ABSTRACT

THE PROGRAM CRITICISM OF TWENTY-ONE LEADING TELEVISION COLUMNISTS, SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER, 1961

by Jules Rossman

This thesis is intended to determine the amount and the nature of the program criticism found in the daily columns of our leading newspapers. To obtain an adequate sampling of reviews, the study analyzed the daily columns from September through November, 1961, which were written by twenty-one television columnists representing the largest circulated newspapers in nine top television markets.

Questions to be answered include the number of reviews, the variety of reviewing, amount of critical agreement, and the adherence of the reviewing itself to the principles of good criticism.

Before analyzing content the study briefly traces the history of broadcast criticism with emphasis on the newspaper column. The introductory chapters also explore the meaning and purpose of criticism as they relate to the arts of drama, literature, and television. Criteria of good criticism are formulated to be used in evaluating the reviews of those columnists selected for special study.

The first part of the analysis surveys the overall amount and variety of program reviewing by all twenty-one columnists. It was found that a majority of the columnists devoted less than 50% of their

columns to specific program review of any length and reviewed less than five programs a week. The markets receiving the least amount of reviewing were Detroit, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Most critics did not review a majority of the new series, and some critics almost completely overlooked certain program categories. As a result, in some markets, notably Detroit, and Pittsburgh, from 25-100% of the programs in certain categories did not receive a single review in three months. The type of program most frequently reviewed by all critics was the drama, with the one-time musical or variety special being the most overlooked.

Critical agreement on programs viewed by at least a majority of the twenty-one critics was 68%. The relation between critical agreement and program success, however, is dubious. Many shows still being seen were reviewed unfavorably, while many programs which were favorably reviewed have since expired.

The six critics whose columns showed the greatest number and variety of program reviews are Harry Harris, Robert J. Williams, Dwight Newton, Harriet Van Horne, Jack Gould, and Jack O'Brian. The second part of the analysis studies their writing for adherence to the principles of good criticism.

It was found that a majority of their reviews are truly critical and contain definite standards which all six critics utilize in judging programs. These standards were most evident and consistent in reviewing drama, detective-western-adventure, and public affairs programs. Standards for comedy were difficult to find and inconsistent. Some of the reviewing reflected the critic's personal bias toward or against the comic involved and his material. Consequently, the amount of agreement

was considerably higher for drama and public affairs than it was for comedy.

The main standard used in judging drama and public affairs programs was credibility in plot and characterization. The elements that destroy credibility were illustrated throughout the reviews. In public affairs and documentary the limited number of reviews indicated standards of truthful balanced presentation of issues or personalities and visual editorializing rather than personal commentary.

In summary, a study of the six selected critics showed that it is possible for a daily television critic to be both prolific and professionally critical in his reviewing. The fifteen other columnists surveyed were certainly not prolific enough and must be studied further to determine whether they are critics at all or mere journalistic reviewers.

THE PROGRAM CRITICISM OF TWENTY-ONE LEADING TELEVISION COLUMNISTS, SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER, 1961

By

Jules Rossman

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Radio and Television

1964

Approved _____
Major Professor

PREFACE

This study developed from an earlier paper which noted the large amount of subjective, sociological, and general criticism of television found in many publications and the notable lack of specific program criticism. An examination of graduate theses in broadcasting up through 1962 also revealed that no study had yet been made on the nature and extent of specific program criticism in the daily newspaper.

It is hoped that this thesis contributes to our knowledge of the kind of program criticism being written by our leading television columnists, what they review, and how well they are performing the function of critics. I wish to thank Dr. Walter Emery for the initial impetus in promoting this thesis from the idea of the first paper, and Professor Arthur Weld Jr. for his editorial comments and suggestions. I also wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the Reference Department at the Michigan State University Library in obtaining all necessary microfilms as quickly as possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

No medium of mass communication has had to grow up with the excitement, the rapidity, and the pervasive quality that have characterized the growth of television. Consequently, no other modern communications "baby" has been subject to more commentary and criticism even before it had a chance to leave its cradle and take its first few steps toward maturity.

The history of television's growth compared with other media and other industries is indeed an impressive one. In 1946 television programs were being transmitted in this country by seven commercial stations[1] and were being received in only 8,000 American homes, a mere .02% of all homes in the United States. Today, the medium reaches 51.3 million homes for a saturation of 92% of the total homes in the United States.[2] Commercial stations on the air now total 532 with hundreds of applications still to be processed.[3]

A comparison of television's growth with that of other media and industries can be seen from the results of a study which was conducted by the Columbia Broadcasting System. The study determined how long it took certain industries to put their products in 34 million homes in the United States. The figures dramatically illustrate both television's

---

[1] Television Factbook, 1962-63 Edition, p. 32-A.

[2] Broadcasting Yearbook, 1964, p. 14.

[3] Broadcasting, September 14, 1964, p. 107.

growth and its importance to the American home as compared with those of other products.

> It took the telephone 80 years, the automobile 49 years, the washing machine 47 years, the refrigerator 37 years, radio 25 years and television 10 years . . .[4]

Although both radio and television spread more rapidly than the telephone, television surpassed even radio as an important item in the home according to the figures. Considering the fact that television was an extension of radio, and considering the price differential between a radio and a television set, this figure is even more impressive as a testimony to television's popularity.

The new medium's popularity is also emphasized by a Roper Poll which asked the question, "Suppose you could continue to have only one of the following- radio-television-newspapers-or magazines, which one would you prefer?" Forty-two percent preferred television, 32% preferred newspapers, 19% preferred radio, and only 4% preferred magazines.[5]

Television's powerful combination of sight and sound certainly made it the most dynamic disseminator yet of news, information, education, and entertainment. But television also had something else. Its intimate closeup quality made it a natural medium for personal salesmanship on a mass appeal level. Advertisers were soon to realize its potentialities for selling their products with new imaginative and exciting techniques. From the beginning those who jumped on the TV saleswagon reaped profitable rewards.

---

[4]Wilbur Schramm, Responsibility in Mass Communications (New York: Harper Bros., 1957) p. 23.

[5]Edward Fischer, The Screen Arts (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960) p. 126. (No date of poll given.)

Through an intensive advertising campaign, the Dow Chemical Company was able to raise its sale of Saran Wrap from 20,000 to 600,000 cases a month.[6] The manufacturers of Marlboro Cigarettes, switching to a masculine appeal campaign, characterized by the famous "television tattoo," had trouble meeting the demand.[7] The Revlon Company, through sponsorship of a television quiz program, became the largest producer of cosmetics.[8] These are just several of the many outstanding sponsor success stories that are an impressive part of television's history and development. In 1962, television time sales totaled $1,303,500,000, with the figure increasing every year.[9]

As a medium of entertainment television has become the nation's number one producer of shows, new talent, and new names in every field of show business. Television stars are in demand for motion pictures and the legitimate theatre. The biggest names in Hollywood and Broadway grace the television screen every night of the week, providing hour upon hour of free entertainment for the world's largest audience. Program trends and audience taste have changed from the wrestling matches and old films of television's earliest days, through the golden age of "live" drama and comedy specials of the mid-fifties, to the situation comedy, Westerns and detective stories of today. The amount of television viewing time, however, keeps steadily increasing. Today, the average television family spends 6 hours and 9 minutes a day in front of the

---

[6]Robert C. O'Hara, Media for the Millions (New York: Random House, 1961) p. 58.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Broadcasting Yearbook, 1964, p. 8.

television set, regardless of the fare being offered.[10]

As television has pervaded the home, disseminating information, culture, entertainment, and education, and as it has grown into a profitable industry, there has been an increasing concern with its function in our society as a communicator of ideas, as a new developing art form, and as a reflection of and contributor to our culture. From its very beginning television has been subjected to varied and severe criticism and commentary.

EVOLUTION OF CRITICISM

As early as 1949 television programming was already being referred to as a "Time Trap for Children,"[11] by Norman Cousins of the Saturday Review. Jack Gould, TV critic of the New York Times called television "A Cut Rate Nickelodeon." In an article titled, "The Low State of TV," Gould stated:

> TV must take heed. It's blindly and shortsightedly selling its ultimate greatness for a batch of synthetic popularity ratings that are boring into TV's foundations like termites. It's caught on the old radio treadmill of repetition and imitation in the wan and futile hope that it need not face up to the realities that lie ahead.[12]

Equally critical of television in 1950 was John Crosby, the noted columnist of the New York Herald Tribune. In an article titled, "Seven Deadly Sins of the Air," Crosby put his finger on the pulse of television's potential, its function, and its development as a new form

---

[10] Ibid.

[11] Norman Cousins, "The Time Trap," Saturday Review, XXXII (December 24, 1949) p. 52.

[12] Jack Gould, "The Low State of TV," New York Times (October 19, 1952) sec. 2, p. 13.

of art.

> Every TV program will inform or educate, or morally elevate or emotionally stimulate a lot of people, or it will deceive or degrade or hypnotize them. It won't leave them unscathed . . . it will do a great many people some good or it will do a great many people some harm . . . In order to do this TV must develop some standards of personal excellence. If TV is ever to amount to anything of cultural importance it should rid itself of the idea that it's the motion picture industry, the book business, or the stage. It's a big new art form of its own.[13]

Thus, early in its infancy, while still struggling to find an identity of its own, television was already being criticized on its programming, its policies, its program content and its political socio-cultural effects.

Not even radio in all the years of its development was subjected to the amount of criticism that was to face the television industry. A short review of the evolution of broadcast criticism in general reveals that serious radio criticism was just beginning to evolve when television arrived to dominate the picture.

The need for good professional broadcast criticism was not taken seriously until radio's golden days of the late twenties and early thirties. Earliest accounts of broadcast commentary show a concern with the technical aspects of the medium with no program commentary at all. The only broadcast commentary found in 1924 was that which was published in some 20 radio periodicals, all of a technical nature.[14]

By the end of 1924, however, an increasing public interest in radio programming caused the development of two innovations in broadcast

---

[13] John Crosby, "Seven Deadly Sins of the Air," Life, XXXI (November 6, 1950) pp. 147-148+.

[14] Ralph Lewis Smith, A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the United States 1920-1955 (Unpublished University of Wisconsin Doctoral Dissertation, 1959) p. 4.

commentary. Station program logs began to appear in fifty newspapers across the country.[15] The mid-twenties also saw the emergence of a regular radio column printed alongside the station log. Public curiosity began to demand news about the many radio personalities who were beginning to make their marks in broadcasting; thus, a "chit-chat" type of promotional column was born. The public's appetite for gossip was filled with personality pieces, interviews, and press-agent-planted items which made for popular reading and good circulation. This breezy non-critical style of writing is used by many columnists today, either as a complete format or in combination with review and commentary. News and promotion are still an integral part of the modern broadcast page.

With the emergence of worthwhile programs, publishers began to be convinced that a department of serious review and criticism was necessary. Newspapers, like the Herald Tribune, Daily News, and the Christian Science Monitor, were among the first to pioneer in serious broadcast criticism.

The first real radio critic was Raymond Francis Yates of the Herald Tribune. In 1924 he began to evaluate programs in his column, "Last Night on the Air," under the byline, "The Pioneer."[16] The column was continued by Stuart Hawkins in 1926, but was dropped after a short time and not resumed until John Crosby began writing in 1946.

These first beginnings of professional program criticism were temporarily ended beginning in the early thirties and lasting until the introduction of television in the early forties. The reason for

---

[15] Ibid., p. 6.

[16] Ibid., p. 14.

this stoppage was the growth of commercial sponsorship of radio. Newspapers, fearful of radio's competition for the advertising dollar, underplayed radio's importance to the point of almost completely ignoring its existence. A fear by the newspaper owner of losing an advertiser's dollar through bad review of his sponsored radio program further weakened the critic's position.

Another contributory factor was radio's immediacy of news coverage, a competitive sore spot with the newspaper. Thus, what there was of broadcast criticism in a professional sense had died by the early thirties and gave way to lay criticism, which was expressed mostly by letters to the editor and the networks.

As radio matured during the pre-War days of the mid-thirties, the need for professional criticism was expressed in many quarters. In 1936 Heywood Broun stated:

> . . . the development of the medium lags. Radio needs critics. Fan letters do not suffice.[17]

The same thoughts were expressed in 1940 by Robert J. Landry, radio editor of Variety.

> I urge the point that radio channels are so important to democracy that as a nation we would be much better off to have, rather than not have, a wide-spread corps of professional radio watchers.[18]

The dearth of lay criticism of the thirties and early forties was attacked by Max Wylie in his forward to Best Broadcasts of 1939-1940:

---

[17]Heywood Broun, "Radio," Nation, (May 27, 1936) p. 686.

[18]Robert J. Landry, "Wanted Radio Critics," Public Opinion Quarterly, IV (December, 1940) p. 620.

> Radio bears much skwawking . . . but thus far its millions of listeners have not yielded a true critic of the industry . . . [broadcasting] can never reach its peak of self realization without the assistance of intelligent and sympathetic public review. . . .[19]

Thus by the end of the Second World War, television appeared on the scene just in time to meet the growing demand for the type of professional broadcast criticism that had died twenty years before and was due for a rebirth. This rebirth arrived when John Crosby, ushered in a new modern era of serious criticism of all aspects of the broadcasting industry.

By the time Crosby began his column, however, several factors had contributed towards this new potentiality for criticism, specifically in the newspaper, which previously had sounded criticism's death knell by its fear of radio competition.

The number of newspaper owners had decreased, remaining owners were more prosperous, more liberal toward broadcasting, and less concerned about broadcasting's competition for the advertising dollar. Many newspapers were actively engaged in broadcasting itself, having acquired television, radio and FM licenses.

Furthermore, the concern about broadcast news was alleviated when surveys showed that most people looked to broadcasting for the headlines, but still relied on the daily newspaper for the details behind the story.

The issuance of the 1946 Blue Book and the post-War rush for TV and FM stations made the FCC and the public more concerned about broadcasting's performance, and its fulfillment of its functions in meeting

---

[19] Max Wylie, Best Broadcasts of 1939-1940, (New York: 1940) pp. vi-vii.

the public interest.

An interest in station's programming was vitally renewed and the professional critic assumed a more important role.

Magazines began taking broadcasting more seriously as a subject for commentary and review. Such publications as the Saturday Review, the New Republic, and The Nation, began to feature regular broadcast writers. In 1944 Jack Gould began his career as TV critic of the New York Times.

Public demand for news about TV personalities also made the TV columnists a must for major newspapers. From 1946-1955 almost twice as many regular columns of professional broadcast criticism appeared in non-trade publications than had appeared in the previous 22 years.[20] Readership studies had also indicated that the TV column had three to five times more readers than either the drama or movie column.[21]

The dawn of serious professional criticism of broadcasting on a regular basis had arrived. As Newsweek magazine stated in a 1947 article titled, "Crosby's First Birthday":

> Crosby's followers were learning fast that radio deserved the same adult criticism as music or the theatre.[22]

It was not long before television and criticism of television dominated discussion about broadcasting. The critical climate carried over from the professional to the layman. The television image found itself a ready target to be praised, condemned, deplored and discussed by critics from every walk of life.

---

[20] Smith, op. cit., p. 49.

[21] Ibid., p. 52.

[22] "Crosby's First Birthday," Newsweek, XXIX (May 19, 1947) p. 66.

Educators, parents, ministers, sociologists, government officials, and members of the industry have all expressed opinions about the medium as a business, a means of mass communication, an art, and a socio-cultural force. Parent-teacher groups and church organizations publish regular lists of television programs and condemn or recommend them on the basis of critical judgments.

Amateur or lay criticism is a representation of good will and is healthy in the sense that it reflects a certain amount of judgment and value making on the part of the public. However, as William Lynch wrote in his book, The Image Industries,

> Amateurs of good will are never the answer to the problems of mediocre workmanship in any field, most especially they will not provide solutions to our present problems in the sphere of the mass media, where mediocre workmanship often combines with an almost contemptuous regard for the intelligence of the consumer.[23]

Amateur criticism is not the kind of criticism that will further the progress of the medium or develop standards against which we can truly judge television as an art form as well as a socio-cultural force. The kind of critic television needs is the one whom Hubbell Robinson, an executive vice-president of CBS, described.

> TV desperately needs critics . . . the public deserves critical writing that sheds light and has balance based on adequate knowledge of the problems and capacities of the men engaged in trying to move the medium's imaginative frontiers onward.[24]

The critic to whom Robinson refers is the professional critic of the newspaper and the magazine; the critic who has an adequate judgment of the techniques and problems of the medium and related arts

---

[23] William F. Lynch, S.J., The Image Industries, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959) p. 16.

[24] Hubbell Robinson Jr., "The Hatchet Men," Saturday Review, XLII (March 14, 1959) p. 56.

upon which to pass a judgment. It is this professional criticism, if properly delivered, which will both educate the public and the industry to safeguard quality and purify taste.

TYPES OF CRITICISM

Because of television's many facets, professional criticism divides itself into several categories.

1. There is the criticism that concerns itself with television as a federally regulated private enterprise competing for the advertiser's dollar, yet committed to serve "the public interest, convenience and necessity" by obligation of its license. Under this category commentary is usually concerned with such matters as balanced programming, sponsorship control, censorship, freedom of speech and freedom of press, government regulation, and commercial time and content. It questions the objectives of a medium that must program to the highest possible audience rating to make a profit, yet is obligated to serve many minority publics.

2. A second category of criticism concerns television as a mass communicator of ideas. The critic here is concerned with television's reflection of our culture and society as well as its possible effects on our culture and society. If it is true that 90% of our knowledge comes through the eyes, then television can be one of the greatest teachers and developers of language, education and art. Television can bring the world to man and man to the world.

One of the primary functions of mass communications is to interpret life and events in terms meaningful to the society in which it operates. Behavior and attitudes that are socially accepted are

presented in an approving manner, and those that are rejected are not so presented. Therefore, through repetition television can reinforce existing social attitudes.

With international television now a reality, television can reflect the best and the worst of our culture, both here and abroad. The importance of mass communications in our society was stated by Klapper.

> . . . our knowledge of primitive cultures and of pre-media years suggests that the present social system and the present culture are at least in part a product of the existence of mass communications.[25]

If we accept Klapper's use of the word, culture, in its broadest possible sense it includes

> . . . the concepts, habits, skills, arts, instruments, and institutions of a given period in a given period, and the training and refining of the mind, emotions, manners and tastes of that people.[26]

Thus, television, as the most potent of the mass media can, to some degree, affect ideas, habits, values, tastes, morals, and other facets of our national personality.

It is this relationship between television and the socio-cultural milieu that constitutes the main body of criticism in this second category. The critic here is concerned with such vital questions as television violence and its effect on children, its relation to crime and juvenile delinquency, television and our morals, television and our political behavior, our buying habits, our sense of values and

---

[25]Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Media (New York: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1949) p. 25.

[26]Webster's New World Dictionary of Modern Language.

our cultural and intellectual growth. It is criticism illustrated by this statement of Gilbert Seldes.

> The offerings of the media are mass produced and we receive them in apathy. We are not required to think. We are not required to select. The thing is poured out on us, and the result is that if we let all those instruments of conditioning the mass go on, we are going to create a nation which, I think, will be half a nation of teen-agers, and half a nation of robots, because the necessity of thinking becomes progressively less all the time.[27]

Occasionally this type of criticism is found in the newspaper columns of our more serious writers and critics. The following two excerpts of criticism are taken from the columns of Walter Lippmann in 1954 and New York Times television critic Jack Gould in 1962.

> There can be no doubt it seems to me that the movies and television and the comic books are purveying violence and lust to a vicious and intolerable degree. . . . A continued exposure of a generation to the commercial exploitation of the enjoyment of violence is one way to corrode the foundations of a civilized society.[28]

> Fundamentally TV can be considered a lowbrow medium. Problems are never left unsolved beyond the closing commercial. Appeal is in its simplicity . . . video is a cultural barbiturate, in a society beset by leisure and anxiety. Video kills time efficiently and economically. Lowbrow does have its place on TV . . . recognition of the importance of escapism must be accompanied by an awareness that a mass audience can also be childlike. To surrender to this tendency on the ground that so doing epitomizes cultural democracy is hogwash . . . much of the violence has been injected as an end in itself, not as a factor in illuminating character or developing interesting psychological dilemma . . . [violence] grow in point where it becomes a social sore more than a matter of theatre.[29]

Mostly, however, this type of criticism is found in the sociological, psychological, and communications research journals, and published

---

[27] Joseph T. Klapper, The Effects of Mass Communication, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961) p. 235.

