James A. Baldwin

Human nature is so constituted, that all see and judge better in the affairs of other men than in their own.

—Terence

One of the surest marks of good character is a man's ability to accept personal criticism without feeling malice toward the one who gives it.

—Unknown

Critics have their purposes, and they're supposed to do what they do, but sometimes they get a little carried away with what they think someone should have done, rather than concerning themselves with what they did.

—Duke Ellington

When I read something saying I've not done anything as good as 'Catch-22' I'm tempted to reply, 'Who has?'

—Joseph Heller

Before criticizing your wife's faults, you must remember it may have been those very defects which prevented her from getting a better husband than the one she married.

—Unknown

Prospective brides ought to be told that while a man will stand a great deal of criticism of himself from a woman, he will not accept criticism of his friends from her. The first is merely a reflection on his temperament, the second on his judgment, which is a much more vital area.

--Sydney J. Harris

Some who have read the book, or at any rate have reviewed it, have found it boring, absurd, or contemptible, and I have no cause to complain, since I have similar opinions of their work.

—J. R. R. Tolkien

If you want to sacrifice the admiration of many men for the criticism of one, go ahead, get married.

—Katharine Hepburn

Comparison is a brutal assault upon oneself.

—Cameron Diaz

Curvy women are real women. Skinny women are real women. Women who have had boob jobs or lip enhancements or liposuction are still real women. Size 0 may make no sense mathematically, but a woman who wears that size is as real as the one who wears a size 16. What makes us ‘real’ people is not the shape of our flesh but our basic humanity. And we lose our humanity when we judge – not when we lose weight, gain weight, or make the intensely personal decision to undergo cosmetic surgery.

—Hugo Schwyzer

Being skinny is OK. Not being skinny is OK. Having curves is OK. Not having curves is OK. Bashing someone for their body type is not OK.

—Internet Meme

Beware, as long as you live, of judging people by appearances.

—Jean de la Fontaine

Rather than condemn Adele for a few extra pounds, we might just revel in her extraordinary music. (Does anyone care what Jay-Z weighs?)

--Debra Spar

I have learned not to read reviews. Period. And I hate reviewers. All of them, or at least all but two or three. Life is much simpler ignoring reviews and the nasty people who write them. Critics should find meaningful work.

—John Grisham

Scholarly acumen sharpens taste and judgment, but we must never mistake criticism for art. Intellectual analysis, however heady, will not nourish the soul.

--Robert McKee

On *THE AMBER SPYGLASS*:

If this plotline was a motorist, it would have been arrested for driving while intoxicated, if it had not perished in the horrible drunk accident where it went headlong over the cliff of the author’s preachy message, tumbled down the rocky hillside, crashed, and burned.

--John C. Wright

Women always feel like they're being stared at and judged, and rightfully so.  
—Rob Schneider

I would be wonderful with a 100-year moratorium on literature talk, if you shut down all literature departments, close the book reviews, ban the critics. The readers should be alone with the books, and if anyone dared to say anything about them, they would be shot or imprisoned right on the spot. Yes, shot. A 100-year moratorium on insufferable literary talk. You should let people fight with the books on their own and rediscover what they are and what they are not. Anything other than this talk.

—Philip Roth

All methods of criticism and teaching are bad if they encourage the persisting separation of student and literary work.

—Northrop Frye

There are two methods for the literary study of any book—the first being the study of its thought and emotion; the second only that of its workmanship. A student of literature should study some of the Bible from both points of view.

—Lafcadio Hearn

Hemingway's remarks are not literature.

—Gertrude Stein

The danger in reviewing and teaching literature for a living (is) you can develop a kind of knee-jerk superiority to the material you're 'decoding'

--Maureen Corrigan

In all the history of literature, Robert G. Ingersoll has never been excelled—except by only one man, and that man was—William Shakespeare. And yet there are times when Ingersoll even surpassed the immortal Bard. Yes, there are times when Ingersoll excelled even Shakespeare, in expressing human emotions, and in the use of language to express a thought, or to paint a picture. I say this fully conscious of my own admiration for that 'intellectual ocean, whose waves touched all the shores of thought.'

Ingersoll was perfection himself. Every word was properly used. Every sentence was perfectly formed. Every noun, every verb and every object was in its proper place. Every punctuation mark, every comma, every semicolon, and every period was expertly placed to separate and balance each sentence.

To read Ingersoll, it seems that every idea came properly clothed from his brain. Something rare indeed in the history of man's use of language in the expression of his thoughts. Every thought came from his brain with all the beauty and perfection of the full blown rose, with the velvety petals delicately touching each other.

