

TITLE: CRI-TIK

PLAYWRIGHT: A. S. McPHIE

CHARACTERS:

The Critic
The Friend

The action takes place in the Critic's drawing room, late one night.

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THE CRITIC IS RETURNING HOME LATE ONE NIGHT WITH A FRIEND, HE IS CARRYING A LARGE PILE OF BOOKS AND HIS FRIEND OPENS THE DOOR FOR HIM INTO HIS DRAWING ROOM, WHERE HE DOES HIS WRITING

The Critic: (ENTERING) Thanks

The Friend: Are you right there?

The Critic: Yeah it's right, I've got 'em (PLACES THE BOOKS ON HIS DESK) just a bit awkward though but that's got 'em. Thanks. (TURNING TO HER) Anyway do you want that coffee now?

The Friend: (GLANCING AT HER WATCH) Well it's pretty late, but since I've come here I might as well have it

The Critic: I've got my percolator on, so I'll just go and get them then (WALKS ACROSS TO EXIT THROUGH THE DOOR THEY CAME IN THEN STOPS HALFWAY ACROSS AND TURNS TO HER) Ah white with two sugars?

The Friend: That's right

HE EXITS, SHE FLICKS THROUGH SOME OF THE BOOKS ON HIS DESK, HE RETURNS SHORTLY WITH THE COFFEE

The Critic: Here you are (PASSING IT TO HER)

The Friend: Thanks (SIPS) mmmm this is good

The Critic: Do you want a seat (INDICATES TO A LOUNGE CHAIR)

The Friend: Thanks (SITS IN IT) Tell me something Michael, why did you pick such an odd time to invite me out for dinner, and at such short notice?

The Critic: Well (HE SITS ON HIS DESK) I knew you weren't doing anything to-night and I thought a quiet dinner between us would be nice

The Friend: But why so late?

The Critic: Well actually I'd just come from a play when I rang you, it was a spur of the moment decision really - I didn't want to finish the night so early

The Friend: I see. It must have been a short play?

The Critic: No, it was a full length play but I left after the first act

The Friend: You left after the first act? Why?

The Critic: Oh, it was a boring play and I didn't like it anyway

The Friend: This isn't one that you have to write up for the paper is it?

The Critic: Yes

The Friend: But how can you, you left after the first act?

The Critic: That doesn't matter. I got the general gist of the play. I think I know what I'm going to put. And besides, I always said that what they can't establish in the first act they can't establish in the rest of the play.

The Friend: But that's a bit unfair isn't it?, writing on them when you haven't even seen their play

The Critic: No, not really, like I said, I know enough from what I saw to be able to write a decent review of them

The Friend: So what are you going to put then?

The Critic: Um, I don't know

The Friend: You see, there you are

The Critic: No, I know what to write. I just don't know which parts of it to write

The Friend: There's a difference?

The Critic: Yes, a big difference, Look why don't you stick 'round and help us do it?

The Friend: No, I can't, it is really late, and besides I wasn't even there

The Critic: That doesn't matter. Oh come on Jenny give us a hand - it'll be fun. A problem shared is a problem halved, eh

The Friend: So you admit to it being a problem

The Critic: Yes, no, well I mean writing it's no problem, it's just that it has to be done by twelve to be in tomorrow's paper, come on, that's only half an hour

The Friend: But I don't know the first thing about writing play reviews

The Critic: That doesn't matter. It's just like any other job. The rules are simple, although they vary a bit with each play, but for this one I have to write about two hundred and fifty words, get it done and in the office by midnight, and if possible submit a photo from the play itself as well

The Friend: Have you got a photo?

The Critic: No, but that's not so important. Come on Jenny whatdya say?

The Friend: Well it is Saturday tomorrow so I won't be working

The Critic: Come on, be a darling

The Friend: Oh, alright

The Critic: Good. Righto then let's start. (HE GOES BEHIND THE DESK, SITS AT THE CHAIR, AND GETS OUT A PEN AND SOME PAPER FROM A DRAWER)

The Friend: So, what are you going to say?

The Critic: What are we going to say

The Friend: Okay, what are we going to say?

The Critic: Well, I'm not really sure. But when in doubt I always start off with some of the facts about the play, that usually helps get my mind working

The Friend: What do you mean, the facts about it?

The Critic: Well, the title of the play, who's putting it on, how long's it on for, who's in it, you know, that sort of stuff

The Friend: Right, what was the play then?

The Critic: Um, I don't....., hang on where's that programme (LOOKING AROUND ON THE DESK, FINDS IT) ahr, here it is, (LOOKING AT IT) ah yes King Lear

The Friend: By William Shakespeare?

The Critic: (LOOKING ON THE PROGRAMME) Ah, er, yes - William Shakespeare did it. So then, how shall I start off. Um I know, (WRITING, AND READING ALOUD AS HE DOES FOR THE REST OF THE REVIEW) "The Vacy Street Theatre Company's production of Shakespeare's King Lear"

The Friend: Put "Shakespeare's classic King Lear"

The Critic: Classic?

The Friend: Well it is a well known play

The Critic: Oh it is, righto, "Shakespeare's classic King Lear began last night", you see it was the opening night, "with a full house giving it a warm reception."

The Friend: How do you know they gave it a warm reception? You weren't there at the end

The Critic: No, but they were all pretty friendly at the start, so I imagine they clapped at the end. Anyway that's not important though. Um, da, dada, ah "warm reception. The play, which continues until (LOOKS AT PROGRAMME) August tenth, starred (LOOKS AT PROGRAMME) Michael Phipps in the, ahr (LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT WORD), title role."