[28] Walter Lippmann, New York Herald Tribune, September 7, 1954.

[29] Jack Gould, New York Times Magazine, (January 14, 1962) pp. 14-15.

books and studies which are not readily available for or sought by the mass audience of television. It is synonymous with names like Schramm, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, Klapper, and Katz.

3. There is a third type of criticism, perhaps the most important type from the point of view of the mass public. It is the type of criticism that deals with television as an art, and since it deals with television as an art, it also by necessity must deal with the tastes and values of television's audience. It is the type of criticism called for by Heywood Broun in 1936; by Max Wylie in 1940; by Charles Siepmann in 1941; and by Hubbell Robinson in 1959. It is the type of criticism described by Professor Arthur Weld, Jr. in an article titled, "More TV Criticism Please."

> . . . formal criticism of individual programs prepared and published in the same way as is criticism of the other arts . . . as social phenomenon TV programs get all the criticism they can use, as works of art almost none . . . esthetic judgment is the one that matters under the aspect of eternity. . . .[30]

It is knowledgeable, unbiased, specific criticism that will bridge the gap between the mass taste and the cultivated taste by attempting to raise the quality of program standards demanded by the mass audience. It is esthetic criticism that educates and further recognizes the potential art of television if given an opportunity, as stated by Lyman Bryson of CBS:

> . . . the challenge to the members of the cultivated minority is to criticize programs, not mercifully, but intelligently and with the slowly acquired expertness that makes criticism valuable. Vigorous, severe, and systematic criticisms are needed. Potential great audience and potential great art come

---

[30] Arthur Weld, Jr., "More TV Criticism Please," NAEB Journal, XXI, (June, 1962) pp. 4-7.

into reality together by interaction and by mutual stimulation in good faith.[31]

Moreover, one of the most prolific and attainable sources of program criticism for television viewers should be the daily newspaper. Just as theatre audiences and movie audiences read the theatre and movie columns, so does the television viewer read the television columnist's program criticism.

There is serious television criticism in eclectic magazines like the Saturday Review, the Reporter, the New Republic, and Commonweal. Critical articles appear occasionally in Harpers and the Atlantic. The magazine critic, however, is writing for a reader whose tastes are already selective, and who already has some standards against which to measure his evaluation and enjoyment of a television program. Criticism directed to the magazine audience, therefore, is not directed at a true sampling of television's mass viewing public. Furthermore, the limited circulation of these magazines cannot compete with the mass circulation and readership of the daily newspaper.

Newspaper columnists on the other hand are sought out and read by the same people that seek out television's variety of program fare. The newspaper television columnist reaches an impressive number of readers that might rival in number the legion of comic strip fans. As we have noted previously, readership studies indicated that the TV column has three to five times more readers than the theatre or movie column.[32] John Crosby was syndicated in more than ninety papers, and

---

[31] Lyman Bryson, "Broadcasting and the Cultivated Minority," American Scholar, XX (Autumn, 1951) pp. 171-172.

[32] Smith, op. cit., p. 52.

Hal Humphrey is syndicated in eighty-seven; Harriet Van Horne writes for the Scripps-Howard chain; Jack Gould and Jack O'Brian reach a readership of hundreds of thousands in just one city. This exposure in itself guarantees a maximum potential readership of criticism by a television hungry public.

Exposure alone, however, is not the only reason for the newspaper columnist's importance as a source or program criticism. There is some evidence to indicate that the key television critics are read by network executives, and are at the same time somewhat influential in executive thinking. During the 1956 Suez crisis several blistering columns by Jack Gould of the New York Times shamed all three networks into covering the United Security Council debate on the Mid-East.[33]

Hubbell Robinson, former executive vice-president of CBS, has repeatedly referred to Jack Gould's critical columns. In an article written in 1959 for the Saturday Review Robinson stated:

> The kind of criticism TV needs is Jack Gould's accounting of TV woes in 1952. It needs the thoughtfulness contained in his Sunday piece of June 22, 1958, profiling the perplexing pattern of advertising thinking which researches and blazes trails with all its products except the TV shows it buys to sell those products.[34]

More specific interest in program criticism by network officials is cited by a lead story which appeared on September 25, 1963, in Variety. The headline read "Critics as TV Image Makers." The story went on to say,

> . . . role of newspaper critics in "image" programming has reached a new height of importance. A nix by key TV critics

---

[33]"Measuring the Giant," Time, LXXIV (November 9, 1959) p. 77.

[34]Robinson, Jr., loc. cit.

> around the country in this area of network programming can spell the death of a particular "image" product, the notices playing such a consequential role . . . when it comes to image programming . . . if the critics pan a CBS-TV "Roots of Freedom" and NBC-TV expensive cultural thrust, an unusual effort in public affairs by ABC-TV there's a groan heard up and down network halls and along Madison Avenue and its environs. Raps count in this area nearly as much as the raps of legit critics reviewing the Broadway scene . . . when key critics knock such entries as badly as they do some of the series which pass for light entertainment . . . the web can't point with pride in Washington circles, members of which may be swayed by key critics, nor does the sponsor derive prestige from the critical panning. . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There is a school of thought among network programmers that when it comes to a prestige show the critic has an obligation to tag the entry as worthwhile even if in his judgment it fails. Some execs even feel that the critic should even lower his critical standards to support such programs . . . Others feel that the image shows should be judged on the basis of their performance not their intention, and that the critical standards should not be relaxed simply because the goals may be worthwhile. In fact, it's argued that the prestige shows, if they are to win a broader public should be judged on higher standards than those used for run-of-the-mill entertainment shows . . . The prestigers tabbed the "conscience of the industry" depends on the conscience and judgments of the TV critics. . . .[35]

This relation of the critic to the executive is perhaps not nearly as important as the critic's relationship with the viewing public. To fully understand this relationship, however, we must define the role of program criticism and the function of the television critic within his limitations. What is criticism? What constitutes good criticism? What kind of criticism do we find in our leading newspaper television columns?

Jack Gould has stated that "the weakness of the critics is their own uncertainty as to what should be their criteria."[36] The

---

[35] Murray Horowitz, "Critics as TV Image Makers," Variety (September 25, 1963) pp. 29, 46.

[36] "Measuring the Giant", Time, (November 9, 1959) p. 77.

following statements about critics were made respectively by an educator, a researcher, and two network executives.

> . . . the press spends too much time generalising about TV and not enough time dealing with individual programs.[37]
>
> . . . by and large TV criticism is the fitful labor of tired writers of monumental good will, a degree of talent, and a jaded perspective. . . .[38]
>
> . . . a great majority of the bashes aimed at it (TV) are superficial, aimless, uninformed . . . and distinguished by fury rather than fact. . . .[39]
>
> . . . either misinformed or intolerant intellectuals who despise the mass taste and want to impose their archaic standards on a reluctant audience. . . .[40]

Do the key newspaper critics in the country fit these descriptions of their writing? Or are they on the whole making an honest attempt to do their job by using standards and judging program performance at all levels based on industrious and impartial examination? The remainder of this study will deal with these questions. After setting up criteria of criticism and discussing the functions of the TV critic within these criteria, the study will then analyze the program criticism of the key critics selected.

SELECTION OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

The columnists analyzed in this study were selected from a primary survey of 21 TV columnists in 9 major markets. An attempt was made to select columnists writing in television's top ten markets

---

[37] Weld, Jr., loc. cit.

[38] Pat McGrady, Newsweek, (February 9, 1959) p. 80.

[39] Robinson, Jr., loc. cit.

[40] Robert Sarnoff, Harpers, (July, 1959) p. 27.

as listed in the Television Factbook.[41] However, since all research was limited to what was available on microfilm, the market of Boston is not included. It is felt that the other nine markets included offer a good cross section of the key critics in the country.

The primary markets surveyed were Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco. Selection of these specific cities as a focus of study was due to several considerations.

1. They represent the widest possible heterogeneous television audience and newspaper readership because of their extensive population and metropolitan nature. These cities also represent a good part of the more selective, sophisticated television audience. Serious criticism is more likely to be wanted, sought, and read.

2. They are centers for television production, advertising agencies, talent, and network executives. The critics are more likely to be read by the important people in television: the people that make the decisions, do the creating, and buy the time. Critics in these cities are, as a whole, more highly respected and more widely read by television executives and the interested public. Since more is expected of their writing, one could expect a greater degree of serious program criticism.

3. Critics in these markets have the widest possible exposure to television because of the number and diversity of channels available.

4. Since these cities include key newspapers and newspaper chains, some of the critics are syndicated, thus assuring even wider

---

[41] TV Factbook, # 33, 1962-63 Ed., p. 24-A.

readership.

Selection of newspapers was based on circulation figures, the general quality and consistency of the television column, and availability on microfilm. At least two newspapers are included in each market for the purpose of incidental data on criticism within cities. In three markets (New York, San Francisco, and Chicago) three newspapers were used since all three were high in quality, and close in circulation figures.

Columnists are selected as leading television columnists by several factors.

1. They are designated by title as "Radio-TV Editor" or "Radio-TV Critic;"

2. Their column appears consistently on a daily basis in the same location on the broadcast page.

The primary columnists surveyed were as follows:

Jack O'Brian--New York Journal American
Jack Gould--New York Times
Harriet Van Horn--New York World Telegram and San Francisco News Call Bulletin
Richard K. Doan--New York Herald Tribune
Harry Harris--Philadelphia Inquirer
Robert J. Williams--Philadelphia Evening Bulletin
Bernie Harrison--Washington Evening Star
Lawrence Laurent--Washington Post and Times Herald
Win Fanning--Pittsburgh Post Gazette and Sun Telegraph
Fred Remington--Pittsburgh Press
Russell W. Kane and George W. Condon--Cleveland Plain Dealer
Jim Frankel--The Cleveland Press
Frank Judge--Detroit News
Betty Lou Peterson--Detroit Free Press
Terry Turner--Chicago Daily News
Paul Molloy--Chicago Sun Times
Larry Wolters--Chicago Daily Tribune
Bob Hull--Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express
Cecil Smith--Los Angeles Times
Dwight Newton--San Francisco Examiner
Terrence O'Flaherty--San Francisco Chronicle

SELECTION OF PERIOD STUDIED

The year 1961 was selected since it was the year prior to the newspaper strikes which inactivated New York and Cleveland newspapers during the months selected for the study. Since the study was begun in 1963, 1961 was therefore the most recent year from which to accumulate data, 1962 being the year of the strike.

The period selected includes September to November; this period represents the month prior to the new season, the beginning of the new season and a month after the new season has begun. This would allow for a comparison of criticism on all new entries for the season, and a representative sampling of three months or potentially 100 columns from each newspaper.

It was the season immediately following Newton Minow's famous "Wasteland" speech. It was the season that saw the debut of more than 35 new programs including such current ones as: "The Defenders," "Dr. Kildare," "Ben Casey," "Dick Van Dyke," "Joey Bishop Show," "Hazel," and "Car 54 Where Are You?" It was the season of Lawrence Olivier's "The Power and the Glory." It was an interesting season and had the potential of much serious program criticism. The amount of that criticism and its quality will constitute the main portion of the following study.

II. CRITICISM: ITS DEFINITION AND FUNCTION

"TV critics are men who report traffic accidents to eye witnesses."--Jackie Gleason[1]

What is the definition of program criticism? What is the function of criticism itself? Certainly television program criticism must transcend the elementary and naive description attributed to it by comic, Jackie Gleason. Even in Gleason's statement, however, there is an element of truth regarding the nature of criticism.

Just as eye witnesses can view the same event from different perspectives, as depicted in the Japanese work, "Rashomon," so can the same TV program be interpreted differently by different critics. This is so because criticism involves more than a mere recounting of details. Criticism involves some subjective interpretation or judgment as stated in almost any formal definition of the word.

One dictionary states that criticism is

> . . . a critical observation, judgment or review . . . the art of judging with knowledge and propriety the beauties and faults of works of art and literature, hence similar considerations of moral and ethical values. . . .[2]

Webster's 1961 New Collegiate Dictionary defines a critic as

> . . . one who expresses a reasoned opinion on any matter, involving a judgment of its value truth or righteousness, or an appreciation of its beauty and technique. . . .

---

[1]Lawrence Laurent, "Wanted, the Complete TV Critic," in The Eighth Art, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962) p. 155.

[2]Webster's New World Dictionary of Modern Language.

A professor of broadcasting has called criticism: "making statements in which an event is compared with a standard of an event."[3]

Thus by definition, true criticism as applied to any work of art including a television program, must adhere to certain criteria and characteristics.

First, the professional critic must make a judgment or express an opinion or appreciation based on knowledge and propriety. This distinguishes him from the lay critic whose judgment or opinion is mostly based on subjective biases. The professional critic is expected to offer an opinion qualified by accepted standards.

This obligation to make a judgment by necessity involves more than a mere repetition of facts as stated by Gleason. The critic must comment on the facts from one of several points of view. The points of view relating to moral and ethical values concern the sociological and cultural criticism which was discussed in the introduction. The concern of this paper is with the critical function of judging the beauty, the faults and the techniques of works of art, being specific program criticism or review.

There is some argument regarding the difference between a "review" and a piece of criticism. I submit, however, that the difference between a true critical review and a piece of criticism is purely academic since both to some degree express quality or depth of evaluation. To see why this is so, we must look at some of the writings on dramatic and literary criticism. The difference between

---

[3]Lawrence W. Lichty, "What Does a TV Critic Write About?" Journal of Broadcasting, XVII (Fall, 1963) p. 353.

dramatic criticism and literary criticism is negligible, in principle at least, according to George Jean Nathan, noted drama critic.

> . . . there is at bottom very little difference between dramatic criticism and literary criticism. What after all is a play but an underwritten novel, and a novel but an overwritten play. . . .[4]

Although Nathan states the case too simply, there are certain principles of literary criticism which are applicable to dramatic criticism, and by the same reasoning to criticism of television which contains the dramatic element.

Henry Seidel Canby divided literary criticism into two types: one type he calls pure criticism; the other type he terms applied criticism or "reviewing." In speaking about the difference, he stated:

> Good criticism is generally applicable to all types of literature . . . Good reviewing is good criticism applied to a new book . . . It is in fact impossible to set a line where criticism ceases and reviewing begins.[5]

If we can substitute the function of the television critic for that of the literary critic, we might say that good television criticism is generally applicable to all types of television programs. Evidently, however, this criticism must contain certain standards which when applied to a specific program makes good "reviewing." The critical judgment based on some standards is present in both cases so that the terms "review" or "critique" in themselves do not offer any difference in quality. This similarity in principle between good reviewing and good criticism was further stated by F. O. Mathiessen in his book,

---

[4]George Jean Nathan, Art of the Night, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928) p. 11.

[5]Henry Seidel Canby, Definitions, Essays in American Criticism, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922) p. 185.

The Responsibilities of the Critic.

> . . . a review is simply a short piece of criticism and it should be as good criticism as its writer can make it. . . .[6]

The difference between criticism and review would, therefore, seem to be one of application rather than quality. Criticism would seem to cover a broader application than specifically evaluating one program. It might be evaluation of a complete series of programs, or programming in general from an esthetic or cultural point of view. The critique might deal with no specific program, but would carry the commentary on to a broader discussion outside the realm of that specific program. Reviewing, for our purpose would be the application of criteria or standards to one specific program. Through usage, however, the term "review" has become associated with the ephemeral review of the daily newspaper as compared with the more lengthy sophisticated critical pieces of selective literary magazines.

There is some form of ephemeral review, however, which gives no opinion at all, or gives an opinion which is purely subjective and not qualitative. This type of review, which merely summarizes, would justly be termed "journalistic reviewing" and originates with the old style newspaper book reviewer. In its simplicity it does not meet even the minimal requirements of true reviewing or criticism. A good review, according to F. O. Matthiessen, should do three things at a minimum.

1. Furnish exposition and description;
2. Give an evaluation;

---

[6]Francis O. Matthiessen, The Responsibilities of the Critic, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952) p. 19.

3. Suggest rather briefly how it measures up to the current state of the art. (Does it make a fresh contribution, or simply more of the same?)

By these qualifications it is evident that a review which offers nothing more to its readers than "it was an entertaining half hour," or, "it was a waste of television time," is nothing more than journalistic reviewing, even though it does offer an evaluation. To be worthy of the name criticism a piece must express itself beyond the criteria of "it was good," or "I liked it."

What are the usual characteristics of a journalistic review? Again, referring to literary criticism, Canby states:

> The journalistic reviewer wrote not to criticize the book but to interest a reader. Yet by the very nature of the case he labored under a disadvantage which forever barred him from calling himself critic as well as reviewer. He was a specialist in reporting, in making a story from the most unpromising material, and also in the use of his mother tongue, but a specialist usually in no other field whatsoever . . . wholesale and emphatic praise became a trademark of journalistic reviewing.[7]

Here are two excerpts from reviews of the same program. The one is an example of the kind of "journalistic reviewing" which pervades many of our television columns across the country. It is high on adjectives, but low on qualitative evaluation based on some kinds of standards.

> . . . I think "Car 54" could become the liveliest and funniest vehicle since the days of Phil Silver's "Bilko" and Jackie Gleason's, "The Honeymooners." I admit I base my judgment on seeing but one show. It was an outrageously warmly human hilarious gem . . . the show is populated with a platoon of infectious police . . . their antics may tax the imagination but didn't Bilko, Lucy, and The Honeymooners?"[8]

---

[7] Canby, op. cit., p. 187.

[8] Jim Frankel, The Cleveland Press, (September 15, 1961) p. B-22.

The second review of the same program demonstrates not only how two "eye witnesses" can differently view the same "accident," but the difference between a journalistic review and a critical review. This gives us a qualified evaluation based on some standards.

> . . . high hopes were voiced that it might be a modern Keystone Cops. It wasn't. It isn't even close to the shrewd diversion . . . [brought on] by the deservedly long running Phil Silvers series [Bilko]. In its premiere . . . was a clumsily written, acted, directed, and conceived formula affair, its situation painfully and awkwardly fabricated, loaded to the brass buttons with the obvious and unfunny. It has a laudably low aim, a comedy about cops without robbers, and perhaps it may improve. We'd say it could do just that without much trouble. . . .[9]

The critic in this piece not only says he does not like it, he gives us reasons why, based on his standards of what constitutes unfunny comedy. His adjectives are qualified by explanation.

It is evident that the short ephemeral review in the newspaper can be as professionally critical as a piece in some selective magazine, provided it adheres to the criteria of criticism and not "journalistic reviewing." When the two sources of criticism provide the same kind of quality writing, regardless of the length of the piece, the difference in terminology is negligible, as stated by Canby:

> . . . a critic is a reviewer with leisure to perform real criticism . . . a good hack reviewer is more useful than a poor critic, and both belong to the same profession. . . .[10]

THE CRITICAL FUNCTION

We have so far discussed the definition of criticism as it

---

[9]Jack O'Brian, New York Journal American, (September 18, 1961) p. 18.

[10]Canby, op. cit., p. 203.

applies to the ephemeral reviewer as well as the magazine critic. To paraphrase a description of the business of professional television program criticism we might say

> It is an informed evaluation of a television program accompanied by description and examples of why it does or does not adhere to certain stated or implied standards of quality.

We must now define the function of this criticism as it relates to both the television art and its audience. Moses Hadas in speaking of the critical function has stated:

> . . . When we call the exercise of informed judgment by its Greek name "criticism," we recognize its claim to be an independent and specialized activity with a particular function--to safeguard quality and to purify taste.[11]

If we consider taste in its broadest sense, meaning an ability to notice, appreciate, or judge what is beautiful, fine or excellent in any art, then we evidently cannot separate the two functions of safeguarding quality and purifying taste; for without the recognition of quality as embodied in taste, there can be no demand for production of quality. Consequently, as Hadas states further:

> . . . the larger and more indiscriminate the audience, the greater the need to safeguard and purify standards of quality and taste.[12]

This is especially important in television which has the largest and certainly the most indiscriminate audience of any of the arts. Surveys show that 33% of TV set owners flip a knob and accept whatever comes in view.[13] Furthermore, television also has the characteristics

---

[11] Moses Hadas, "Climates of Criticism," in The Eighth Art, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962) p. 15.