Thoughts of diamonds and pearls, rubies and sapphires rolled off his tongue as if from an inexhaustible mine of precious stones.

Just as the cut of the diamond reveals the splendor of its brilliance, so the words and construction of the sentences gave a charm and beauty and eloquence to Ingersoll's thoughts.

Ingersoll had everything: The song of the skylark; the tenderness of the dove; the hiss of the snake; the bite of the tiger; the strength of the lion; and perhaps more significant was the fact that he used each of these qualities and attributes, in their proper place, and at their proper time. He knew when to embrace with the tenderness of affection, and to resist and denounce wickedness and tyranny with that power of denunciation which he, and he alone, knew how to express.

--Joseph Lewis

Marx was troubled by the question of why ancient Greek art retained an 'eternal charm', even though the social conditions which produced it had long passed; but how do we know that it will remain 'eternally' charming, since history has not yet ended? Let us imagine that by dint of some deft archaeological research we discovered a great deal more about what ancient Greek tragedy actually meant to its original audiences, recognized that these concerns were utterly remote from our own, and began to read the plays again in the light of this deepened knowledge. One result might be that we stopped enjoying them. We might come to see that we had enjoyed them previously because we were unwittingly reading them in the light of our own preoccupations; once this became less possible, the drama might cease to speak at all significantly to us.

The fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns—indeed that in one sense of 'our own concerns' we are incapable of doing anything else—might be one reason why certain works of literature seem to retain their value across the centuries. It may be, of course, that we still share many preoccupations with the work itself; but it may also be that people have not actually been valuing the 'same' work at all, even though they may think they have. 'Our' Homer is not identical with the Homer of the Middle Ages, nor 'our' Shakespeare with that of his contemporaries; it is rather that different historical periods have constructed a 'different' Homer and Shakespeare for their own purposes, and found in these texts elements to value or devalue, though not necessarily the same ones. All literary works, in other words, are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a 're-writing'. No work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new

groups of people without being changed, perhaps almost unrecognizably, in the process; and this is one reason why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair.

--Terry Eagleton

In reality there is no kind of evidence or argument by which one can show that Shakespeare, or any other writer, is 'good'. Nor is there any way of definitely proving that—for instance—Warwick Deeping is 'bad'. Ultimately there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is itself an index to majority opinion.

--George Orwell

It is a great thing to start life with a small number of really good books which are your very own. You may not appreciate them at first. You may pine for your novel of crude and unadulterated adventure. You may, and will, give it the preference when you can. But the dull days come, and the rainy days come, and always you are driven to fill up the chinks of your reading with the worthy books which wait so patiently for your notice. And then suddenly, on a day which marks an epoch in your life, you understand the difference. You see, like a flash, how the one stands for nothing, and the other for literature. From that day onwards you may return to your crudities, but at least you do so with some standard of comparison in your mind. You can never be the same as you were before. Then gradually the good thing becomes more dear to you; it builds itself up with your growing mind; it becomes a part of your better self, and so, at last, you can look, as I do now, at the old covers and love them for all that they have meant in the past.

--Arthur Conan Doyle

Nothing about a book is so unmistakable and so irreplaceable as the stamp of the cultured mind. I don't care what the story is about or what may be the momentary craze for books that appear to have been hammered out by the village blacksmith in a state of intoxication; the minute you get the easy touch of the real craftsman with centuries of civilization behind him, you get literature.

--Dorothy L. Sayers

To say Agatha Christie's character are cardboard cut-outs is an insult to cardboard.

--Ruth Rendell

As a book-worm I have got so used to lewd and lascivious books that I no longer notice them. The most virtuous lady novelists write things that would have made a bartender blush two decades ago. If I open a new novel and find nothing about copulation in it, I suspect at once that it is simply a reprint of some forgotten novel of 1885, with a new name. When I began reviewing, I used to send my review copies, after I had sweated through them, to the Y.M.C.A. By 1920 I was sending all discarded novels to a medical college.

--H. L. Mencken



In movie acting especially, there's a big element of luck. I've probably taken some roles I shouldn't have. It's taking a chance and rolling the dice. If something doesn't work, what are they going to do to you? All right, so you get bad reviews, people say you stink, then it's over with. I'm not impervious, but being an actor means that you have to be sensitive, and you also have to have the hide of a rhinoceros.

—Christopher Walken

These are books in which measurable cerebral activity is virtually absent.