The Friend: Can I have a look at the programme?

The Critic: Sure (PASSES IT TO HER) "He was well supported by (THINKING) ah, Michelle Beard who played, ah (THINKING) Desdemona"

The Friend: Cordelia

The Critic: What?

The Friend: It's Cordelia, not Desdemona

The Critic: Oh, whoops, right, thanks. "Who played Cordelia as well as the Fool." Now comes the fun part

The Friend: What's that?

The Critic: Well now that I've said a little bit about the facts I've got to say something about the quality of the production

The Friend: And what are you going to say about that?

The Critic: I dunno

The Friend: This'll take ages

The Critic: Not really, you see we've already done about (DOES A QUICK COUNT) fifty words. We're about one fifth of the way there

The Friend: I know, why don't we say things like, "The Actors and Actresses all tried very hard and put in a generally good production. Their efforts were well spent, which showed itself particularly in the quality of the acting which....."

The Critic: (CUTS IN) Oh come off it, I can't say that

The Friend: Why not?

The Critic: Well for a start it's untrue, the acting wasn't that unreal, especially that bloke playing that King. I mean at the start he just sat there speaking really slowly, like he was petrified of the audience or had forgotten what his next lines were or something. And besides, when I write this I've got my image to consider and the respect of my peers as well

The Friend: What do you mean

The Critic: Well if I wrote something as simple as that and something in favour of the play like that, they'd all think I was weak and didn't know what I was on about. You see there's another rule that I didn't tell you about

The Friend: And what's that?

The Critic: That is you've got to make it complex, and you've got to use esoteric words, like esoteric. And then everyone starts falling around you in praise, calling you a genius

The Friend: Because they don't know what you're on about?

The Critic: (STOPS, THINKS) Yes, that's right

The Friend: That seems rather silly don't you think?

The Critic: No, not really, it works

The Friend: Where'd you get that idea from anyway

The Critic: There was a scientist I knew, and he told me, never say one plus one equals two, but say, sine squared theta plus cos squared theta plus the natural log of e equals the sum of the infinite geometric series from n equals zero to infinity of one over two to the power of n

The Friend: (SHOCKED) Right

The Critic: But that's not the only reason I can't write what you said, you see I've got to take a strong view, nobody likes a reviewer that aimlessly agrees with what he saw, even if what he saw was good

The Friend: Well perhaps. But why don't you just write what you think

The Critic: Well I will. Anyway we've got two hundred words, and (LOOKING AT WATCH) twenty minutes to go. So this is what I'll put

THE FRIEND GETS UP AND STANDS NEXT TO THE DESK AND WATCHES

The Critic: "Although Phipps and Beard gave only mediocre performances they starred as a result of the less than average performances put in by the other players, especially (THINKS FOR THE NAME) David Morecome as Edward....."

The Friend: (CUTS IN) Edgar

The Critic: Edgar was it, righto, "David Morecombe as Edgar, who's all-too-often frequent lapse of memory coupled by his delivery, when he did remember his lines, which ranged from a barely audible stutter to a loud firing of words with machine-gun speed, made it very difficult to understand what was said and follow the continuity of the play."

The Friend: That's not very nice you know

The Critic: (KEENLY) I know

The Friend: But you're not going to leave it like that?

The Critic: Yes, why not?

The Friend: Well how do you think poor old David Morecombe is going to feel after reading that?

The Critic: I don't know, and I don't care. He's a big boy now, and once he gets up there he and everyone else is open to all sorts of criticism, they've got to learn to handle it. And besides, it's kinda fun writing whatever you like

SHE LOOKS AWAY, NOT TOO IMPRESSED

The Critic: Now where was I, ah yes, "The rest of the cast were of course no exception, presenting their characters as hard and wooden, which showed no understanding of the subtlety and depth with which Shakes....", hang on, what was that name they had for him, the bird, or the bored, or something?

The Friend: The Bard

The Critic: Year that's it. Is that a b, a, double r, e, d?

The Friend: No, b, a, r, d

The Critic: Ohr, that's right. Boy you must think I don't know much about plays

SHE LOOKS AWAY, SMILING, NOT ANSWERING

The Critic: Anyway, "with which the Bard had endowed his characters." Now for something about the set, ah, "The set was very bleak, plain and open, it showed no intricacies or great depth which one would expect to have as being reflective of the characters who's depth and fertility was in no way symbolised by the barren set."

The Friend: Aren't you going to say anything in favour of the production?

The Critic: Yes, this is it. "The most positive aspect of the play was it's ending; with the possible exception of the use of the strobe light in the storm scene, which superbly, in an omnipotent didactic manner, symbolised the on-again off-again relationship of the King with the Fool." And then to sum it all up, "But in an overview as an overall play, the Vacy Street Theatre Company's production of King Lear was a (LOOKS UP IN THE AIR, THINKS, GRABS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES INTO HIS HEAD) water weak wash out." There, easy wasn't it?

The Friend: And you're really going to publish that?

The Critic: Yes, (LOOKS AT WATCH) how about that, it's ten to twelve and we finished, it's even long enough and everything. Whatdya reckon? It's pretty good isn't it?

The Friend: Um, I think it's time I was going Michael

The Critic: Hmm, going? Oh yes, I better go too and get this down to the paper

THEY STAND AND WALK TOWARDS THE DOOR

The Critic: Well thanks for your help with this Jenny

The Friend: (SERIOUSLY) Don't mention it.

THEY EXIT

- FINITO -