[12] Ibid., p. 16.

[13] Fischer, op. cit., p. 125.

of a "popular art." The relationship in a "popular art" between an artist and his audience is different from this relationship in the so called "elite arts." This difference was explained by Leo Bogart in his book, The Art of Television.

> Elite judgments are supported by critical canons and are expressed through its spokesmen the critics. Thus the elite artist is stimulated through reproach or praise, expressed in rational esthetic terms and addressed to him directly in his creative role . . .success or failure of a popular artist is more often directly indicated by his changing record on the cash register . . . the popular artist is one who sets forth deliberately to conform to the tastes and wishes of the public, interpreted by the operators of the mass media. . . .[14]

Thus in popular art, if the taste of the audience is indiscriminate, the quality of the product will likewise be indiscriminate; and, since the artist cannot innovate, since he must cater to public demand, the audience itself is its own biggest deterrent to viewing the kinds of quality programs that help to understand and form critical standards. Therefore, by reading the standards of the critics, the public will gain a truer understanding of quality thereby elevating its taste.

By expressing critical standards, therefore, the critic functions in both an educational and a salutary way. When he judges a program to be high in quality, the artist is encouraged to create more of the same, and the audience by reading the evaluation learns to discriminate. Thus, even in the limited framework of popular formats, a quality work can be recognized and encouraged. The artist, the critic, and the audience are part of a three-way relation, the function of which is to determine the quality of television fare. The

---

[14]Leo Bogart, The Age of Television, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1956) p. 22.

result of this determination will in turn have to be interpreted by the operators of television in providing the kind of programs desired.

Edward Fischer in his book, The Screen Arts, writes of the relation between the artist, the critic and the audience taste.

> . . . the artist and the critic both work from sensitized feelings and highly developed intuitions. Reading about standards helps somewhat in sensitizing the feeling and in developing intuitions. But it's also possible to memorize all the standards ever printed and still have vulgar taste. The capacity to enjoy and appreciate is developed by studying standards and by coming into frequent contact with the best things in art, especially under the guidance of a cultivated mind. This system eventually leads to attitudes and to habits of mind that are more satisfying to a viewer than a collection of his uncultivated likes and dislikes. . . .[15]

Fischer puts his finger on the aim of the program critic in leading the public to acquiring a sense of discriminate taste which will increase the pleasure of television viewing. To develop this taste, however, the reading of standards must also be accompanied by an exposure to the finer forms of art and an opportunity to use these standards. As Northrop Frye has said:

> The critic is exposed to a series of impressions . . . and by responding to these as carefully as possible he develops by practice, skill and flexibility for which the traditional term in English is taste.[16]

As audience taste is elevated, the desire for more quality elevates the stature of the artist and his output so that the audience continues to receive more of the kinds of impressions from which it can form standards of evaluation. Thus, by a combination of reading good program criticism and exposing himself to a wider range of program

---

[15] Fischer, op. cit., p. 7.

[16] Northrop Frye, The Well Tempered Critic, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963) p. 112.

fare, the viewer learns to critically evaluate programs based on critical standards rather than subjective appeals. He learns to question and to think why he did or did not enjoy a program. He also learns to be able to say it was a bad program but I liked it, or, it was a good program by critical standards but I did not like it. He discriminates between his critical opinion and his personal opinion, which is based on personal taste. It is this thinking or questioning attitude that is most important in increasing the viewer's pleasure, as has been stated by Weld:

> . . . the interested viewer observing the kinds of questions criticism asks, learns to ask these kinds for himself . . . the main thing is the questioning attitude. . . .[17]

Seldes has commented on the non-discerning effect of television in these words:

> The offerings of the mass media are mass produced and we receive them in apathy. We are not required to select, we are not required to think. The thing is poured out on us, and the result is if we let all those instruments of conditioning the mass go on, we are going to create a nation which I think will be a half a nation of teen-agers, half a nation of robots, because the necessity of thinking becomes progressively less all the time.[18]

We can summarize the critic's function therefore, specifically in television, as educating the audience to increase viewing pleasure by learning how to discriminate between programs, and thus gradually elevate the quality of the artistic product by their demands.

We must now ask how does the critic express this function in his writing? How does he recognize and judge quality?

First, the critic must look for certain basic truths in the

---

[17]Weld, Jr., loc. cit.

[18]Klapper, op. cit., p. 235.

interpretation of any work of art. In the minds of the Greeks a work was good when it measured up to the pattern or purpose for which it was intended. More specifically, in recognizing quality in art the critic must answer the fundamental questions posed by Goethe.

> . . . what has the writer proposed to himself to do? . . . and how far has he succeeded in carrying it out? . . .[19]

George Jean Nathan speaking of dramatic criticism voiced the same criteria.

> A play should be appraised in terms of the author's success or failure in the achievement of his plan and intention.[20]

The same principle applied to television reviewing was expressed by New York Times' critic Jack Gould who in 1961 wrote:

> A work of art is entitled to the respect of being judged in terms of what it sets out to do and how well it succeeds . . . all other criteria are secondary.[21]

Quality in this sense would therefore seem to mean the success of a program and its elements in translating or interpreting the original intent of the artist or creator. This form of esthetic criticism can also take in sociological or cultural concern if the intent was of a sociological nature by its meaning or message. It is the successful interpretation of that message, however, which should primarily concern the program critic.

In television this particular aspect of quality extends to all the medium's characteristics. The camera work, the settings, the

---

[19] J. E. Springarn, "The New Criticism," in Criticism in America, its Functions and Status, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1924) p. 23.

[20] George Jean Nathan, The Intimate Notebook of George Jean Nathan, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932) p. 136.

[21] Jack Gould, New York Times, (November 5, 1961) sec. 2, p. 19.

dialogue, the special effects, must all be weighed to see if in the overall production they complimented the original intention or idea. If they served to further the plot, enhance the mood of the song, emphasize the characterization, they are quality elements. If, on the other hand, the camera work does not punctuate the dialogue, follow the action or emphasize the character, but proves obtrusive in its movement; if the set is too lavish for the mood of the song; if the acting is too exaggerated for the essence of the story, as artistically beautiful as these three elements might seem on the screen, they do not help to achieve the ultimate intent of the artist and therefore cannot be judged as being truthful in their quality.

Truth must also be sought in the meaning of the work itself. The critic must ask the question is this a true character in his actions, in his speech, in his manner? Is the work a true representation of the story it is telling, or is it based on suppositions and untruths?

The critic, therefore, discriminates between the beauty of a program and the truth about its interpretation when the two are not synonymous. This kind of discrimination requires an ability to intellectualize as well as to emotionalize, so as to be able to report the facts as objectively as possible. As George Jean Nathan wrote:

> The concern of art is with beauty, the concern of criticism is with truth, and truth and beauty despite the Sunday School are often strangers.[22]

The critic can applaud the ingenious techniques, the unusual staging, the gravity or significance of the plot, but he must temper

---

[22]George Jean Nathan, The Critic and The Drama, (Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 7.

this applause with an appraisal of the overall success in fulfilling the creative intent. If the program does contain both esthetic beauty and truthful interpretation in its final form, then the critic must justly evaluate it and point out why it contains quality. In television criticism the critic will use examples to illustrate his points. If the prime purpose was entertainment or comedy, clear examples of the entertaining and comedy elements will be cited. If the purpose was dramatic realism, a vivid character, a slice of dialogue, the starkness of the set, it should be called forth in the review to illustrate the quality of successful interpretation.

Another measure of quality is a fresh new imaginative approach to an already established idea. The critic judges a work against the accepted example or standard of a similar or related work. The television critic can compare a program with similar programs and point out why one is a better or more imaginative interpretation. Thus, a situation comedy can be a better situation comedy if it uses a new approach, better casting, fresher dialogue, unique staging, or any of the elements that serve to embellish it. A comparison of the work with previous work by the same author, director, or talent can also be used for comparison with a standard of quality.

By using these measures of quality a critic sets up standards against which he evaluates a program and gives the audience food for thought.

It is important for the critic to realize, however, that standards of quality are applicable to all types of television fare regardless of his personal preferences. There is room in television for serious drama and light fantasy, for classical ballet and for

modern jazz, for simple comedy and for sophisticated Shakespeare. One of television's responsibilities aside from education is to keep man laughing and relaxed through entertaining and wholesome programs. This need for variety in television fare was expressed by Seldes.

> I think that in coping with the spirit of our life, a true variety of choice should be made available, not merely a variety of packages for identical goods . . . they [the popular arts] can justify themselves only if they offer a balanced entertainment in their average product, if they interest the individual in as many ways as he is capable of being interested, and serve all significant groups.[23]

The critic, therefore, should be able to report on a variety of programs and judge them all objectively. According to George Jean Nathan, a critic should actually be capable of enjoying many types of entertainment, if they are of good quality.

> . . . a critic who cannot enjoy Hamlet one night and Follies the next . . . seems to have something wrong with him . . .[24]

Thus by writing about and evaluating all types of program fare, the critic not only gives the better program a chance for higher exposure, but gives the audience an opportunity to learn, recognize and enjoy quality in any type of format. In this manner the television critic functions somewhat like the newspaper drama critic according to Seldes.

> It is part of the duty of a critic to guide the public taste . . . the critic should understand his place between the producer and the consumer. He has a vital function. In the theatre it can be expressed in terms of dollars and cents . . . it is his job to help them not to waste their money on trash . . . by his destruction of trash he helps (in theory) to give the best shows

---

[23]Gilbert Seldes, The Great Audience, (New York: The Viking Press, 1950) p. 214.

[24]George Jean Nathan, Materia Critica, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924) p. 30.

> a chance to survive . . . his standards may be low but they are his instruments of judgment and he does not throw them away if he pans a play and it becomes a success. The situation of the critic in broadcasting is different only because the audience does not pay in cash for each program. It pays in time given to the program, and it pays also if the program has an adverse affect on the emotional integrity or the clearness of mind of those who witness it. The critic has no business imposing his standards as the only ones appropriate for broadcasting, but he has to use his standards and make sure the audience gets a true report. For the critic to do less is the real treason of the intellectual.[25]

Therefore, the final result of good criticism should be to create an audience of individual critics, each using a set of standards to judge the quality of programs and thus increase his viewing pleasure. By learning to recognize quality and by selectively viewing, the audience can force the elevation of the art and the artist. To promote the critical attitude in the television audience is the prime goal of good television program criticism.

> The first wish of any critic is that he should bring more critics into being, all inwardly judging, inwardly operating.[26]

THE TELEVISION COLUMN

To this point we have defined the program critic's function and some general principles upon which we can base the nature of his criticism. If he adheres to the criteria of good criticism as described, his writings over a period of time should reflect certain consistencies. These are of a general and a specific nature dealing with the content of his columns.

---

[25]Gilbert Seldes, The Public Arts, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956) pp. 294-295.

[26]Lynch, op. cit., p. 17.

One of the first general principles of good newspaper criticism is that over a period of time it should reflect a variety of critical opinion. A critic should attempt to review several different types of programs, although he might emphasize those that appeal to his personal taste.

Over a period of time some kind of critical standards should be evident, either stated in specific criticism or implied. The critic cannot generalize but must deal in specifics.

Charles Siepmann has stated that "it is always easier to see what is wrong than to know what is right."[27] The critic should not only point out the bad in television but should point out the good. His columns should not reflect an overwhelmingly negative attitude about everything that is done. He should have a balanced proportion of complimentary and adverse criticism, pointing out the reasons for each. He should not expect every program in a series to be spectacular and should not pass judgment on a whole series by citing the first or the worst example. This necessarily means that the critic should review more than one program in each series to see if the program has improved or degenerated in quality, or whether it still meets the critic's first evaluation.

The critic, recognizing the fact that there is a place in television for all types of fare, should not criticize a series or program on the grounds that the time might be used for nobler ends based on the critic's personal preference. If the critic has a

---

[27]Charles A. Siepmann, Radio's Second Chance, (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1946), p. 254.

subjective bias towards a particular type of program or performer, he should state it. The audience must not confuse his subjective tastes with his objective reporting and criticism. Bias should be revealed rather than concealed.

In reviewing drama the critic should review it within its television limitations and he should display a knowledge of the medium in discussing these limitations.

In reviewing public affairs programs or controversial issues, the critic should consider the presentation of the issue as to its fair handling and impartiality. The techniques employed in these kinds of programs are secondary to the main purpose of truthfully reporting or informing.

The critic should not attempt to impose his standards on the audience or imply that their taste is inferior because they might enjoy or accept a program which he did not. He should judge a program by the audience it aims for and how well it succeeded.

Specifically the column itself should be written in a manner that is interesting to the reader. The critic can use humor to prove a point even when reviewing a serious drama. As Nathan has said,

> If there is a place for humor in Hamlet, why not a place for humor in the criticism of Hamlet.[28]

There is no one formula or style for criticism according to Nathan:

> Criticism may take as many forms as the drama criticized, being at times tragic or melodramatic, comical, farcical, burlesque, constructive, or destructive, emotional, or cerebral, analytical or impressionistic, with equal

---

[28]George Jean Nathan, Art of the Night, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. 17.

soundness, depending on the critic and the drama.[29]

The language of the critic should be free from unexplained clichés of judgment and description.

The critical column should do at least three things, as previously explained, in order to qualify as a good review: It should give an evaluation of the program and some stated or implied criteria against which it is judged; specific examples should be cited to illustrate the criticism.

These, then, are some of the criteria against which we will measure the overall quality of specific television program criticism in the columns chosen.

THE CRITIC'S LIMITATIONS

It is recognized that because of television's vast variety of fare, certain limiting conditions affect the reviewer's quantity of output. These conditions originate mostly with the fact that there is too much going on at any one time for any one critic to cover.

During the season covered in this study more than 35 series and forty specials made their debut in prime time hours. This figure does not include series that were held over from the previous seasons and the programming in non-prime time hours. A critic can only view one program at a time so that with three competing programs he can only report on one. This does not take into account the programs being offered on the fourth and fifth channels available in many of

---

[29]Constance Frick, The Dramatic Criticism of George Jean Nathan, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1943) p. 125.

the markets covered. A critic, therefore, is limited not only on the number of programs he can review in any one week, but the number of programs he can view in any one series or on any one station. Thus, the large number and variety of television programs in themselves limit the amount of reviewing any one critic can accomplish.

A second limiting factor is the human element. Not all of a television's working day can be spent in viewing television since a good part of it must be spent in writing and preparing the television column; consequently, the amount of time given to television viewing is also limited. A critic over a period of time will also naturally tend to view those types of programs which appeal to his personal tastes rather than spend his limited time on those which do not. The kinds of programs reviewed therefore, will vary according to the individual critic.

A third restricting factor of program review is the fact that the columnist must turn out a daily column consisting of more than just program review. Part of his column must be devoted to news, promotion and other forms of criticism. Since many of the columnists studied write only five days or six days a week, their critical output is further limited.

Thus, a television critic can be allowed certain considerations in his overall program criticism and column content over a period of three months, due to the factors cited.

1. A critic cannot be expected to view many series more than once or twice over a three month period. Since most specials compete with and overlap other programs, the critics must miss certain programs to view a complete spectacular.

2. Because of conflicts in scheduling, viewing habits, and other factors, a critic cannot be expected to review all of the new programs being offered in a three month period. He can be expected however to review at least one offering from more than a majority of them.

3. Most criticism should concern those programs being offered during "prime time" hours. These programs attract the most viewers and are of a nature that is subject to more serious criticism.

4. Since there is no specific length of a good review, the amount of column space devoted to it will not be considered. It is the number of critical columns and programs reviewed and the quality of the reviewing that is important. These will be discussed further under content analysis.

With these limitations and considerations in mind we will now analyze the criticism of the columnists selected to determine whether they are performing their critical function.

III. A PROFILE OF CRITICISM

Thirty-five new weekly series and forty-one specials from September through November ushered in the 1961-62 television season. The new entries included twelve comedies, three detective series, six hour long dramatic series, two public affairs series, and several adventure and western types. Among those programs still being seen today are "The Defenders," "Dr. Kildare," "Ben Casey," "Car 54 Where Are You?" "The Joey Bishop Show," "The Dick Van Dyke Show," and "Hazel." Others, including "Mrs. G. Goes to College," "Alcoa Premiere," "The Bob Newhart Show," and "David Brinkley's Journal," despite favorable notices from the critics, are no longer on the air today.

It is the purpose of this chapter to draw a profile of both the television season and the criticism of that new season during the three month period studied. A second purpose is the selection of those critics who will be studied for their adherence to the criteria of good reviewing which includes the use of critical standards. These critics will be selected on the basis of the quantity and variety of their reviews and on the elements they have in common which make their writing more compatible for overall analytical purpose.

Some of the questions to be answered in this profile concern the amount of specific program criticism. How much column content is devoted to specific program criticism as compared with other types of column content such as news and promotion? Who are the most prolific

program critics? The least prolific? Which markets receive the largest amount of program criticism? Other questions to be answered concern the new season itself and its programs. Which types of programs received the most reviews? Which types the fewest reviews? Which programs were the most favorably received? Is there any relation between critical opinion and program durability? Thirdly, the chapter will deal with the critics themselves. What is the amount of agreement among critics? Do critics within markets have the same viewing patterns? Do certain critics show patterns of viewing?

Both an overall view of the new programs and their reception will be profiled from the summarized data of more than 1500 television columns written during the period studied.

For accurate analysis of data, however, it is necessary to separate those columns dealing with program criticism from those columns which do not. An examination of content reveals that in general program criticism constitutes either part of a column, the entire column, or is omitted entirely. Since this study is interested exclusively in specific program criticism, it will not consider other forms of criticism even though they might constitute a part of the column which also contains program criticism. A program criticism column, therefore, will be defined as any column containing at least one specific program review regardless of its length. With this breakdown as a basis for classifying data we will now draw a profile of the specific program criticism found in the columns of twenty-one leading television writers over a three month period.

HOW MUCH CRITICISM

How much column content is actually devoted to specific program criticism? In order to get some idea of a critic's preferences and standards, it is necessary to read the largest possible number of his reviews during any given period. Since a good critic will attempt to review as many of the new programs as he can, we can assume that the majority of his columns will contain some program criticism. The average columnist writes at least five columns a week. If only three of these columns contained some specific program review, the critic would have a 60% figure of program criticism columns. How many of the columnists surveyed actually maintain this percentage? The data shows that the majority of columnists did not even devote 50% of their column space to some program review over the three month period. The following list shows the number of columns studied for each critic, followed by the number of "program criticism" columns and the percentage of program criticism columns.

Van Horne	52	45	86%	(News Call Bulletin)
Newton	80	60	75%	(San Fransisco Exam.)
Gould	55	40	73%	(N.Y. Times)
Williams	62	44	71%	(Phil. Eve. Bulletin)
Harris	76	44	58%	(Phil. Inquirer)
O'Brian	73	41	56%	(N.Y. Journal American)
Harrison	68	33	48%	(Wash. Eve. Star)
Molloy	63	28	44%	(Chicago Sun Times)
Smith	80	34	42%	(Chicago Tribune)
Woltors	72	30	41%	(L.A. Times)
O'Flaherty	79	30	38%	(San Fransisco Chronicle)
Frankel	63	24	38%	(Cleveland Press)
Doan	81	30	37%	(N.Y. Herald Tribune)
Peterson	71	23	32%	(Detroit Free Press)
Turner	77	21	27%	(Chicago News)
Fanning	67	18	26%	(Pittsburgh Post Gazette)
Kane & Condon	58	15	26%	(Cleveland Plain Dealer)
Laurent	79	17	21%	(Washington Post)
Remington	71	12	17%	(Pittsburgh Press)
Hull	63	7	11%	(Los Angeles Herald)

Except for the first six critics listed, the others devoted less than 50% of their column space to some program review. Another obvious fact is that the highest percentage of program criticism is concentrated in three markets, Philadelphia, New York, and San Francisco.