—Joan Didion

It has no more real pretension to be called music than the jangling and clashing of gongs and other uneuphonious instruments with which the Chinaman, on the brow of the hill, fondly thought to scare away our English bluejackets.

—Musical World,  
(London, 1855)

This music is only half alive. How trite and feeble and unconventional the tunes are, how sentimental and vapid the harmonic treatment, under its disguise of fussy and futile counterpoint! Weep over the lifelessness of its melody and harmony, so derivative, so stale, so inexpressive.

—Lawrence Gilman,  
(1924)

Drama critics have to see so many horrible 'turkeys' in the course of the season that they may be excused if they occasionally forget their manners in print.

Brooks Atkinson wrote the shortest review on record. It read: 'Such-and-such opened last night. Why?' Another critic declared that the musical 'arrived in town after an insufficient number of postponements.' 'The picture version of Panama Hattie needs a certain something,' wrote David Lardner, and added defensively, 'Possibly burial.' Burton Rasco announced that a certain actress' performance 'sickened him.' The next day she sent him a bottle of castor oil.

Percy Hammond closed a review with 'I have not everything except the knees of the chorus girls, and nature anticipated me there.' David Lardner is credited with 'The plot was designed in a light vein that somehow became varicose.' A Detroit music reviewer contributed: 'The Blank Quartet played Brahms last night. Brahms lost.' Somebody met Georgia Kaufman after a particularly gruesome opening. 'What did you think of it?' ventured the stranger. 'It's not quite fair for me to say,' Kaufman assured him. 'I saw it under particularly unfortunate circumstances. The curtain was up.'

—Bennett Cerf

He [George S. Kaufman] keeps a close check on his productions, lest the actors let down, as they do so frequently in the long-run successes. Late in the run of *Of Thee I Sing* he sent a wire to one of the stars, William Gaxton, which read, 'Am watching show from rear of orchestra. Wish you were with me.'

—Bennett Cerf

In another hit, the leading actor began to change his part to suit himself. Kaufman [George S.] brought him back to scratch with a note that began, 'Your performance grows more scintillating every evening. Sorry I can't say the same about the the lines.'

—Bennett Cerf

Dean [James] scuffs his feet, he whirls, he pouts, he sputters, he leans against walls, he rolls his eyes, he swallows his words, he ambles slack-kneed—all like Marlon Brando used to do. Never have we seen a performer so clearly follow another's style....Whatever there might be a reasonable torment in this youngster is buried beneath the clumsy display.

—Bosley Crowther

I demand that my books be judged with utmost severity, by knowledgeable people who know the rules of grammar and of logic, and who will seek beneath the footsteps of my commas the lice of my thought in the head of my style.

—Louis Aragon

Dan Brown's heretical *The Da Vinci Code* is surely the most lucrative novel ever written by a borderline illiterate.

—David Bentley Hart

I learned a lot about critics, not to really take them too seriously about movies.

—Gina Gershon

You will never be pretty enough, skinny enough, smart enough, successful enough, or famous enough for the media.

--Brooke Stonex

People have no idea what a hard job it is for two writers to be friends. Sooner or later you have to talk about each other's work.

—Anatole Broyard

The dread of criticism is the death of genius.

—William Gilmore  
Simms

I'm not a critic, I'm just a worker. So, I'm always grateful for anything the critics say—good or bad.

—Mandy Patinkin

Lovers of literature will look for the remains of the golden treasure in that shipwreck on the bottom of the sea of criticism.

—Josef Skvorecky

Literary fiction by men tends to be received differently from literary fiction by women. When a well regarded male novelist...publishes a new novel...,publishers and readers automatically take the book seriously....It's packaged respectfully, reviewed widely, and marketed to people of all genders.

Books by...female colleagues tend to be relegated to...the 'lower shelf.' Their covers suggest domesticity, their spines are slimmer, and their contents are dismissed by some male readers as 'one soft, undifferentiated mass that has little to do with them.' The distinction is significant in many ways, particularly for sales: both men and women read books by men, but books by women are far more likely to be read by women than by men....a man she met at a party, after hearing her describe her novels— 'Sometimes they're about marriage. Families. Sex. Desire. Parents and children'—suggested that she talk instead to his wife, who read 'that kind of book.'

—Ruth Franklin

Professional reviewers really add nothing to the mix of book reviews. They are more critical and snobby than helpful. Their assessments are academia oriented and often with no reflection of how a book will be received by the man or woman scanning an airport book store.

Half the people I know rarely pay attention to book reviews.