Another quantitative measure of adequate program review for evaluation purposes is the number of programs reviewed over the given period. Allowing for a minimum of four prime time program reviews a week, the good critic will review at least forty-eight to fifty prime time programs over the three month period. A tabulation of column content again reveals, however, that little more than a third of all the critics reviewed this minimum number of programs. The following list shows the number of prime time programs reviewed by each critic during the period selected for study.

Harris (Philadelphia Inquirer)	129
O'Brian (N.Y. Journal American)	93
Williams (Phil. Eve. Bulletin)	86
Newton (San Francisco Examiner)	79
Judge (Detroit News)	58
Harrison (Wash. Eve. Star)	55
Gould (N.Y. Times)	55
Woltors (Chicago Tribune)	55
Van Horne (S.F. News Cal Bulletin)	51
Smith (Los Angeles Times)	44
O'Flaherty (S.F. Chronicle)	43
Turner (Chicago News)	43
Doan (N.Y. Herald Tribune)	40
Peterson (Detroit Free Press)	39
Frankel (Cleveland Press)	37
Fanning (Pittsburgh Post Gazette)	32
Molloy (Chicago Sun Times)	30
Hull (Los Angeles Herald)	26
Kane & Condon (Cleveland Plain Dealer)	24
Laurent (Washington Post)	21
Remington (Pittsburgh Press)	19

Again, six of the eight leading critics are those with the highest percentage of program criticism columns, and are located in New York,

Philadelphia, and San Francisco.

How much of the program criticism was devoted to the new programs? The data shows that all critics devoted from 71 to 100% of their reviewing to the new prime time programs.

If we now rank all twenty-one columnists according to the highest percentage of program criticism columns, the number of prime time programs reviewed, and the number of new prime time programs reviewed, the order of those critics whose content is most adequate for study is as follows, by ranking.

Harris	Philadelphia Inquirer
Williams	Philadelphia Evening Bulletin
Newton	San Francisco Examiner
O'Brian	New York Journal American
Gould	New York Times
Van Horne	San Francisco News Cal Bulletin
Harrison	Washington Evening Star
Woltors	Chicago Tribune
Turner	Chicago News
Doan	Herald Tribune
O'Flaherty	San Francisco Chronicle
Smith	Los Angeles Times
Judge	Detroit News
Molloy	Chicago Sun Times
Frankel	Cleveland Press
Fanning	Pittsburgh Post Gazette
Laurent	Washington Post
Hall	Los Angeles Herald
Peterson	Detroit Free Press
Kane and Condon	Cleveland Plain Dealer
Remington	Pittsburgh Press

Using the same basis of evaluation, the markets studied are ranked as follows, according to the best amount of overall criticism.

Philadelphia
New York
San Francisco
Chicago
Los Angeles
Washington
Detroit
Cleveland
Pittsburgh

The highest ranking columnists and critics are concentrated in three markets. It is interesting to note that Los Angeles, which is the largest center of television talent and production is ranked in the middle of the scale.

WHAT DID THE CRITICS VIEW?

With a choice of more than thirty-five weekly series and more than forty-one specials it is obvious that no one critic could possibly view all the programs being offered in a three month period. We can, however, determine which programs were reviewed by more critics, which programs were hardly reviewed, and how the new programs were received.

Many factors determine whether a critic will view a specific program or series. Advance promotion, stars involved, personal taste, time availability, all have a bearing on what the critic will watch when confronted with several simultaneous programs. We will assume, however, that if a program is viewed by a majority of the twenty-one critics studied whatever the reason, it can be considered to some extent as being an important program.

Using this criterion of importance, here are the most important new program series of the 1961-62 television season, ranked by the number of critics that reviewed them at least once in the period studied.

1.	"Car 54 Where Are You"	(comedy)	19 critics
2.	"Steve Allen Show"	(comedy)	18 critics
3.	"Bus Stop"	(drama)	18 critics
4.	"Bob Newhart Show"	(comedy)	18 critics
5.	"The Defenders"	(drama)	17 critics
6.	"David Brinkley's Journal"	(P.A.)	17 critics

7.	"Dr. Kildare"	(drama)	17 critics
8.	"Joey Bishop Show"	(comedy)	16 critics
9.	"Hazel"	(comedy)	16 critics
10.	"Mrs. G. Goes to College"	(comedy)	16 critics
11.	"Follow the Sun"	(adv.)	15 critics
12.	"Ben Casey"	(drama)	15 critics
13.	"87th Precinct"	(det.)	15 critics
14.	"Dick Powell Theatre"	(drama)	15 critics
15.	"Disney"	(child.)	15 critics
16.	"Bullwinkle"	(cartoon)	15 critics
17.	"Top Cat"	(cartoon)	15 critics
18.	"Window on Main Street"	(comedy)	14 critics
19.	"Alcoa Premiere"	(drama)	13 critics
20.	"Dick Van Dyke Show"	(comedy)	12 critics
21.	"The New Breed"	(det.)	12 critics
22.	"Cain's Hundred"	(det.)	12 critics
23.	"Calvin and the Colonel"	(cartoon)	11 critics

Using the same criterion here is the rank order of important one-time specials of that period.

1.	"Laughter U.S.A."	(comedy)	17 critics
2.	"The Power and the Glory"	(drama)	17 critics
3.	"The Danny Kaye Hour"	(comedy)	15 critics
4.	"The Victor Borge Show"	(comedy)	13 critics
5.	"Walk in my Shoes"	(P.A.)	13 critics
6.	"Angola Journey to a War"	(P.A.)	13 critics
7.	"Carnegie Hall Salutes Jack Benny"	(comedy)	11 critics

From the preceding information several factors can be determined concerning the critics' viewing trends for that period.

It would seem that drama is considered the most important category of program by the majority of the critics. All six of the new hour-long dramatic series were reviewed by at least thirteen out of the twenty-one critics. Furthermore, of forty-one specials offered during the period studied, the drama, "The Power and the Glory," was one of the seven most important, attracting seventeen critics. It can also be noted that the three other dramatic specials of that period, "The Spiral Staircase," "Intermezzo," and "The Dispossessed," were reviewed by ten, nine, and eight critics respectively, a larger number

of critics than any of the remaining specials had attracted.

This concern with drama is also demonstrated when we look at the ten series which received the most reviews during the period studied.

1.	"David Brinkley's Journal"	27 reviews
2.	"The Defenders"	25 reviews
3.	"Dick Powell Presents"	25 reviews
4.	"Steve Allen Show"	24 reviews
5.	"Car 54 Where Are You?"	23 reviews
6.	"Bob Newhart Show"	21 reviews
7.	"Bus Stop"	20 reviews
8.	"Alcoa Premiere"	20 reviews
9.	"The Steel Hour"	17 reviews
10.	"Jack Benny Program"	18 reviews

Five of the top ten programs are dramatic programs. Considering the proportion of dramatic programs on the air to comedy, detective, and adventure, this figure is even more impressive. It is also worth noting that an older program, "The United States Steel Hour," garnered more reviews than most of the new series.

When we look at the detective series they also seem to be important since all three new entries were viewed by a majority of the critics. However, after the initial program review, only one series, "87th Precinct," was reviewed more than once, but not enough times to make the above list. We can conclude, therefore, that only the first program of a new detective series will attract a majority of critics, but that interest languishes after the premiere. The same can be stated for adventure series. Only one of three new entries, "Follow the Sun," was viewed on its debut by a majority of critics, and then wasn't reviewed again.

Comedy rates high on the list as being important, with eight of thirteen new series being viewed by at least twelve of the critics.

However, after the initial program only one series, "Car 54 Where Are You," received five more reviews during the three months. Bob Newhart's show received only three reviews after his first program. It is interesting to note that veteran Jack Benny received more reviews than eleven of the new shows that season. This popularity of a personality can also be detected in the list of top specials. The "Carnegie Hall Salutes Jack Benny Special" was viewed by a majority of critics. A majority of critics also viewed "The Victor Borge Show," "The Danny Kaye Hour," and "Laughter U.S.A.," which featured George Burns as narrator. New comedy series which attracted at least sixteen critics to the premiere program included such familiar names as Steve Allen, Gertrude Berg, and Shirley Booth. Aside from the initial drawing power of comedy, however, no series is reviewed more than once or twice by a majority of the critics.

Public Affairs programs also seem to depend initially on the personality involved. Whereas "David Brinkley's Journal" was viewed by seventeen critics and received the most reviews of the period, Frank McGee's "Here and Now" was viewed by only six critics and not more than one time by each. Out of ten public affairs specials only two were reviewed by thirteen critics. The others were not reviewed by more than nine, and one was reviewed by only two critics. Of those remaining specials the two which received the most reviews were "CBS Reports" featuring an interview with President Eisenhower, and "The Many Faces of Spain," which was written and narrated by NBC News personality, Chet Huntley.

The type of program which received the least amount of viewing by the critics judging by the reviews, is the one-time musical or

variety special. Only seven critics viewed at least a third of twenty-three such programs offered during the period studied. Of these seven, only four critics viewed at least half of the specials offered. The following list shows the number of specials viewed by each critic during the three month period.

Harris	21
O'Brian	15
Van Horne	13
Williams	12
Newton	9
Judge	9
Doan	8
O'Flaherty	7
Frankel	6
Peterson	6
Woltors	6
Smith	6
Gould	5
Turner	5
Harrison	4
Fanning	3
Hull	3
Molloy	3
Remington	2
Laurent	2
Kane & Condon	2

Again, five of the six leading critics in this category are Harris, O'Brian, Van Horne, Williams, and Newton. These five and critic Jack Gould have been the six most prolific critics in all categories surveyed up to this point. Evidently Gould, like a majority of critics, does not find the one-time musical or variety special as appealing as other types of programs. It will be found in this thesis that most critics have a tendency to overlook certain categories of programs in their reviewing.

Aside from the general tendency for all critics to overlook the one-time special, an examination of columns reveals a fairly proportionate amount of criticism of all types of programs. There is

a general emphasis on drama and comedy, with much less of an emphasis on detective, adventure and western series.

Since so many new programs made their debut during the period studied it can be expected that the critics attempted to review at least one program from two thirds of the new series, if not all of them. Judging by the number of program reviews in each column over the three month period as previously cited it is evident that most critics reviewed at least thirty five programs. It is possible, therefore, for a critic to have reviewed at least one program from every new series. A study of the reviews, however, indicates that most critics did not bother to review at least 50% of the new series even once in the three month period. The following list shows the number of programs which were overlooked completely by each critic.

Harris	(Phil. Inquirer)	2
Newton	(S.F. Examiner)	7
Williams	(Phil. Eve. B.)	7
O'Brian	(N.Y. Journal A.)	9
Turner	(Chicago News)	12
Gould	(N.Y. Times)	14
Molloy	(Chicago Sun T.)	14
Doan	(N.Y. Herald T.)	15
Harrison	(Wash. Eve. Star)	16
Bull	(L.A. Herald)	16
Woltors	(Chicago Tribune)	17
O'Flaherty	(S.F. Chronicle)	17
Kane & Condon	(Cleveland P.D.)	18
Smith	(L.A. Times)	18
Remington	(Pitt. Press)	19
Judge	(Detroit News)	20
Frankel	(Cleveland Press)	21
Van Horne	(S.F. News Cal B.)	22
Fanning	(Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)	23
Laurent	(Washington Post)	24
Peterson	(Detroit Free Press)	29

The figures reveal that most critics miss a fair number of new programs. Do certain critics, however, exhibit a marked tendancy to overlook specific types of programs? We have already seen a general

tendency not to review the one-time special. An examination of reviews brings out some other tendencies as well.

For at least eight of the critics, comedy and cartoons are the most common type of series which are not reviewed at all. Out of a total of seventeen new comedy and cartoon series, the following critics missed at least ten of these completely in three months.

Peterson	14
Van Horne	13
Laurent	13
Frankel	13
Fanning	11
Smith	11
Judge	10
Kane & Condon	10

For five of the critics studied drama is a category which was not given complete coverage. Out of six new weekly dramatic programs, the following critics did not review at least half of them during the period studied.

Fanning
Laurent
Peterson
Judge
Remington

Some critics are also negligent in reviewing public affairs programs. With two public affairs programs offered weekly, the following critics did not review either of them at least once in the period studied, including "David Brinkley's Journal" which was reviewed more than once by a majority of the critics.

Peterson
Smith
Hull
Molloy

It is evident from the data that certain critics not only neglect reviewing a large proportion of new programs, but a majority of new

programs in several categories. Peterson, Fanning, Smith, and Judge would seem to be the most consistent in neglecting to review most new programs in the most categories.

Do critics in the same market have the same viewing tastes? Do they review the same types of programs or the same programs? A listing of the types of series that were not reviewed at all shows that in four markets the critics evidently did not review the same programs in several categories. As a result, the markets were completely deprived of any reviews of from 50-100% of the public affairs series, 33-50% of the comedy series, 30-60% of the adventure series, and 25-100% of the new detective and western series. The following listing shows the number of series not reviewed in each market in drama, public affairs, comedy, and detective-western and adventure.

Philadelphia	0	0	0	0
New York	0	0	1	1
San Francisco	0	0	2	1
Chicago	0	1	3	2
Washington	1	0	8	2
Cleveland	1	0	8	2
Los Angeles	0	2	6	3
Detroit	0	1	6	6
Pittsburgh	3	0	7	4

It is evident that the markets of Washington, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Pittsburgh receive the minimal variety of program criticism.

Several other facts are evident from the data thus far summarized with regard to specific critics and the markets they serve. Six critics stand out as being the most prolific program reviewers and offering the widest range of criticism. The six critics are: Harry Harris, Robert J. Williams, Jack Gould, Jack O'Brian, Dwight Newton, and Harriet Van Horne. Their markets are Philadelphia, New

York and San Francisco. These six viewed a majority of the new programs and viewed them more times, thus offering the largest sampling of reviews for further study. It is also evident that certain critics within the same market offer the least amount and least variety of criticism, consequently not offering an adequate sampling of reviews for an in-depth study. The four markets whose critics reflect the poorest amount and variety of reviewing are Cleveland, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. One more aspect of this profile will be drawn before studying the writing of the six selected critics.

DO THE CRITICS AGREE?

A profile of the 1961-62 television season must ask the question, "How were the series received by the critics?" Is there agreement among critics? Were any programs or series given unanimous or overwhelmingly favorable or unfavorable reviews? If there are any common standards by which critics judge programs, they would more easily be found in the reviews of those programs which were received with the largest amount of critical agreement. It is necessary, therefore, to look at those programs which were reviewed by a majority of the critics studied and determine which ones received the same kind of reception from these critics.

As a basis of comparison we will use the first program of the new series of that season. In all cases it was the first program which received a majority and sometimes all the reviews the series was to receive during the period studied. Only those programs which attracted a majority of the critics will be considered, and agreement by two thirds will be accepted as an overall judgement.

Seventeen new series and four specials were reviewed by a majority of the critics. There was overall agreement on seventeen of these programs for a percentage of 68%. The following is a breakdown on the seventeen programs and the number of favorable and unfavorable reviews received by each.

Dick Powell Presents	8 good	3 bad	1 fair
Dr. Kildare	12 good	3 bad	
David Brinkley's Journal	12 good		3 fair
The Power and the Glory	12 good	1 bad	1 fair
Mrs. G. Goes to College	11 good		
Alcoa Premiere	10 good	1 bad	1 fair
Carnegie Hall Salutes Jack Benny	10 good		1 fair
The Danny Kaye Hour	10 good	3 bad	2 fair
Angola Journey to a War	10 good	1 bad	
The Bob Newhart Show	9 good	2 bad	3 fair
The Steve Allen Show	3 good	12 bad	
Hazel	8 good	4 bad	
Disney	8 good	1 bad	2 fair
Ben Casey	8 good	2 bad	1 fair
Follow the Sun		11 bad	
87th Precinct	2 good	13 bad	
The Joey Bishop Show	2 good	14 bad	

Any attempt to predict a program's success by its critical reception is obviously difficult. "The Joey Bishop Show" is still on the air today after a most unfavorable reception. On the other hand, "Mrs. G. Goes to College," "Alcoa Premiere," "David Brinkley's Journal," and "The Bob Newhart Show" have all expired after receiving favorable reviews. On the positive side, "Follow the Sun," "87th Precinct," and "The Steve Allen Show," have all expired after having been received unfavorably. "Hazel," "Dr. Kildare," and "Ben Casey," are still on the air after being favorably received. The relation between critical reception and program success is speculative at the most.

The percentage of agreement in some markets exceeds the overall average of 68%, and the number of programs viewed simultaneously by the critics in these markets also shows a similar specific program

preference. The following list shows the percentage of agreement by the critics in each market based on the programs viewed by all critics. The first figure shows the number of programs viewed, the second figure shows the number agreed on in reviews, and the third figure, the percentage of agreement.

New York	41	33	80%
Washington	10	8	80%
San Francisco	33	24	75%
Los Angeles	13	9	70%
Detroit	6	4	66%
Chicago	24	15	62%
Philadelphia	66	41	62%
Pittsburgh	4	2	50%
Cleveland	6	3	50%

It is obvious that the percentage of agreement in New York and San Francisco is exceedingly higher than the percentage of overall agreement. Furthermore, the critics in Philadelphia, New York and San Francisco share the most common viewing tastes.

Having determined that there is a good percentage of agreement between critics on certain programs, we can ask the question "what do these critics write in their reviews which would indicate certain common standards of evaluation?" Do the critics adhere to the principles of good criticism, or is the majority of their reviewing of a journalistic nature? To answer these questions the study will now focus on the columns of six selected critics whose columns reflect a variety and quantity of reviews most adequate for further study. It can be noted that although the six represent less than one third of the critics surveyed they contributed 43% of the total number of reviews written by the twenty-one columnists over a three month period. The critics to be studied are as follows.

Harry Harris	Philadelphia Inquirer
Robert J. Williams	Philadelphia Evening Bulletin
Jack Gould	New York Times
Jack O'Brian	New York Journal American
Dwight Newton	San Francisco Examiner
Harriet Van Horne	San Francisco News Call Bulletin

IV. CRITICAL CRITERIA

Do the six selected critics adhere to the principles of "critical" reviewing? Do they use standards in evaluating the television program? Or, does the majority of their writing fall under the "journalistic" review category? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions by analysis and illustration of column content.

Employing the definition set forth in chapter two, a "critical" review should contain at least the three elements of evaluation, description or illustration, and the reasons for the evaluation. Using this definition, the content studied reveals that a majority of the reviews by our six critics do fall into the "critical" review category, as opposed to the "journalistic" review. The following list shows the percentage of column content devoted by each critic to critical review.

Jack Gould	85%
Harriet Van Horne	84%
Jack O'Brian	72%
Dwight Newton	70%
Robert J. Williams	64%
Harry Harris	57%

Considering the pressure of a daily deadline, the large number of programs reviewed and the amount of work involved in writing a "critical" review rather than a mere summary, the figure in each case is highly impressive. It is also interesting to note that the percentage of agreement is higher among the six selected critics than it was for a majority of the twenty-one critics originally surveyed. Out of a

total of forty-six programs viewed by at least a majority of the six critics, there was majority agreement on thirty-four programs, for a percentage of seventy-five. It would seem, therefore, that there might be some common criteria or standards of judgment which appear with some consistency in the reviews of the six selected columnists.

Before discussing these standards several points must be noted. Since the number of critical reviews is limited, these standards, if they do exist, might not appear in every column, but can be expected to appear at one time or another in the columns of all six critics. Furthermore, these standards might be stated directly or implied. It is also possible that these same standards are used by the other fifteen critics surveyed. These six were selected for study, however, because they offer more ground in which to search for standards and a larger variety of reviews in which to apply these standards. Rather than study each individual critic, the chapter will take particular standards and illustrate their application by the critics. This will allow for a clearer overall picture of common standards and will illustrate any agreement or disagreement of critical opinion on the specific programs cited. The various writing styles of the critics will also be evident for comparison.

In studying the many reviews it becomes evident that certain critical criteria do emerge. Furthermore, the main canopy under which all criteria seem to gather is the question, "Does the program successfully fulfill its intent?" To answer this question the critics judge different types of programs by different intents, and consequently ask for different values in each. All these values, however, are based

on some common standards of judgment which the following sections will attempt to define and illustrate.

DRAMA

The dramatic program in order to be judged successful by the critics must involve the viewer emotionally and mentally. The viewer must not only be made to think, but to empathize emotionally with the characters involved in the story. This success of drama to involve emotionally the viewer was not present in the greatly heralded television adaptation of "The Power and the Glory," according to critic Jack Gould. Here is an excerpt from his review:

> . . . in the pursuit of epic dimensions it mislaid the tiny and elusive kernel of inspiration and humaneness that would have touched and moved the individual viewer to share in the priest's agonizing torment and final redeeming sacrifice. . . . The viewer too often was only invited to be a spectator and rarely a participant whose emotions were to be put under compelling seizure.[1]

The same standard of emotional involvement is used by Robert J. Williams in his review of the play, "People Need People," an Alcoa Premiere presentation dealing with the treatment of the mentally ill in the Navy:

> On rare occasions the crushing power of a dramatic presentation leaves the viewer emotionally exhausted. . . ."People need People" provided such an experience. . . . The dreadful aberration, the frightening violence, and the pathetic helplessness of the deranged were enacted with realism that seared the heart and mind of the viewer.[2]

The play, which brought unanimously favorable reviews from the critics, was praised in these words by Harriet Van Horne who also used the

---

[1] New York Times, October 30th, 1961, p. 59.

[2] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, October 11, 1961, p. 25.

standard of emotional involvement in her review:

> Mr. Greenberg's drama was tenderly and soundly crafted. He took us on a heartbreaking journey through the mind of the sergeant whose psyche bore wounds almost too terrible to contemplate. That we did share for a little while the anguish of the mentally ill, that we did contemplate, is proof that the writing, acting, and directing were of a very high order.[3]

Miss Van Horne again utilizes this standard of program intent in her review of "The Power and the Glory," in which she states:

> The execution scene was agonizing. This I daresay proves the excellence of the drama. We discovered how much we cared.[4]

Emotional involvement is only one intent of drama. The intent of making the audience think is implied by Dwight Newton in his review of "The Quality of Mercy," the first program in The Defenders series. The story concerned the mercy killing of an infant born retarded.

> . . . superior drama in every way. . . . Threaded through the play were provocative views on euthanasia. . . . To the viewer is left a conclusion to debate, denounce, or applaud, as all good drama should. [Sic][5]

As expressed in the preceding reviews, emotional or mental involvement by the viewer would seem to be the main intent of drama. The most important standard the critics use in measuring the drama's success in fulfilling this intent is that of credibility.

The concern for credibility in all its forms is expressed throughout the reviews of the selected critics at one time or another. At times the critics disagree as to whether the drama achieved credibility, but they do use the standard itself as a measure of the program's success.

---

[3]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 11, 1961, p. 35.

[4]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 30, 1961, p. 30.

[5]San Francisco Examiner, September 19, 1961, p. 26.

Credibility involves not only credibility of the plot, but also credibility of characterization. Dwight Newton reviewing the play, "Moment of Decision," deplores the incredibility of the story line, stating in his review: ". . . it was a preposterously unbelievable yarn. . . ."[6] Robert J. Williams, utilizing the same standard in reviewing the program stated:

> . . . at its worst it was a preposterous parody that momentarily was in danger of drowning in its own absurdity. . . .[7]

Credibility of plot was one of the main criteria used by all of the critics in the play, "Somebody's Waiting," the story of a lonely sailor and lonely girl who find some small measure of comfort together. Although all applauded Mickey Rooney's realistic characterization, they rejected the incredible plot. Critic Harry Harris perhaps summed up the majority reaction in this excerpt from his review:

> The trouble in "Somebody's Waiting" was that Rooney succeeded all too well in imparting realism to the central character. Seaman Augie Miller was an inane long winded bore. As he chatted away relentlessly pouring banalities into the ears of both sides of the television screen it was easy to see and understand why shipmates and cousins preferred to remain out of ear shot. Less readily understandable despite their mutual loneliness was why a lovely young girl who had recently suffered a romantic crisis should be drawn to him . . . As the compassionate Carla, Susan Oliver is too pretty and appealing for the jabber jammed fate apparently in store for her.[8]

Incredibility in the continuity of the play and in some of the scenes is also found by critic Robert J. Williams, although he applauds the

---

[6]San Francisco Examiner, November 9, 1961, p. 30.

[7]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, November 8, 1961, p. 62.

[8]Philadelphia Inquirer, November 9, 1961, p. 16.

fine acting:

> Fine acting in a miserably constructed play produced a strangely contradictory hour of drama. . . . The performance of Mickey Rooney and Susan Oliver illuminated "Somebody's Waiting" more brightly than it had a right to be . . . For reasons that might have been convincing to author Adrian Spies, but certainly to no one else, Rooney lies for hours in the street, unable to get help, although the area seemed as busy as Market on the Saturday before Christmas. This was one of several glaring flaws. Another completely messed up the time element. The action took place on election day when the liquor stores were closed. After it was established that none could be purchased till after the polls closed at 8 PM, Seaman Rooney, noting that the grog shops were now open went off on his errand in broad daylight. But even with this sloppy writing, "Somebody's Waiting" was appealing entertainment thanks to Rooney's portrayal of the pathetic seaman.[9]

An example, on the other hand, of a program which was favorably reviewed by most critics because of its believable characters and somewhat credible situation was the first program of Dr. Kildare. Here are several excerpts from the reviews of Jack O'Brian, Dwight Newton, and Robert J. Williams:

> . . . another winner. . . . Much of the show's success rested mainly on the simple fact that its characters were credible. The situations were dramatically strong but well within a viewer's belief and patience. It wasn't felt necessary to make the hospital cases so hyperthyroid in their tragedy to fall into bathos, and the very young hero was not given any premature characteristics of a genius. Chamberlain's completely different than Ayres and at least for TV's purpose an improvement. His misgivings and professional gropings are human and sympathetic shortcomings, subtly part of a character that can grow not smugly perfect therefore fine to give the viewers a rooting interest. . . .It was a sensible comfortable hour without dazzle or dramatic skyrockets and it too rested its hopes for TV permanence on character credibility which it offered in consisting satisfaction to a viewer.[10]

> . . . bears no resemblance to the Lionel Barrymore Lew Ayres tandem . . . creating own new characterizations, more modern,

---

[9]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, November 8, 1961, p. 62.

[10]O'Brian, New York Journal American, September 28, 1961, p. 13.

more believable. . . .[11]

> . . . the series looms as solid antiseptic scented TV fare . . . the opening episode was neatly packaged. It had conflict, humor, the breath of romance, also a scoop or two of soap suds. . . . The main business of the premiere was to establish character and atmosphere which was impressively achieved. Richard Chamberlain, a bony faced handsome young actor seemed to be a handsome choice for Kildare. . . . Old pro Raymond Massey provided the necessary counterpoint to Chamberlain's brash dedicated but often foolish Kildare.[12]

A different reaction, however, was voiced to the Ben Casey series which also featured the realism in dialogue of a hospital setting. Critics, however, questioned the credibility of the character, Ben Casey, and the credibility of the first story which had an obvious ending. Casey himself was a victim of a potentially fatal rabies infection. Critic Robert J. Williams finds fault with the unrealistic plot while praising the program's realistic setting:

> Ben Casey got off to a super heated start . . . boiled with the sledge hammer medical realism of "Medic." Considerably less realistic, however, was its plot . . . since series heroes never die in the first episode, Casey's plight produced a dramatic vacuum.[13]

Thus, by providing an obvious ending the play did not allow the viewer to empathize with Casey in his predicament. Consequently, the story did not successfully achieve its intent as good drama should.

Harry Harris in discussing the credibility of Casey's character compares Casey with Kildare and also questions the dramatic value of the plot:

---

[11]Newton, San Francisco Examiner, October 2, 1961, p. 28.

[12]Williams, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 29, 1961, p. 20.

[13]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, October 3, 1961, p. 70.

> We'd say that Casey is to Kildare as Captain Bligh is to a sea scout. He's a rough tough customer this no nonsense neurosurgeon, bull headed, brusque, unmannerly, unsmiling, and in the first segment, "to be pure" he repeatedly demonstrated his abundant ability to lose friends and alienate people. But more ingratiating Casey characteristics were displayed too as he conducted three intricate operations over hospital staff objections to save the life of a nine year old boy and sweated out the thirty day incubation period of rabies after an accident. (We didn't share the general concern about the latter situation since the star of a series isn't about to be killed off in the first chapter.)[14]

Possibly the most unfavorable review of the program came from critic Jack O'Brian. He considered both the character of Casey and the premise of the series hardly credible:

> . . . played by Vincent Edwards on a one note of humorless urgency as if he had only to finish the show to perform one great operation and die. He almost did die from drowning in the plot as two counterplots whirlpooled their talents last night. . . . Because the show was sold for the whole season it seemed unlikely they'd kill off the young genius last night so the tension didn't quite mount.
> The show's appeal apparently will have to stand on its loud clear insistence on the grimmest overstated reality. You won't find a hospital like this one anywhere short of a Marx Brothers' movie, with the sense of humor extracted. . . . For it seems the villain of this weekly piece is Dr. Ben's own personality, abrasive, even a bit ugly, not so much a bedside manner as jailside. He's rough and uncouth but simply awash with genius, impatient of the shortcomings of ordinary doctors, ragged edging the nerve ends of the hospital boards, frustratingly bothersome to his old doctor patron, played by Sam Jaffe more like a crusty shopkeeper than a doctor. . . .
> It's a "Dr. Kildare" series without the sugar and spice and everything nice, except for a few fleeting scenes behind closed doors when Dr. Ben does break down and speak softly and sympathetically gently to the little boy. No witnesses though except the camera. Meanwhile the rough tough no-hysteria does hold interest, not too much credibility, but some interest.[15]

The critics' concern with credibility of characterization was perhaps most vividly brought out in their reviews of the television adaption of Graham Greene's powerful and controversial novel, The

---

[14]Philadelphia Inquirer, October 3, 1961, p. 24.

[15]New York Journal American, October 3, 1961, p. 16.

Power and the Glory. It starred Sir Laurence Olivier as the alcoholic priest fleeing from anti-clerical forces. Involved in the reviews was not only concern for the truthful translation of the story itself, but also for a truthful portrayal of the priest's character if the play was to truly involve the audience emotionally and mentally with the priest's dilemma. Olivier's acting inspired the main commentary of all the selected reviews. Dwight Newton wrote:

> . . . a dramatic masterpiece . . . unwavering dedication to Graham Greene's story as interpreted by adapter Dale Wasserman . . . Sir Laurence Olivier delivered a superbly sensitive performance. . . . None [of the cast] in their emotional moments detracted one whit from the story. Sir Laurence did not lapse into Olivier for a second. He was the priest always. The result was a superior blending of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual conflict.[16]

Also in agreement with Newton, critic Harry Harris found Olivier's performance the difference between making the role seem anti-clerical and giving it the feeling of religious affirmation that the novel conveyed.

> In The Power and the Glory he [Olivier] was cast as a seeming travesty of a Latin American priest, a brandy guzzler with a bastard daughter, a weak man whose palpable vices exceeded his virtues. But he possessed virtues too, including compassion and a sense of mission and dedication, a compulsion to perform his religious office so intense, that however reluctantly, he elected to eventually leave hard bought safety and comfort for certain death. . . . The dominant mood was tragic. . . . Much of the teleplay's content could be construed as anti-clerical, but the ultimate effect thanks to Olivier's brilliantly varied three dimensional portraiture was powerfully one of religious affirmation.[17]

Similar reaction to the production was expressed by Harriet Van Horne who called Olivier's interpretation of the whiskey priest a "towering,

---

[16] San Francisco Examiner, October 31, 1961, p. 25.

[17] Philadelphia Inquirer, October 30, 1961, p. 30.

heart rending performance,"[18] and Dale Wasserman's script as "faithful to all the complexities of Graham Greene's novel."[19] Perhaps the finest overall evaluation of the play's truthful transformation and credible characterization was written by Jack O'Brian.

> In Laurence Olivier's role as the tragic priest it [the production] certainly had a fine richly modulated powerful performance of a beautifully drawn role.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Olivier extracted from the character the depth and the tortured fears of a man of God ripped violently toward both heaven and hell, and managed it brilliantly. Not in manner, speech, mood, and glance, nor even in the slightest reaction did he waver from a sustained performance, which ranged far beyond the merely professional. He caught all the nuances, understood even the transient Latin meanings of a hurried absolution, and caught all the large ritual power of Greene's allegory so brilliantly and deftly derived from the passion of Jesus Christ.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Olivier was superb. You believed the goodness of the man of God and understood his shortcomings of flesh and bottle as totally human weaknesses.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Olivier's barely faint Latin inflections were splendid, eliminating all British effects while accenting without destroying the character he played. The theme, trying to obliterate the spiritual by material right, was clear. The power of the title means spiritual power, able to accomplish what all the might of man set against it cannot.[20]

Thus, not only Dale Wasserman's faithful adaption of the novel's true spirit, but Olivier's credible interpretation of the role of the priest are agreed upon by the critics quoted. One other critic, however, Jack Gould, demonstrated that it is possible to use the same standard of evaluation and come up with an entirely different reaction. Gould in his review also commented on Olivier's execution of his role, and on the fact that the production as a whole did not allow the

---

[18] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 30, 1961, p. 30.

[19] Ibid.

[20] New York Journal American, October 30, 1961, p. 22.

viewer to become emotionally involved. Here are two excerpts from the reviews he devoted to the program:

> In pursuit of epic dimensions it [the production] mislaid the tiny and elusive kernel of inspiration and humaneness that would have touched and moved the individual viewer to share in the priest's agonizing torment and final redeeming sacrifice. The viewer too often was only invited to be a spectator and rarely a participant whose emotions were to be put under compelling seizure.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Dale Wasserman's script reflected an episodic preoccupation with a more superficial aspect of the alcoholic priest's flight from anti-clerical forces. A deeper psychological insight to the man was never developed. Sir Laurence Olivier's performance attained a stature and illumination in the concluding scene when the priest beseeches God's compassion. But for the main part it was disconcertingly strident and wanting in emotional electricity.[21]

It can be seen that in all reviews the measure of the play's success depended on the truthful script and the truthful portrayal of the priest's character by Olivier. Most critics applauded the play's success. Gould did not, although he used the same standards of evaluation. Several other reviews also illustrate the critics' concern with credible acting as a standard.

In the drama The Dispossessed dealing with the rights of the American Indian, critic Harriet Van Horne, although praising the theme, had this to say about the casting and acting of one of the principal characters:

> Its [the program's] aims were high, its heart conspicuously in the right place. But a clue to its overall excellence may be seen in one incredible piece of casting. Dina Merrill, that pale, languid, lily blond, who carries a certain drawing room elegance into every role she essays, played an Indian maid on the old frontier. A coarse black wig and Groucho Marx eyebrows merely accentuated her dainty Caucasian features. Miss Merrill was at pain to explain, "I'm one quarter white from the waters of the Gitchee-Gumee." I thought I heard Minnie Ha Ha laugh.

---

[21] New York Times, October 30, 1961, p. 59.

> As if Miss Merrill's position weren't sufficiently absurd she had to play a scene as Standing Bear's interpreter that came perilously close to one of those wild wig wagging sketches we all remember from one of the old Caesar-Coca shows. I've no transcript of Miss Merrill's lines and I won't attempt to reproduce the sounds of Ponca Indian talk. Mostly it was grunts interspersed with a few syllables of what might have been Magyar.[22]

The same thoughts on this were expressed by Jack O'Brian:

> Dina Merrill's sunny high society personality made her role as three-quarter Indian maiden a bit incredible.[23]

Miss Van Horne again displays her concern with credible acting in her review of the play, "Street of Love," involving the story of an American boy who falls in love behind the iron curtain:

> The girl Tanya has miraculously learned to speak flat unaccented midwestern English at the University of Moscow. In general, the production could be described as a poor dress rehearsal. Much of the dialogue skidded into hilarity when it was meant to be terribly solemn. . . . Mr. McLure, the boy detective of "Checkmate" is good at rapturous embraces and grim jaw settings.[24]

Here is an excerpt from her review of "Ben Casey" in which she also stresses the acting:

> Ben Casey is terribly earnest and awesomely professional. The dialogue is so choked with medical terms that a lay viewer can be totally lost for five minutes. All that holds the attention is the fine acting of the principals.[25]

Sprinkled throughout the reviews of all six critics is the standard of credible acting in judging the program's success. Sid Caesar's overacting in a Checkmate drama brought these comments from Harry Harris:

---

[22]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 25, 1961, p. 30.

[23]New York Journal American, October 25, 1961, p. 30.

[24]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 21, 1961, p. 26.

[25]Ibid., October 17, 1961, p. 32.

> . . . a piece of confused claptrap that would have overwhelmed even an Olivier. Whatever he may be, Caesar is no Olivier, as he demonstrated by enthusiastically overacting the role of a paranoid, hypochondriac all night deejay. At times Sid's wild wild Johnny Wilder was embarrassingly reminiscent of some of the way out jazz characters he's played on former telecasts strictly for laughs. The script was ludicrous. It would have you believe for instance that a radio station would permit hour after hour of rock 'n roll irrational words, not even rock 'n roll.[26]

Harris is also questioning the credibility of the plot in the second part of the excerpt. Robert J. Williams reviewing the special play "Assassination Plot at Teheran" criticizes its cliché-filled acting and production as destroying what could have been an intriguing story:

> The premise was a provocative one. Had Hitler known in advance that President Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin were to meet at Teheran, he would have attempted to kill off all of them. Thus rooted in completely valid fictional ground. . . [the production] proceeded to reduce the fascinating make believe into eye rolling, scenery chewing, cloak and dagger blubber. . . . John Larch, Oscar Homolka and Abraham Sofer mugged and grimaced their way through the hour.[27]

Dwight Newton's comments on the excessively overacted version of "The Spiral Staircase" were as follows:

> Oh what a good and gory throat choking time was enjoyed by the performers in "The Spiral Staircase". . . . The whole thing was a mad ball for the actors and a rare fun night for viewers who get laughing kicks from hysterical melodrama.[28]

A program which received unfavorable reviews not only because of its bad acting, but also because of its untruthful departure from the original premise upon which it was based, was the television version of "Bus Stop." The series was to follow the setting and characters of the play by William Inge. Unlike The Power and the Glory which was

---

[26]Philadelphia Inquirer, November 2, 1961, p. 10.

[27]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 25, 1961, p. 22.

[28]San Francisco Examiner, October 6, 1961, p. 31.

hailed by most critics for its faithful adherence to the spirit of Greene's novel, "Bus Stop" was rejected for its unfaithful utilization of the title only, ignoring the original premise and characters. Here is an excerpt from the review by Jack O'Brian:

> . . . an hour of pretentious gooey rubbish. . . . daytime soap opera shifted into the evening hours with a couple of hells and damns thrown in to make it seem adult. A bit of heavy "you're mine, I want you" type breathing during a scene between husband and wife didn't mature its age to the use of dramaturgical reason either. It stars Marilyn Maxwell whose role last night consisted of a "Howdy sir."[29]

Critic Jack Gould voiced the same reaction in almost identical terms:

> . . . only discernible similarity between it and the play is the title. . . . a pedestrian mixture of soap opera and whodunit characterization of the shallowest sort and minimal acting requirements. Marilyn Maxwell, billed as one of the stars, had only a bit part. In support of advertising that the program is adult . . . kissing scenes that were meant to look torrid seemed terribly clumsy. The program also included superfluous hells and damns.[30]

One more illustration from the review of Robert J. Williams, captures the overall reaction to the poor premise, dialogue, and acting:

> . . . a rattle trap drama called "Afternoon of a Cowboy." There were many things wrong with the episode, a few of them trivial. Most offensive, however, was a bogus attempt to achieve earthiness by sprinkling the dialogue with damns and hells to cover up the deficiencies of a poor script. Star Marilyn Maxwell was barely seen in the premiere.[31]

The same type of criticism was expressed on the television version of the screen classic "Intermezzo" which originally starred Ingrid Bergman and Leslie Howard. As with all adaptations, the critics used the original as a basis of comparison. They found the television play unfaithful to the original spirit and beauty of the story and also

---

[29] New York Journal American, October 2, 1961, p. 28.