As an author with a major publishing house, book reviews by the big cities papers are nice, but they review only a select number of all the great books published each year. They only have so much time and space. Why review a new, unknown author when the new Dean Koontz is out?

Blog reviewers are readers and they write reviews because they love it. Bravo for this trend.

— Rachel Hauck

Carl Sandburg was persuaded to attend the dress rehearsal of a very serious play by a very serious young dramatist, but unfortunately slept through a greater part of the performance. The outraged dramatist chided him later, 'How could you sleep when you knew how much I wanted your opinion?' Sandburg reminded him, 'Young man, sleep is an opinion.'

—Bennett Cerf

The screen had just started to talk when Miss [Tallullah] Bankhead interrupted in 1930.

—Richard Maney

An over-publicized authors submitted to a mass interview recently. When it was over, one critic said, 'He isn't quite as conceited as I'd been led to expect.' 'Yes,' said another, 'but he has so much to be modest about.'

—Bennett Cerf

Lunching at New York's Harvard Club, John Meeker recalled proudly, 'I was sitting at this very spot when the late Edmund Pearson, author of *Studies in Murder*, came up one day and asked to be introduced. Naturally I was flattered, but said, 'Are you sure you are not mistaking me for somebody else?' 'Not at all,' answered Pearson. 'You're the fellow I want all right. For the last three afternoons in succession I've seen you sound asleep in that chair with a copy of my book open on your lap. What's it worth it to you, young man, to switch to something else?'

—Bennett Cerf

I haven't any right to criticize books, and I don't do it except when I hate them. I often want to criticize Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader; and therefore I have to stop every time I begin. Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice* I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin-bone.

--Mark Twain

Do your thing and don't care if they like it.

—Tina Fey

A lot of the people who read a bestselling novel, for example, do not read much other fiction. By contrast, the audience for an obscure novel is largely composed of people who read a lot. That means the least popular books are judged by people who have the highest standards, while the most popular are judged by people who literally do not know any better. An American who read just one book this year was disproportionately likely to have read 'The Lost Symbol', by Dan Brown. He almost certainly liked it.

--The Economist

Reading Stephen King's book, *On Writing*, was like being cornered and forced to have a long, drawn out mental enema.

—Mary Garden

I have the reputation for having read all of Henry James, which would argue a misspent youth and middle age.

—James Thurber

Mr. Thurber accomplishes something which very few writers do. He has a style combining accuracy, liveliness and quiet—qualities which do not often go together. He has a sense of the wildly incredible things that happen to human beings who think all the time that they are acting with the greatest prudence and common sense. He has you hypnotized. You believe that people really are like the people he writes about and draws. And looking back on it, you see no reason to change your mind. They are.

—Gilbert Seldes

Mr. Thurber's humor grows almost entirely out of the action of a very keen and inordinately logical mind when confronted with a world which doesn't make sense. The Thurber method is a natural result of extreme reasonableness in an unreasonable world, and an acute appreciation of the fact that things don't make sense.

—Richard Lockridge

Thurber is a funny man, no doubt of it; he is also one of the most discerningly and disturbingly bitter. He has a peculiar brand of wisdom not untouched with madness. Long may he flourish.

—Stanley Walker

It's because [Heath] Ledger's performance [in the *Dark Knight*] is so intense and so lasting; it's because despite the insane mask, it's a subtle, nuanced piece of acting so powerful it banishes all memories of the handsome Aussie behind it. The makeup seems to have liberated him: He's supple of body, expressive with only his eyes, and his voice has undulations of irony and mockery and psychopathology to it. He's an essay—in a way he's never before been, playing straight-faced characters—in pure charisma.

—Stephen Hunter

The average life of the movie is till it reaches the critic.

—Will Rogers

Since I became a novelist I have discovered that I am biased. Either I think a new novel is worse than mine and I don't like it, or I suspect it is better than my novels and I don't like it.

—Umberto Eco

Criticism is to poetry as air is to a noise: it allows it to be heard; and even if we can't see it or feel it, it is there, shaping how we hear.

—Annie Finch

I was just contemplating how some gasoline and a match would improve this painting.

—Penelope Douglas

If you submit much, at some point you've gotten a rejection that said your piece was not quite right for a particular publication. I have gotten many of these, and here's how I used to read those letters: 'We hate you. We hate you so much. We can't believe you had the gall to submit to us. We'd have responded to your submission sooner, but we were too busy laughing our heads off.' Then I became the editor of a small Jewish newspaper, and I started to receive queries and completed articles that were way outside the purview of what we publish, necessitating that I reject them. At no point did I hate the person who submitted the inappropriate piece, nor did I spend any time laughing my head off, because I am not 9.