[30] New York Times, October 2, 1961, p. 63.

[31] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, October 2, 1961, p. 26.

criticized the acting, which they did not feel caught the true characterization of the original play. The following excerpts from the reviews of Harry Harris and Jack O'Brian illustrate the overall reaction.

> As we remember the earlier version it was lyrical, bitter sweet, extremely moving in its depiction of the romance between a married violinist and his infatuated accompanist. . . . None of the adjectives listed was applicable to the television adaptation. There was practically nothing to explain the mutual attraction, so what should have been a "grand amour" emerged as little more than a shabby extra-marital affair involving two rather unattractive and far from sympathetic hanky pankyists. The performances of Jean Pierre Aumont and Ingrid Thulin did little to breathe life or emotion into Patricia Broderick's pedestrian script, cliché crammed almost to the point of burlesque. Aumont was stiff and mostly dead panned, hardly an impassioned lover. The troublingly neurotic looking Miss Thulin displayed enough intensity for both of them, but in a poor cause.[32]

> Fred Coe's television werewover of the slick and lovely movie Intermezzo suffered badly in comparison with the original, still so beautifully memorable. Jean Pierre Aumont's a good actor, but the late Leslie Howard was perfect in the role, delicate yet exquisite in a thoroughly male fashion, whereas Aumont is craggier in look and manner, less the esthete called for in the part of the concert violinist suffering through an epic wing-ding with the beautiful young pianist. The latter role so superbly performed by Ingrid Bergman should never be done by anyone else. We're afraid Miss Thulin wasn't up to the original in looks or personality, acting talent aside. Bergman was the superior there too. The misfortune of comparison does not end with the acting. The somewhat less than an hour version was far short of its need for establishing depth and mood. The condensed version, stripped to the bare bones of the movie plot, remained unsatisfactory and shallow throughout. Miss Thulin caught none of the big romantic mood in the too brief moments the script allowed her to establish her impact and the feeling that this could be the great back street romantic affair of a world famous performer never once seemed to soar as it did in the Bergman-Howard film. It came precariously close to just a little transient tawdriness. The rest of the cast did as ordered professionally, but in light of the program of time and mood more earnestly than credibly.[33]

Again, the shallow untruthful characterizations might have prevented

---

[32]Harris, Philadelphia Inquirer, November 20, 1961, p. 19.

[33]O'Brian, New York Journal American, November 20, 1961, p. 24.

the viewer from empathizing with the principals involved in the drama.

Another element which seems to destroy dramatic credibility according to the critics is the contrived or the obvious. This was illustrated in the first program of the Ben Casey series.[34] It is also illustrated in this excerpt from a review by Harry Harris of the play "Out of the Night," in which he comments on the incredible plot and obvious climax:

> . . . a far fetched melodrama about a World War Two pilot who deliberately bombs an Italian town to even a score with a single man. . . . Seventeen years later he returns to finish the job, only to find to his (if not anybody else's) surprise that the guy had nothing to do with a Nazi atrocity.[35]

In a Ben Casey episode Harris criticizes the use of contrived symbolism and sentiment, which destroys any realism or credibility:

> . . . trying to soothe its depressed audience with an upbeat ending, gratuitously linked death and birth, complete with closeups of a minute old arrival. Also detracting from real people in a real situation atmosphere was the use of schmaltzy background music to italicize the dramatic moments.[36]

These, then, are the main standards of credibility by which the critics seem to judge drama. Believable casting and characterization, believable situations, realistic natural dialogue and endings, all allow the viewer to become emotionally involved with the principals in the story. By so doing, the drama successfully fulfills its intent.

With regard to the production elements of the story, such as directing, camera work, setting, etc. the critics rarely comment

---

[34] See above page 65.

[35] Philadelphia Inquirer, November 2, 1961, p. 10.

[36] Ibid., October 25, 1961, p. 36.

other than saying that directing was good or polished, or the camera work was fluid. They seem to be concerned mostly with the substance of the play. Their reviews imply that if the acting, the pacing, and the adapting were credible, then the directing was good. Two critics, however, in several of their reviews encourage the use of simplicity and subtlety in all aspects of production. These two excerpts from two reviews by Jack Gould of the television production of "Antigone" illustrate his concern for simple setting and simple production as being the essence of television at its most intimate:

> . . . affirmed the uncanny suitability of Greek classical drama to the wants of video. Lean and stark staging invites a clearness of pictorial design that leaps out at the eye. No mounds of plaster of paris, no stacks of two by four lumber, no turntables grinding out harsh background music. . . . the simplest of frames for all that really counts, the playwright and the play.[37]

> The players were set against a striking set. No camera restlessness, or trickery intruded on the performance of the script. . . . Michael Elliot is a director with a gift for remaining unobtrusive. The use of camera for accent or emphasis was delicate and knowing, above all, content to let the author dominate.[38]

Jack O'Brian in his review of "The Power and the Glory" also expresses an appreciation of the use of the intimate and the simple in achieving dramatic effect in drama:

> Much of the play adapted by Dale Wasserman, despite its effect of being seen thr.ugh cheesecloth, had an intensely intimate effect. Many of the scenes were held in small focus. The result, even in unfortunate lighting, and despite clumsy musical scoring, was intensely personal and immensely strong dramatic explanation of the inner priest who sinned but never lost his faith nor shunned the call to glory.[39]

Now that we have defined and illustrated the standards which

---

[37] New York Times, November 15, 1961, p. 87.

[38] Ibid., November 19, 1961, p. 21, sec. 2.

[39] New York Journal American, October 30, 1961, p. 22.

our six selected critics employ in their evaluation of drama, we will study the detective-adventure-western program. All three of these types are judged by somewhat the same standards as the pure drama since they contain the dramatic elements. There are certain aspects of this type of program which the critics seem to be more concerned with than they are in pure or regular drama. As a result, standards are more clearly stated and are found more consistently.

DETECTIVE, ADVENTURE, AND WESTERN DRAMA

Although this category of program represents a lesser proportion of the total reviews written, there is a higher percentage of agreement among the critics than on any other program type. There also emerges a specific pattern of standards which the critics use in their evaluation.

As with regular drama, the question of credibility in plot and character is still the main standard of evaluation. Another important standard, however, which seems to be applied to these types of programs, is that of originality in story and characterization. The stereotyped story in this category will not only contain excessive and unnecessary violence, but also stereotyped characters and "obligatory" scenes. It is these elements which the critics feel destroy the credibility of the story.

One of the first new entries of that season was Cain's Hundred, a detective series rejected unanimously by the critics because of its lack of originality, its violence, and its cliché-ridden characterizations and plot. Harry Harris stated in his review:

> . . . should prove far from a delicate delicacy, with Philadelphian Marc Richman as its staunch, stern, hero. . . . This new entry promises to furnish some exciting hours of video violence. . . . It shapes up as something of a present day "Untouchables." It's no wonder, concocter of the series Paul Monash wrote the original "Untouchables" script. As in the case of that shoot 'em up episode, "Cain's Hundred" gets underway with a two parter, and there are other resemblances too, like the use of an off screen commentator to give the proceedings documentary quality. . . . If there's really a Hollywood campaign to soft pedal the rough stuff, you'd never know it from the first episode which started off with gun shots, a kick in the head, a solar plexus plunking, swinging doors, etc.[40]

The program's resemblance to The Untouchables and some of the stereotypes characterization were both commented upon in the review by Jack O'Brian:

> Part "Untouchables," part vintage Warner Brothers early Cagney violence. . . . Only Cain (it says here) can do definitive battle with these evil men or actors. It makes him a constant target for their blunderbusses of course, even as was Elliot Ness from whom so much of this crudity stems. . . . As a TV drama it was awash with clichés, loaded to the gunnels with overstated criminal types. Martin Gabel as the top hood, a sort of roly poly Costello Luciano type (ah, but never with any nominal ethnic trait) was a horridly overstated villain, varying his cut rate Edward G. Robinson gamut from staring to glaring, not too artistically taxing, even if it reduced the role almost to comedy if not to embarrassment.[41]

The reviews of Dwight Newton and Harriet Van Horne also agree with those of Harris and O'Brian on the program's lack of originality:

> . . . seems to be riding on the coat tails of "The Untouchables" three years too late. Just like Robert Stack, newcomer Marc Richman chases around . . . slugging crooks and shooting mobsters. The thing runneth over with fights in dark alleys, the ratatat of machine guns, screeching tires, gun molls, and all that nonsense.[42]

> "Cain's Hundred" is an updated "Untouchables," the chief difference being that the hoods wear this year's dinner jackets and skitter around back alleys in low slung cars. Cain . . . will

---

[40] Philadelphia Inquirer, September 20, 1961, p. 43.

[41] New York Journal American, September 20, 1961, p. 24.

[42] Newton, San Francisco Examiner, September 28, 1961, p. 28.

> takes a little time getting into proper focus as a hero. Firstly, actor Marc Richman has one of those gaunt cold-eyed faces which inflexible TV type casting long ago stamped "villain." In particular, the sensitive borderline psychotic villain who gets a big coloratura case of hysteria in the final scene. Another obstacle to Cain's acceptance is that we first meet him as a shyster lawyer and amiable fixer for the mob. His decision to cross the street, ethically speaking, doesn't change his spots. Turncoats, no matter which way they turn, are rarely endearing fellows.[43]

This standard of natural unstereotyped casting is expressed in the reviews of several other shows, notably the adventure series Follow the Sun which evidently used a "typical" adventure type here for that kind of program. Jack O'Brian in referring to the hero states:

> The premiere starred Brett Halsey's dimples and darkly pouty prettiness.[44]

Harry Harris referring to the first program called it a "carbon copy of umpteen adventure yarns already on the air."[45] Referring to Brett Halsey he commented: "soulful looking Brett Halsey plays Templin mostly with his forehead and eyelashes."[46] The same thoughts on Halsey's role were expressed by Dwight Newton:

> . . . followed the threadbare doings of most chintzy action adventure shows. . . . trite old hat situations in Honolulu. . . . A girl is killed before Brett, the hero with bedroom eyes concedes that "the police have been kept out of this long enough."[47]

The lack of originality by the use of clichés and obligatory scenes seems to be the main concern of critic Harriet Van Horne in

---

[43]Van Horne, San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 20, 1961, p. 41.

[44]New York Journal American, September 18, 1961, p. 18.

[45]Philadelphia Inquirer, September 18, 1961, p. 18.

[46]Ibid.

[47]San Francisco Examiner, September 19, 1961, p. 26.

her reviews of detective and adventure stories. Here is an excerpt from her review of 87th Precinct:

> The glossy high priced crime series has this in common with all the other crime shows that have preceded it this season. Once seen it quickly empties itself out of the mind, and while being seen it ploughs through the ruts of conformity with such precision we at home could almost cue the actors. . . . What disappoints in this series is its insistence on the clichés. As in the western, the TV detective drama must give us not one but a dozen obligatory scenes.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> We started off the parade of familiars last night with the weary case hardened coroner giving our young detective his grisly report on a female corpse recently recovered from the river. Her dental work is intact and she has an odd tattoo on her hand. "Was she pretty?" asks the detective. There follows the obligatory pause, then, "Nobody is pretty after three weeks in the water."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then follows the scene that so quickly is rung up on TV's little play writing machine. It's what pot holders are to a sewing machine lesson. The innocent lass puts her head on the killer's shoulder, murmurs in a dazed way, "How come a handsome man like you, a man who could have anybody, chose a dull ordinary girl like me?" "Because," he tells her, "I wanted a woman, a warm passionate woman." Suddenly she feels better about not being queen of the May. If the villain had a moustache here is where he'd tweak it. We also had the obligatory fight scene . . . a messy hard hitting brawl ensues. It fails to advance the plot; it fails spectacularly to add anything to the hero's charm. What is the purpose? Well we have underscored for us the nice normal conforming ways of our hero. All TV detectives engage in fist fights, scoring fine bloody victories. Therefore Detective Carella must.[48]

Critic Jack O'Brian also reviewed the program unfavorably, but his concern was not so much with the cliché treatment as with the incredibility of the plot:

> "87th Precinct" isn't just another cops and robbers series but probably is TV's most incredible improbable vehicle this side of "T-Zone," but with none of the latter's forthright diversion into the eerie. This hash of almost baheesh imagination is about a cop with a deaf mute wife who sticks her soundless two cents into hubby's ugliest assignments, in this case a literal lady killing nut who has his female victims tattooed before assigning them to eternity.

---

[48] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 26, 1961, p. 15.

> This script goofed off into the impossible and had an obviously genteel deaf mute yearn to have her sexiest shoulder expanse tattooed just so the show's writers might place her conveniently on the premises when the murderer turned up with his latest to be marked woman. It also supposed that the audience might accept as fact that a cop's wife may go buzzing off into deserted waterfront piers in dark dangerous hours on the trail of this sordid nut. In all, it's so thoroughly beyond sensible drama as to be even too far out for the pliable comprehension of an ectoplasmic happy beatnik.[49]

Harry Harris, like O'Brian, finds the story implausible:

> What supposedly distinguishes the "87th Precinct" detective yarns is that they're ultra realistic, but the NBC series based on the novel seemed anything but. The cops are mundane enough . . . but one of them is married to a beautiful deaf mute with odd motions ala pantomiming Harpo Marx, and odder notions like getting a black butterfly tattooed on her shoulder blade. . . . [she] decides to trail the villain which is quite a problem since she cannot phone nor yell for help. She's saved in the nick of time but only after several mishaps, optimistically intended to generate suspense. At intervals there are squad vignettes which at best seemed lifted from Sidney Kingsley's "Detective Story," and at worst from "Car 54."[50]

A final excerpt from the review of Jack Gould illustrates the critics' concern for natural realistic characterization, as opposed to contrived and coincidental plot:

> An individual and incidental benefit of "87th Precinct" is to illustrate a deaf mute's ability to lead a normal life and converse fluently through lip reading and gestures. . . . However, instead of making the point quietly and keeping it in everyday perspective, which so easily could have been a delightful innovation in characterization, the program went the usual Hollywood way of using the absence of speech and hearing as a primary melodramatic end in itself. The wife's inability to communicate vocally placed her in peril when she set out to assist her husband in the pursuit of a modern bluebeard.
>
> Apart from the role of the detective's wife "87th Precinct" was a standard undertaking in every way. Even though it had an hour at its disposal the program virtually exhausted the possibilities inherent in unlikely coincidence.[51]

---

[49] New York Journal American, September 26, 1961, p. 15.

[50] Philadelphia Inquirer, September 26, 1961, p. 23.

[51] New York Times, September 26, 1961, p. 79.

Another standard by which the critics seem to judge the quality of the program in this category is its use of violence only when necessary to further the plot. We have seen references to violence and sadism in some of the reviews previously quoted. There were some programs, however, which received unanimously unfavorable reaction mainly because of their excessive sadism and violence. One such program was Target the Corruptors, which drew the same major criticism from all three critics who reviewed it. Here are excerpts from the reviews of Dwight Newton, Harry Harris, and Robert J. Williams:

> . . . it premiered as hoodlums shot a nice little Italian in the belly and dumped a truckload of garbage over him. . . . Mr. Big was shot shot shot and reshot until he was dead dead dead.
> A more appropriate name would be million dollar dump. . . . action elements that made "Untouchables" popular and a lot of viewers may eat it up garbage and all.[52]

> ABC added another Untouchables type gangster series to its list of mayhem stretching programs. This one's violent enough to suit any sitting room sadist, but tricked up with public service overtones. Thus, the premiere between especially unsavory killings and assorted sluggings made documentary style comments about the garbage collection racket's cost to the average citizen. . . . the show was stolen as it usually is in these shootemups by the guest hoodlums.[53]

> This can be said about the "Million Dollar Dump" premiere episode of "Target the Corruptors" . . . the program reeked with hideous violence, reviling characters, and all around savagery. In the guise of exploring business racketeering which exists in some places, perhaps, it left a stench in my parlour more foul than the garbage dumped on a victim of the hoodlums. This dainty touch was in the opening scene, the one that drew blistering criticism last June from the senate sub-committee investigating violence on TV.[54]

---

[52] Newton, San Francisco Examiner, October 2, 1961, p. 28.

[53] Harris, Philadelphia Inquirer, October 2, 1961, p. 22.

[54] Williams, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 30, 1961, p. 20.

Another such program was the western, Frontier Circus. The reviews by Robert J. Williams and Jack O'Brian reflect the general opinion of the show:

> CBS issued a statement . . . pointing with pride to its programs aired for the enlightenment of children. Last night it added another such show to the prime 7-8 PM kiddie slot. It's called "Frontier Circus." The little ones who watched the first episode heard and saw such edifying features as a vivid word picture of how a beautiful woman was torn to shreds by lions, a visual demonstration of how to horsewhip a man and a bloody fist fight. Only slightly less impressive character building attractions were a sadistic animal trainer and a booze guzzling ex-animal trainer who reformed.[55]

> More of Minow's wasteland was "Frontier Circus". . . . [It] edified the nation's living rooms with the sight of a sadistic villain holding a man in front of a famished bear . . . a sadistic lion tamer holds a man whose fear of lions drove him to drink within jaw and claws length of the caged jungle king . . . said lion tamer savagely whips the sodden subject of terror, later unleashes the lion into a cage containing his wife and Aldo Ray. Romantic? The lion tamer's wife whips husband righteously if not savagely and of course a couple of bang up bully boy fist fights . . . could be useful for throwing sensitive souls clear into convulsions.[56]

It is not only the excessive use of violence which the critics deplore, but the assumption that violence is justified when it is committed by the supposed "heroes" of the play. Dwight Newton's review of the program, Frontier Circus, contained these words:

> . . . shapes up as a "Wagon Train" with lions, tigers, and elephants, and the good guy always wins, even if he is a drinking stumblebum lion tamer as Aldo Ray was. . . . If you're content with "Wagon Train" you'll probably develop an appetite for "Frontier Circus" once you get used to it.[57]

His review of Straightway exhibits the same thought:

> It ended happily, however, when Kelley [one of the heroes]

---

[55] Ibid., October 6, 1961, p. 8.

[56] New York Journal American, October 6, 1961, p. 24.

[57] San Francisco Examiner, October 10, 1961, p. 24.

> sprayed gasoline in the sheriff's eye and made him confess he was wrong.[58]

The characterization of Billy the Kid in the Tall Man brought these remarks from Newton in another of his reviews:

> Pat Garret still pals around with Billy the Kid, a despicable and moronic killer. In real life Garret shot him dead but on TV vicious Billy remains an idol with feet of mud and blood.[59]

If we review the standards by which the six critics judge the quality of detective, adventure, and western dramas, the main ones would seem to be those of originality and credibility. The critics admire the story that can maintain interest and suspense without resorting to excessive violence and cliché dialogue, characters, acting, and plots. The most unfavorable reactions are expressed toward "type casting" of heroes and the "obligatory" scenes of violence and sadism which seem to stereotype most of the programs in this category.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND DOCUMENTARIES

What is the intent of the public affairs or documentary program? The limited number of reviews in this category seem to indicate that the main intent is to inform or to educate. An examination of what reviews there are does reveal some critical standards used in evaluation by the critics.

The first of these standards is a truthful balanced presentation of subject matter, whether the subject be a controversial issue or a personality. The program "Walk In My Shoes," dealing with the

---

[58] Ibid., October 16, 1961, p. 29.

[59] Ibid., September 12, 1961, p. 27.

American Negro as seen through the Negro's eyes was lauded by all critics for its balanced truthful presentation of the issue. These following words are from the review by Harry Harris:

> . . . the camera commuting from place to place and person to person proved most effective. Cumulatively established by the unorthodox technique was the fact that whatever their geographic location, their economic status, their degree of education, American Negroes are rarely ever to forget the pigmentation of their skin and the conviction that it automatically deprives them of the rights automatically accorded non-Negro fellow citizens. This consciousness of being 24 hour Negroes provided a recurring theme as mobile cameras recorded spokesmen for varying viewpoints on how to achieve equality in Harlem slums and Los Angeles patios, in cabs, conventions, night clubs, and living rooms. Young Negroes disagreed with old ones. . . .[60]

Jack Gould's comments almost reiterate those of Harris:

> It was told purposely from the standpoint of the Negro. It was a perspective further enhanced by inspired use of a mobile candid camera. . . . The misery and squalor of the Negro ghetto in Harlem were shown in agonizing detail and then contrasted with some comfortable patio life enjoyed by some Negroes on the West coast. But whatever the environment or personal, economic, and educational standards, theirs was a burden common to all, the unremitting reminder that one is a Negro.[61]

One more excerpt from the review of Dwight Newton will illustrate the program adherence to unbiased truthful presentation:

> You saw and heard Negroes agree and disagree with Negroes on everything from integration and social status to Black Muslims and Freedom Riders. You saw poor repressed Negroes in the slums of Harlem, wealthy sophisticated Negroes in the suburbs of Chicago and Los Angeles, the cab driver, the lawyer, the night club comic, and the agitator.[62]

Thus, there is approval of a program which showed all sides of the Negro question from all types of Negroes, the "best" as well as the "worst." Another program which attempted balanced presentation was

---

[60] Philadelphia Inquirer, September 20, 1961, p. 43.

[61] New York Times, September 20, 1961, p. 59.

[62] San Francisco Examiner, September 21, 1961, p. 26.

"Angola Journey to A War" which dealt with the native uprisings against the Portuguese government. NBC News assigned separate crews to join the natives and the government and thus hoped to present both sides of the dispute objectively. Dwight Newton referred to the attempt as "alert unbiased journalism."[63] Harriet Van Horne, however, claimed that the documentary did not do a thoroughly balanced job:

> We were taken to the bloody battleground of Angola on little cat feet all the way. . . . Simply comparing last night's film to the stories that have appeared in newspapers here and in London, makes it clear that this white paper contained quite a bit of white wash and a slight overcoat of rosy pink. Robert Young deserves credit for bravery, but his film for the most part was travelogue stuff. "Things are just terrible here" it said in effect, but never mind why. Only one scene stood out as vivid exciting TV. This was the rendezvous by the NBC crew and the native guides. For once, the tremulous young voice was exactly right saying, "We put our lives into the hands of these seven strangers and marched off into the night."[64]

Thus, Miss Van Horne, using the same standard, of truthful balanced presentation finds the program unsuccessful, although she praises the effort made. She uses this same criterion in appraising the documentary, "The Many Faces of Spain." Here is an excerpt from her review:

> It would appear that Chet Huntley and his NBC cameras met with the cold hand of censorship while in sunny Spain. Last evening's film . . . was essentially a travelogue, albeit a haunting and beautiful one, rather than a documentary. The cameras concentrated on scenery, festivals, faces, and--to the point of exhaustion--flamenco dancing and bull fights.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> In contrast to conventional documentaries, only one Spaniard sat for an interview. This was Julian, a writer and philosopher whose prestige is such that he is allowed to criticize the regime. . . . was neither specific nor severe . . . "The trouble for 25 years no present issues have been discussed here," said Senor Marias.

---

[63] Ibid.

[64] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 20, 1961, p. 41.

> "I mean political question. . . . Politics doesn't really exist." Perhaps not, but the camera showed us the dreaded Puerta Del Sol Prison currently familiar to an estimated 6,000 political prisoners, to quote narrator Huntley.[65]

The same standard of truthful balanced reporting in biographical treatment is again utilized by Miss Van Horne in her review of the "World of Billy Graham":

> . . . the tone of last evening's narrative seemed to me hushed and reverent to the point of absurdity. Not all viewers are persuaded that we are a nation of sinners, and that salvation is to be found in a tent with a choir of thousands crooning revivalist hymns. Only once did the script ask why do people flock to hear Billy Graham. The answer was cursory. "Some people come to find something, some come because they are curious. . . some come to see a show." Others, one suspects come rather to be part of a show. The Reverend Billy beseeching sinners to step forward and be saved reminded a British critic of a magician who asks for volunteers to assist in a bit of conjuring. It would be interesting to learn how long these conversions carried out with a theatrical flourish actually stick. No comment on these in the script.[66]

Jack Gould reviewing the same program, also expresses a concern over somewhat slanted presentation, rather than spontaneous balanced documentary:

> A personality profile of considerable interest if not too much dimension. . . . Always aware of being on camera led to a certain stiffness and formality to his remarks . . . the difference between talking for publication and relaxed conversation. . . . [The plot] fell down by touching very briefly on controversy over his methods and effectiveness. . . . would have been vastly more valuable if modern day evangelism had been discussed with much greater thoroughness and if there had been independent opinions by world religious figures on the measure of Graham's contributions and on lasting results of his visits. Last night's hour suffered from the limitations of resembling an authorized biography.[67]

Truthful, balanced presentation of issues and personalities is thus

---

[65] Ibid., November 15, 1961, p. 18.

[66] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, November 30, 1961, p. 44.

[67] New York Times, November 30, 1961, p. 74.

illustrated as being one standard by which the critics measure the success of public affairs programs.

A second standard showing up in the reviews implies that the critic prefers visual or factual editorializing to personal sermonizing. The critics look for the visual treatment of the facts and issues to speak for themselves with a minimum of subjective commentary by the narrator or commentator of the program. Jack Gould expresses this thought in his review of "Conference of Unaligned Nations":

> Accompanying the study, however, was an editorial that was not only redundant in the face of facts previously cited, but also had overtones of sermonizing to a third of the world. It was considerably less compelling.[68]

His review of "David Brinkley's Journal" also reveals a concern for the low pressure editorial:

> . . . a half hour of wry and amusing sequences. . . . engagingly low pressure and sardonic tone . . . and a delightfully wry editorial.[69]

The example of visual editorializing which most caught the critics' attention in this program was the sequence which played a recording of the song "America the Beautiful" to a film of America's junk yards, city dumps, slums, tenement clotheslines, highway billboards, and other such unsightly objects. All critics selected this one particular segment as being superb irony and an outstanding visual editorial. Harriet Van Horne, in another Brinkley program, again expressed her admiration for Brinkley's ability to editorialize visually by using an example from "The Respectable Side of Crime":

---

[68] Ibid., September 13, 1961, p. 91.

[69] Ibid., October 12, 1961, p. 59.

> The smashing of a TV camera that remained valiantly in operation recording every shudder of its traumatic experience gave us an interlude of stunning TV. . . . NBC's mobile camera lingered thoughtfully before the stately homes of America's hoodlums. Guide Brinkley read off names, addresses, and occupations.[70]

The desire to let the picture or the facts speak for themselves with a minimum of commentary was the reason for Harry Harris' lukewarm review of "The Many Faces of Spain":

> Photographically it was a gem, filled with vivid vignettes. The accompanying palaver, however, was less than inspired, pedestrian, needlessly polysyllabic, sometimes distractingly at variance with the pictures, and crammed to the point of indigestibility.[71]

A third standard which emerges in some of the reviews is that of the newness or importance of the information. Harriet Van Horne's criticism of "The Awesome Servant" which dealt with automation was that it spent too much time talking to people who had nothing new to say, rather than with some experts who could give us new and important facts. Her review of the program "Heresy in Red" concerning communist Yugoslavia expressed this same thought about new information:

> There was nothing in this half hour peek at Yugoslavia that the intelligent viewer hadn't read, or heard, or seen on other TV programs.[72]

Robert J. Williams' review of "In Case of War" voiced the same critical concern about old material:

> . . . covered ground that has been thoroughly raked over on the air and in print.[73]

Jack O'Brian criticized "The Many Faces of Spain" as being "an extended

---

[70]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 19, 1961, p. 25.

[71]Philadelphia Inquirer, November 15, 1961, p. 70.

[72]San Francisco News Call Bulletin, November 29, 1961, p. 20.

[73]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, November 10, 1961, p. 40.

detailing of some rather well known Spanish facts."[74]

Based on the limited amount of reviews in this category, these three standards are the ones which seem to concern the critics in judging the public affairs program. 1) Truthful, balanced presentation of the issue. 2) Visual editorializing with a minimum of commentary. 3) New and important information. If a program adheres to these three criteria it is evidently fulfilling its intent of informing and educating the viewer.

THE COMEDY PROGRAM

One of the most difficult programs in which to find some common standards by which most critics judge it is the comedy program. Perhaps this is because the intent of comedy is to provide laughter to the viewer. Consequently, the humor of the material seems to be the only standard which the critic uses. Since sense of humor depends on many factors, what is funny to one critic is in many cases not funny to the other critic. The percentage of agreement among critics on the comedy program is less than fifty percent as compared to percentages between 75-100% for all other types of programs.

Not only do critics differ among themselves, but each individual critic is inconsistent with his own standards. While rejecting the exaggerated characters or absurd plots of one comedy program the critic will accept them in another program perhaps because of his personal bias toward the personality involved. These two factors of disagreement and inconsistency among critics will now be illustrated, with

---

[74] New York Journal American, November 15, 1961, p. 32.

special emphasis on the important role of personality appeal.

Ernie Kovacs' brand of humor on his first special of that season drew mixed reviews, depending on whether the critic liked Kovacs' visual style. Critic Dwight Newton implied that the Kovacs' brand of humor was an esoteric kind which did appeal to Newton:

> A televised tour with Ernie is like a tour through a museum of modern art. If your imagination is clicking you're spellbound; if not, you're bored stiff. Ernie's goal seems to be to amuse himself with camera tricks and wacky vignettes created for fun not for any logical reason. . . . The last shot was a huge closeup of Ernie's eye. I want to be there when he opens it for his second show next month.[75]

Richard J. Williams also favored the Kovacs brand of laughs:

> . . . [The program] was a choice special from his bottomless loony bin. . . . He is TV's only 100% visual comedian. This is not an unmixed blessing in a medium primarily visual by definition. You have to strain to take in all the action and love that man's antics as I do.[76]

Critic Harriet Van Horne, however, expresses an entirely different reaction:

> Madness without method can grow terribly tiresome, particularly if it's a labored and not very fastidious madness as was certainly the case in Ernie Kovacs' first special. Clever and gifted as he is . . . artistically speaking he permits crudities that are in no sense funny. And he has a heart too soon made glad by surrealistic bits of imagery that convey nothing. To sustain a half hour show based on camera tricks, low physical jokes, and the art form called "dadaism" requires a soaring imagination and a firm discipline. . . .
> The Kovacs quest for the grotesque may be his undoing. There can be no art without style, proportion and a sense of delight. The shock effect in some of Ernie's devices is at times stunning. But the sense of delight like everything else on the show is achieved through a distorting prism.[77]

Thus, the illogical trickery of Kovacs' show, which appeals to Newton

---

[75] San Francisco Examiner, September 25, 1961, p. 59.

[76] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 22, 1961, p. 32.

[77] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 22, 1961, p. 24.

and Williams, does not appeal to Miss Van Horne.

Another example of a comedian whose style appealed to most critics, but not all, was Danny Kaye. His show was on the whole favorably received by most critics--because of his personality, however, not his material. The following excerpts from reviews illustrate critical agreement and disagreement. Critic Robert J. Williams lauded Kaye's performance:

> It does great injustice to Danny Kaye to think of him as a comedian. He is of course a great one, but clowning is only one of the many brilliant facets of this one of a kind entertainer. In his second annual TV special Kaye gave a dazzling display of his gifts. Within the hour he was storyteller, dancer, singer, mimic, and standup comic. His moods embrace whimsy, zaniness and sentimentality. No matter what he was doing on this taped show . . . Danny Kaye's exquisite showmanship gave it luster. Many of the program's antics were linked to the general theme, seeing ourselves as others do. This device gave Danny wide latitude for projecting an album full of characterizations. . . . If ever there was demolishing argument in behalf of Taped vs. Live TV, Danny gave it last night. It would have been impossible to present his rapid fire series of caricatures in costume without using tape. It was these which gave the show some of its sparkle and individuality. The only number in which Kaye did not appear was a marvelously imaginative dance routine . . . in which the chorus translated into movement the sounds of trains, autos, rocket blast off, and the carousel.[78]

Critic Harry Harris likewise salutes Kaye's performance:

> In what was a one star, if not a one man show, Kaye had himself a ball singing, dancing, clowning, and displaying his skill as a pantomimist dialectician and informal chatterer. . . . A fast moving hour, some dull spots and some perilously coy ones, but most of the hour rated a resounding hoorah for Kaye.[79]

Harriet Van Horne, although lauding Kaye's performance, found fault with the material and also disagreed with Williams on both the taped sequences and the dancing:

---

[78]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, November 7, 1961, p. 67.

[79]Philadelphia Inquirer, November 7, 1961, p. 21.

> In the nightly lottery of TV Danny Kaye is absolutely anything constitutes a grand Prize. He gave us some rich and wonderful moments. But it can be said that . . . [his performance] far below expectation . . . considerably more dross than gold . . . too much that was new and mediocre when our hearts were longing for something old, familiar, and impeccably first class as befits an artist of Mr. Kaye's standing. . . . Appearing with our star were a chorus of singers and a horde of extras dressed to the nines. The latter were of no help. . . . An eight minute pantomime that depended as much on the artistry of the makeup department and the sharp cutting of the tape as it did on Kaye's talent.[80]

Critic Jack Gould also gave Kaye a tempered review:

> . . . in need of far better material to develop sense of rapport upon which success depends rather heavily. He spoke of the sponsor's product in much the same tone as he referred to a Robert Burns' poem. One tasteless sequence had Kaye hypnotized, portraying a six year old child at a Washington diplomatic reception.[81]

If the aforementioned critics criticized Kaye's materials, they also approved his personality and performance, but critic Jack O'Brien rejected Kaye's program in every way including Kaye's talent:

> No one is more certain than Danny Kaye that Danny Kaye is cute, and nothing is more artistically fey than a fiftyish comedian who leans a full sixty minute show on the thick syrupy goo of cuteness. His once physically glib dancing has gone the way of all aging tendons . . . so that he had to fall back on his personality. Oddly enough he once had one that was wallopingly effective, but then it did not rest so hopelessly heavy on the giggling cuteness with which he belabored his annual CBS-TV hour last night. Matter of fact many of his moments bore the touch of Jerry Lewis in an unprepared Lewis gambit.
> As Kaye gets older his jokes are smaller and his effort to pump them up with the childishly absurd into larger laughter than they deserve gets pretty wearying. Even his muted toned touches of seriousness suffer the tortures of cuteness. "I Am an Is" was the title of a far fetched tangle of pretentious sermonizing simplicity full of arch little simperings and fears that "I Am an Isn't" but finally found him assured that "I Am an Is," all in a style loaded to the diapers with goo goo and ga ga and glug. Kaye capered through the now museum piece in which he sings, "Begin the Beguine," relentlessly off key. The sketch in which

---

[80] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, November 7, 1961, p. 26.

[81] New York Times, November 8, 1961, p. 71.

> he was hypnotised by mistake . . . flung him into giggly baby talk and was somewhat emptied anyway by the fact that it served as the basis for a "Pete and Gladys" episode some week ago. There was very little in the show able to escape Kaye's cavalcade of cuteness.[82]

O'Brian's rejection of a personality is also reflected in his review of The Bob Cummings Show:

> . . . one of the silliest extremes of grown up giddiness TV has suffered in a generation of some pretty offensively charming people. . . . Under no circumstances could such a ridiculous array of syrupy situations, dialogue, and dimpled coyness be palatable. But in light of Cummings' endlessly publicized age . . . gallavanting thus about the TV screen in such an adolescent confection seems hopelessly unexplainable. . . . He disburses his romantic favors willingly, smugly, sweetly, but never for pay, only for the benefit of the sugar plums dancing in his cheeks.[83]

Other critics gave the show and Cummings' personality somewhat favorable reviews. Robert J. Williams wrote:

> Presto! Bob, the perennial juvenile has pressed the button marked girls again . . . with every indication that casanova Cummings will make another merry success of his wow the women formula. . . . The script was breezy, spotted with some very funny lines, and one hilarious switch on that old follow the cab routine.[84]

Jack Gould commented:

> Style same as past. Fast talk, pretty girls, and breezy comedy. Bright, quick, inconsequential and inoffensive.[85]

Another example of critics disagreeing not only on the personality but on the material is illustrated in the reviews of The Steve Allen Show. His attempts at satire and other elements of the show were received differently by the critics. Dwight Newton unfavorably reviewed the whole program with specific comment on two segments:

---

[82]New York Journal American, November 7, 1961, p. 18.

[83]Ibid., October 6, 1961, p. 24.

[84]Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, October 6, 1961, p. 8.

[85]New York Times, October 6, 1961, p. 71.

> . . . a limp hour. . . . Attempts to satirize a TV investigating committee became foolish farce. The only sure fire hit was Steve's question man routine, done to music this time.[86]

Harry Harris in a journalistic type of review gave a favorable reaction to the program in general terms.

> . . . Allen indicated that he's planning to serve up pretty much the same mirthful menu as before. Not all the show's gags worked. The Allen wit seemed to need whatting. But when Steve accompanied a phony preview of next week's show with the observation, "You'll naturally be pleased to hear we've been renewed for another week," we were indeed pleased.[87]

Robert J. Williams expressing his opinion, cites specific sketches for criticism in disagreeing with Harris:

> There was a time when I thought Steve Allen's humor was the freshest and most provocative on TV. Either my taste has changed or Steve has lost his bite and sting. I found very little to laugh at. In fairness though, the Jose Jimenez astronaut routine by Bill Dana was quite hilarious the first couple of times around, so let's chalk that up as a plus even though it was stale for me. The trouble was not that Allen lacked ideas but Allen's efforts to satirize these situations, however, were chaotic and dull. Only once was there a flash of his former brilliance, in the previews of next week's show. But these came at the end and by then the show was a lost cause.[88]

Jack O'Brian also rejecting the overall show liked Allen's TV investigator routine but not his Question Man routine, thus disagreeing with Dwight Newton on these two sketches.

> . . . he has been funnier before and certainly elsewhere. His comedy sketches this time were far too long where they contained good essential ideas, and limp in Allen's own blackout quickies, such as the Question Man routine. The better elements included a spoof needling TV investigators. . . . Bill Dana did his familiar Astronaut routine which could have been a tape of an old Allen Show for all its durable staleness.[89]

---

[86] San Francisco Examiner, September 29, 1961, p. 31.

[87] Philadelphia Inquirer, September 28, 1961, p. 25.

[88] Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 28, 1961, p. 40.

[89] New York Journal American, September 28, 1961, p. 13.

A different reaction to the program was expressed by critic Harriet Van Horne, who on the whole enjoyed the program, and more specifically the Astronaut routine and the Question Man routine which O'Brian found unfunny:

> . . . not as elegantly mounted as his last effort . . . nor do guest stars shine so brightly. But the endearing quality is still there. I mean that sharp irreverent point of view, the rowdy but very wise sense of fun.
> Not every routine kindled a blaze. . . . Bill Dana was hilarious as an astronaut. The Question Man was as fiendishly literate as usual.[90]

A final illustration of critic disagreement is the review of Jack Gould who found the entire show unfunny and specifically the star's attitude:

> Steve Allen is a man who has written several very creditable books, plays good fraternity house piano, feels genuine alarm over the nuclear arms race and can be a bright and perceptive humorist. With such credentials at his disposal one wishes he would overcome his compulsion to be a slapstick clown, especially after last night.
> He appeared in an hour bereft of practically everything but 60 minutes. The comedy was so broad of outline and so small of point that the program's inclusion of a reference to Ted Mack's "Amateur Hour" had the nature of relevance.
> It began with a satire on a government investigation of TV programming. On a subject so rich in possibilities at the moment, the sketch succeeded only in becoming exhibit A for the prosecution. The coarse burlesque of Captain Kangaroo was especially ill considered. . . . The evening's only rewarding moments were those not concerned with comedy.
> But the details of Mr. Allen's first show were less important than its dominant attitude. The approach of the whole show was so rudimentary in its concept of what makes laughter, so incredibly heavy handed and obvious that only a true artist of slapstick might have minimized the difficulty. But amongst the things Mr. Allen can do on TV the art of performing is not one of them. . . .
> One wonders why Mr. Allen could not become the host, leisurely talking to others as he once did on "Tonight," introducing the act and engaging in some random conversation of some spice and pith. In such a setting he might feel much more at home in the field of comedy. He would have to take recourse in pedestrian sight gags which are so perishable in inexperienced hands, and he could make

---

[90] San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 28, 1961, p. 45.

much better use of his mind where his sense of humor lies.[91]

It is evident that the critics disagree not only on a comedian's personality and approach, but on the material itself. The standards of what is funny to one critic do not hold for the other critics. Since we cannot find standards in those programs upon which the critics do not agree, perhaps we can find standards in those programs which bring unanimous or overwhelming agreement by the critics.