—Dani Shapiro

This poem will never reach its destination. (On Rousseau's *Ode To Posterity*)

--Voltaire

Once in a golden hour  
I cast to earth a seed.  
Up there came a flower,  
The people said, a weed.

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

There are two ways to dislike poetry: One is to dislike it; the other is to read Pope.

—Oscar Wilde

Works of art are of an infinite solitude, and no means of approach is so useless as criticism. Only love can touch and hold them and be fair to them.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Criticism is like politics: if you don't make your own you are by default accepting the status quo and are finally yourself responsible for whatever the status quo does to you.

—Annie Finch

If I'm still wistful about *On the Road*, I look on the rest of the Kerouac oeuvre—the poems, the poems!—in horror. Read *Satori in Paris* lately? But if I had never read Jack Kerouac's horrendous poems, I never would have had the guts to write horrendous poems myself. I never would have signed up for Mrs. Safford's poetry class the spring of junior year, which led me to poetry readings, which introduced me to bad red wine, and after that it's all just one big blurry condemned path to journalism and San Francisco.

—Sarah Vowell

I am the best and sharpest critic of my own work. I know myself what is and what is not well written.

—Anne Frank

Your first audience, and your best critic, is yourself...if you're honest.

—Tom Clancy

The critics can make fun of Barbara Cartland. I was quite amused by the critic who once called me 'an animated meringue.' But they can't get away from the fact that I know what women want—and that's to be flung across a man's saddle, or into the long grass by a loving husband.

—Barbara Cartland

Russia is a country that is burying their troubles. Your criticism is your epitaph. You simply say your say and then you are through.

—Will Rogers

It is impossible to discourage the real writers—they don't give a damn what you say, they're going to write.

—Sinclair Lewis

I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. For the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works.

—Samuel Johnson

It was one of the dullest speeches I ever heard. The Agee woman told us for three quarters of an hour how she came to write her beastly book, when a simple apology was all that was required.

—P. G. Wodehouse

To you I am neither man nor woman. I come before you as an author only. It is the sole standard by which you have a right to judge me—the sole ground on which I accept your judgment.

—Charlotte Bronte

If you are not afraid of the voices inside you, you will not fear the critics outside you.

—Natalie Goldberg

A person who publishes a book willfully appears before the populace with his pants down. If it is a good book nothing can hurt him. If it is a bad book nothing can help him.

—Edna St. Vincent  
Millay

All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.

—Internet Meme

When you write, you can hide behind your words. When you talk, you are up front, like the clown in the midway booth; and passersby can bean you with a ball.

—Willard R. Espy

Where do you think my new novel is? In the waste basket. I can see myself that it's no good on earth, and when a loving author realizes this, what would be the judgment of a critical public?

—Jean Webster

The only happy author in this world is he who is below the care of reputation.

--Washington Irving

...one of the worst pieces in the history of the alphabet.

—Ethan Mordden

Do not start me on *The Da Vinci Code* ... a novel so bad that it gives bad novels a bad name.

—Salman Rushdie

I hate orthodox criticism. I don't mean great criticism, like that of Matthew Arnold and others, but the usual small niggling, fussy-mussy criticism, which thinks it can improve people by telling them where they are wrong, and results only in putting them in straitjackets of hesitancy and self-consciousness, and weazening all vision and bravery.

...I hate it because of all the potentially shining, gentle, gifted people of all ages, that it snuffs out every year. It is a murderer of talent. And because the most modest and sensitive people are the most talented, having the most imagination and sympathy, these are the very first ones to get killed off. It is the brutal egotists that survive.

—Brenda Ueland

I do not wish to comment on the work; if it does not speak for itself, it is a failure.

—George Orwell

A writer is the worst judge of his own work.

—Ilsa J. Bick

[On Henry James] His polished, pointless, uninteresting stories about the upper social classes of England make one blush to admit that he was once an American.

—Theodore Roosevelt

When you go in search of honey, you must expect to be stung by bees.

—Joseph Joubert



Beware of those who criticize you when you deserve some praise for an achievement, for it is they who secretly desire to be worshiped.

—Suzy Kassem

A non-doer is very often a critic—that is, someone who sits back and watches doers, and then waxes philosophically about how the doers are doing. It's easy to be a critic, but being a doer requires effort, risk, and change.

—Dr. Wayne W. Dyer