The programs Car 54 Where Are You, and The Joey Bishop Show were both received unfavorably because of their bad material and bad characterizations. Reviews of both programs by the same critics express the same objections to the unoriginal ideas, the stereotyped characters and dialogue, and the canned laughter. Here are excerpts from Jack O'Brian's reviews of The Joey Bishop Show and Car 54 Where Are You?

> . . . a vast disappointment full of faded formula comedy characters and not very good jokes or situations at that. . . . The poverty of comedy ideas even moved the show to use a good young secondary comic named Joey Forman. Therefore it wasn't too odd that the central comic gimmick of the show was a candid camera takeoff, a bit too reminiscent of a similar sketch Foreman and Mickey Rooney did on TV before.[92]

> High hopes were voiced that it might be a modern Keystone Cops. It wasn't. It isn't even close to the shrewd diversion . . . [brought on] by the deservedly long running Phil Silvers' series, "Bilko." In its premiere . . . [it] was a clumsily written, acted, directed, and conceived formula affair, its situation powerfully and awkwardly fabricated to the brass buttons with the obvious and unfunny.[93]

Jack Gould's reviews of the same two shows voice almost the same

---

[91]New York Times, September 28, 1961, p. 83.

[92]Bishop Review, New York Journal American, September 21, 1961, p. 26.

[93]Car 54 Review, Ibid., September 18, 1961, p. 18.

sentiments:

> The plot was simply assembly line, a ho hum yarn. . . . There was little in the proceedings to justify the occasional burst of laughtrack hilarity. Bishop, whose forte is the devastatingly apt ad lib, contributed little more than pained looks like a bush league Jack Benny. The charm of which he is capable was manifested only in a cigarette commercial. Less imitative writers would help even more.[94]

> . . . a series with an absurd premise insanely executed. The principle figures are two cardboard radio patrolmen straight out of a Hollywood situation comedy. Their assignment apparently is to turn a precinct house into a typical video zoo . . . the soft headed buffoons pursued an assortment of overdrawn adventures that were bereft of credibility. The strains of plausibility were too great to be relieved by the canned applause that began before the show did.[95]

The reviews of Harriet Van Horne also express her dissatisfaction with the situation formula and the bad material:

> . . . it's the familiar situation comedy Hollywood style. The jokes follow a ritual pattern. . . . Even the sets look familiar, the office where Bishop works being the sort all private investigators maintain. You know, lots of tall potted plants and swiftly closing elevator doors. . . .
> The format because it is so common place . . . bodes ill. But none of this is of great consequence because Joey Bishop is wonderful. He's wonderful when he has a funny line and oddly entertaining when he has a bad one. When silent he manages to look as if he were thinking something funny. His writers ought to be more appreciative of this talent.[96]

> "Car 54" was described as an hilarious show about cops without robbers. Also cops without wits, charm, or the slightest degree of credibility. Nat Hiken of Bilko fame created this new series and I daresay it will find many warm admirers. But it seems to me that Mr. Hiken let himself be beguiled by the mechanics of comedy, forgetting all about his characters. Toody and Muldoon are mechanical men, wound up for funny business that is just too pat and predictable to be funny.[97]

---

[94] Bishop Review, New York Times, September 21, 1961, p. 71.

[95] Car 54 Review, Ibid., September 18, 1961, p. 59.

[96] Bishop Review, San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September 21, 1961, p. 26.

[97] Car 54 Review, Ibid., September 18, 1961, p. 30.

It would seem from these reviews that there are some standards the critics use in determining what they do and do not think is funny. Cliché situations, absurd situations, absurd characters, and canned laughter would seem to top the list. Do these standards hold up?

The premiere of Hazel starring Shirley Booth, was admitted to be pure situation comedy by most critics, with an absurd premise, absurd situations, and a somewhat incredible kind of character. Yet the program was warmly received because of Miss Booth's personality. Harry Harris was the only critic who rejected the program basing his rejection on his standards of situation formula. Here is an excerpt from his review:

> In pen and ink the rough tough take charge maid is funny. As portrayed in a considerably softer version, more heart than brawl by Shirley Booth, despite loud laugh track cackling, she's not. . . . Hazel, a whiz at place kicking, bowling, and ear flipping, and not above an occasional stab at hop scotch, decides the kids needed a playground more than a botanical garden and sets about getting it most improbably. Enroute she kicked a football into a chimney, climbed a ladder, and otherwise behaved in a way that prompted the question, "Is she some kind of nut or something?" Don Defore and Whitney Blake are also trapped in this trivia. [Sic][98]

All other critics, also admitting the formula style and the absurdity of the situation, still accepted the program because of their partiality for Shirley Booth's personal warmth and her interpretation of an incredible character. They did not even mention the phony laugh track which was given quite a bit of attention in their critical rejections of the Bishop show and "Car 54." The following excerpts from the reviews of Jack Gould, Dwight Newton, Richard J. Williams, and Jack O'Brian illustrate.

---

[98]Philadelphia Inquirer, September 29, 1961, p. 22.

. . . a vidipix all the way, but hard as they tried the Californians minions couldn't quite extinguish Miss Booth's warmth.[99]

Incongruity is its biggest selling point. There never has been a TV character like squat, dumpy Hazel, self-centered and absolutely myopic to the mores and norms of society if they run contrary to her wishes . . . waddles like a duck, quacks her opinion in a whining trembling voice, yet has fantastic physical coordination. . . . Don Defore is devoid of authority as the father.[100]

On Shirley Booth's head now rests the crown of Queen of TV Comedy which Lucille Ball put aside several years ago. Miss Booth in the title role of "Hazel" . . . is great, greater, greatest. She is irresistably, infectiously, deliriously funny and so is the show. Here we have class 100% proof situation comedy. The situations in the premiere were outrageously improbable and the comedy outlandishly but delightfully cornball . . . And Hazel, I'm wagering, is going to be the biggest comedy hit of its species since Lucy. So hail to "Hazel," a twenty-six trombone show.[101]

"Hazel" was a warm and funny show. It proved an old conviction of mine that "format" is not nearly so important on a TV show as character. A show needs a point of view, a basis for reference, a continuing knowledge and appreciation of the person around whom the fun whirls . . . Hazel is maid of all work whose imprudence never approaches impertinence, whose good nature sails clear over all criticism and all problems. The show frankly flings Hazel into many broad comedy situations, but that's where the solid anchor of a recognizably amusing basic personality transcends clichés. Shirley Booth identified the fun and homey niceness in "Hazel" within minutes of the show's start. She played the role as if the lines belonged to her and not to the gag writers, a certain sign always of the polished professional comic actress. Lots of it is farce as broad as burlesque and Shirley knows how to play farce for the finest results as if it were absolutely normal. The situations spray off into incredible detail. . . . She lives the role rather than walks through it with a patronizing air. The show was produced well, directed brightly, written with shrewd comic comprehension. The plot of the premiere is expendable, but Shirley Booth's performance and the show's diverting point of view are not. This time, the player's the thing, with the play taking but second place.[102]

---

[99]Gould, New York Times, September 29, 1961, p. 71.

[100]Newton, San Francisco Examiner, October 4, 1961, p. 27.

[101]Williams, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 29, 1961, p. 20.

[102]O'Brian, New York Journal American, September 29, 1961, p. 26.

Again, it would seem that the popularity of a personality is a big factor in a critic's reception of even a situation comedy program. Perhaps if Joey Bishop had been allowed to project his unique type of humor in his series he would have been more favorably received, as was implied in the reviews selected for study. This concern for a comic doing what he can best do is reflected in the reviews of "The Alan King Show" which also encompassed a situation comedy format. King, however, during the show was allowed the liberty of delivering stand up monologues which are his forte. The result was that the critics overlooked the trite situation of the premise and praised King's monologues which contained original fresh material. Here is an excerpt from the review by Harry Harris:

> The ingredients of "The Alan King Show" are more than a little familiar. The situation comedy development between standup monologues format was used on TV years ago by George Burns. The exasperated husband bit smacks of "The Honeymooners" and even earlier, "The Bickersons." Yet, the overall effect is quite amusing. That's because of the irascible yet intelligent image projected by King, the often superior quality of his gags and the fact that his comments on the perils of suburbia, however exaggerated, often strike close to home.[103]

The same appreciation of fresh funny material in an old comedy situation delivered by a comedian who is doing what he can do best, is evidenced in reviews of Robert J. Williams, Dwight Newton, and Jack O'Brian:

> It didn't matter that the story line was the hackneyed bit about the messed up vacation. The dialogue was fresh.[104]

> The story line was as old as "Ozzie and Harriet", parents and two kids, but the rendition was a howl, fast and funny. The

---

[103]Harris, Philadelphia Inquirer, September 19, 1961, p. 16.

[104]Williams, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September 19, 1961, p. 60.

> meat was in the lines, the tempo and the zest. . . . The first show to maintain start to stop wallop since the early days of Gleason, Silvers, and Joan Davis.[105]

> . . . had far fresher brighter jokes and imagination than the all out hollering of Alan King might let you suspect. . . . On TV the undiluted shouts of resentfulness all but overwhelmed the jokes. Good show, but would have been twice as good half as loud.[106]

One more illustration of the critics' acceptance of a comedian doing what he can do best is revealed in the reviews of The Bob Newhart Show. Newhart was at his best in his satirical monologues for which he is noted. His other material was unfavorably reviewed by all the critics. Here is an excerpt from Harry Harris' review:

> High point of the show was a very typical Newhart monologue envisioning the horrendous possibility if fire fighting were controlled like any other business.[107]

Dwight Newton praises Newhart for his own type of material but unfavorably reviews the rest:

> . . . opened with a feigned phone call to Perry Como that was as witty as his album or his night club material. . . . another amusing phone monologue [the fire fighting monologue] and then kerplunk, Newhart ran out of gags. The reason was obvious. He was using material of other writers. . . . I don't think Robert will make it with this format. He is a monologist, not a skit man. Nobody, not even Mark Twain, could turn out effective thirty minute monologues one a week.[108]

Jack Gould and Harriet Van Horne in referring to Newhart's last three sketches also expressed their disfavor:

> . . . a problem of material, neglecting one of Newhart's basic secrets, to let the audience use its imagination in contributing

---

[105] Newton, San Francisco Examiner, September 20, 1961, p. 19.

[106] O'Brian, New York Journal American, September 19, 1961, p. 18.

[107] Philadelphia Inquirer, October 12, 1961, p. 24.

[108] San Francisco Examiner, October 13, 1961, p. 29.

to the fun.[109]

> Whether Newhart's homely, irreverent and sometimes scathing humor will tickle the multitudes remains to be seen. I rather imagine it will so long as he can keep the Hollywood gag writers from muddying up his scripts. One of the three sketches last night, the opening one, was hilarious, the second full of promise that went pfft, and the third disfigured by a payoff that involved a monstrous greeting card prop.[110]

In summary, it can be seen that standards for comedy vary from program to program depending on many factors. The personality's popularity or ability to project a likeable image tempers many reviews even though the comedy situation itself is old or formula. The most unpopular program would seem to be the situation comedy with no outstanding personality to add luster or promise. Finally, the critics seem to approve the comic whose role in any type of program allows him to perform his specialty. This was implied in the reviews of "The Joey Bishop Show," and the Alan King and Bob Newhart programs. The most that can be said is that the only standard the critic goes by is the ability of the material to make him laugh, which in the end result is the pure intent of comedy.

MUSIC SPECIALS

It has been pointed out that the one-time special is the form of program most neglected by the critics. As a result, there is not enough data upon which to base any conclusions as to whether or not the critics adhere to any critical standards. A large period of study which would take in more reviews would have to be used.

---

[109] Gould, New York Times, October 12, 1961, p. 59.

[110] Van Horne, San Francisco News Call Bulletin, October 12, 1961, p. 10.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The information analyzed and studied in this thesis permits certain conclusions to be drawn with regard to the nature of television program criticism in the daily newspapers selected.

The three month period was found to be most adequate for determining both the amount and quality of criticism to be found. Since the first program of all new series was reviewed by a majority of the critics it was also possible to determine critical reception of that new season of programming.

Judging by the quality of the reviews of the six selected columnists it must be concluded that the daily television writer can not only be a prolific program reviewer but a "critical" reviewer as well. The good newspaper critic can be expected not only to devote a majority of his columns to "critical" reviews rather than other types of column content, but also to review a majority of the new programs and series.

The findings of this study show, however, that certain markets do not receive even a minimum amount of specific program criticism. The critics selected in these markets not only focus their columns on news, promotion, and general commentary, but also share the same viewing preferences within each one of these markets. As a result, the variety of reviewing received in each one of these markets is also limited. The markets of Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, and

Los Angeles have the least prolific television critics. Philadelphia, New York and San Francisco stand out as having the most prolific program critics of the twenty-one surveyed.

Critics on the whole agree on 68-75% of the programs being reviewed. The lowest percentage of agreement is on the comedy program. The highest percentage of agreement is found on the detective-adventure type of program, with pure drama and public affairs next. There is no relation, however, between critical agreement and program success or failure. There are programs which were unfavorably received by the critics which are still on the air and programs which were favorably received that have long since expired. Conversely, many programs which were rejected have also expired, and some programs that were praised are still being seen today. To draw any implications from these facts would be mere speculation since program durability depends on many factors.

The type of program most frequently reviewed is the drama, with comedy next, and detective, adventure, and western programs being reviewed the least. The public affairs program is likewise infrequently reviewed but reviewing is also limited by the few such programs presented. The type of program most overlooked by all critics is the one-time musical or variety special.

The reviews also show that critics tend to view those programs which are personally appealing. As a result, many new series were not reviewed at all by some critics because these series conflicted in time with other shows of greater appeal to the individual critic.

An evaluation of the six critics selected for study must take in to consideration the quality of their reviewing, the language or

style of their writing, and the standards they use in passing judgment.

The six critics certainly adhere to the principles of good criticism as defined by this author in chapter two. Their writing on the whole shows an adherence to the criteria of "critical reviewing" as opposed to mere "journalistic reviewing." A majority of their reviews contain the three elements of description, evaluation, and illustration or reason for evaluation. Harriet Van Horne and Jack Gould are the most prolific "critical" reviewers, having devoted 90% and 85% of their total reviews to "criticism," rather than "journalistic reviews."

Van Horne and Gould are also as often complimentary to television as they are critical. Their reviews reflect an equal amount of good television drama and bad television drama, good public affairs programs and bad public affairs programs. In marked contrast, critic Harry Harris gave unfavorable reviews to 75% of the television programs he viewed and critic Jack O'Brian unfavorably reviewed 73% of the programs he viewed. Moreover, both Harris and O'Brian gave bad reviews to most television drama. Critics Dwight Newton and Robert J. Williams like Gould and Van Horne, were as often complimentary to television as they were critical.

The style and language employed by all six critics are most suitable for the audience which they reach. As was illustrated, humor is frequently employed even in the discussion of serious drama to clearly illustrate the point. When there is subjective bias involved on the part of the critic toward a particular type of program or personality it is revealed most of the time in the review. Consequently, the reader can understand that he might very well enjoy the program

although the critic rejects it. It is difficult to find much subjective bias tempering the objectivity of most of the reviewing.

The reviews of critic Jack O'Brian however do at times suffer from an undercurrent of subjective bias. This subjectivity is most evident in comedy and drama. His dislike of certain types of plots and personalities, and his favoritism toward certain personalities, makes it difficult to determine how much of his reviewing is based on objective judgment and how much on subjective attitude. Moreover this bias is not admitted in his reviews so that the reader is not fully aware of it.

There are definite standards of evaluation to be found in the reviews of all six critics selected. These standards were most evident in drama, including the detective-adventure drama, and least evident in the comedy program. Standards in comedy were highly flexible, depending in many cases on the critic's bias toward a specific personality and his style of comedy. Since each critic has his own standard of what is funny there is no common meeting ground of critical judgment.

Standards in drama seemed to be based on the success of the drama in involving the viewer emotionally and mentally. This involvement is measured by credibility of plot and characterization. It is destroyed by obligatory and contrived scenes and contrived sentimentality. In detective-adventure drama credibility is destroyed by cliché plots, cliché acting and cliché violence and sadism which are not necessary to the plot. The success of the public affairs program is measured by its balanced truthful presentation of issues and its ability to visually editorialize, with a minimum of spoken editorial

commentary. The public affairs program's primary intent is assumed to be to inform and educate.

Although the utilization of these standards is valid in making judgments, one might question the validity of the interpretation of these standards. Since credible characterization to a viewer in many cases depends on his own background, knowledge of character and exposure to many different characters, what is cliché to the critic might be truthful to the viewer. Conversely, what is a believable character to the critic might be a totally strange and incredible character to the viewer. The fact of the matter is that many great roles on stage have had varied interpretations by the actors who portrayed them. This point of subjective interpretation of a role was illustrated in the reviews of The Power and the Glory. If Olivier's interpretation had been truly credible, might not there have been unanimous agreement? Of the six critics studied, Jack Gould did not find Olivier's character a truthful interpretation. There were other disagreements among the critics relating to credible characterization. Actually, of all the dramas reviewed by all six critics or a majority of them, not one received unanimous judgment on the part of the critics. All of the reviews contain illustrations of what destroys truthful characterization rather than what makes truthful characterization. The critics seem to be more positive in what they do not like than in what they do like. If the reader is to learn how to utilize the standard of credible characterization he must certainly be exposed to more illustrations of why certain roles were credible as well as why they were not.

The one standard which seems to be the most commonly valid is that of credibility of plot. Not only do all critics utilize this standard but they similarly interpret it. Perhaps it is in this area that the viewer can learn the most from the critic. The "contrived" happy ending, the "contrived" obligatory cliché scene can be pointed out as it was done in a majority of the reviews. The critics were most consistent in utilizing this standard. In many reviews they applauded the acting but criticized the incredible plot.

Although lack of originality was used in many reviews as a standard, one can question the originality of any plot, drama, or comedy. In many cases it was difficult to determine whether the critics were rejecting the program on the basis of unoriginality of premise or unoriginality in the treatment of the premise. This could have been brought out more clearly in the reviews.

On the whole, however, standards used were rather consistent. Since interpretation in many cases is a subjective matter, the fact that there was so much agreement does show that as a rule the critics in question recognize some type of credibility. Whether the viewer agrees with them or not he is at least forced to make a judgment, and this is the main end of good program criticism.

Certain questions arise from this study which can form the basis of future research in this area. Do the other fifteen critics surveyed adhere to the same critical standards? Are there other standards which they employ? Have critical standards changed over the years? Are the individual critics consistent in their standards over a period of time? Do the limited number of reviews by the other fifteen

critics reflect true "criticism" or mere journalistic reviewing?

It is hoped that the results of this thesis can prove useful to those who consider program criticism a healthy objective way to gauge the artistic output of television, and also as a means of educating the public toward utilization of their own standards in judging and enjoying programs. It has been shown that prolific and professional criticism is possible in a five-day-a-week television column. The fifteen critics who were not studied were certainly not prolific enough. They must be studied further to determine whether or not they are truly performing the function of "critics" rather than mere journalistic reviewers.

The publishers and editors of our daily newspapers have a responsibility of filling their television columns with writers who can intellectualize and emotionalize as well as promote the medium. Until this is done, the television columnist as a critic will be held in low esteem by the public whom he can educate, and will be ignored by the people responsible for making the medium of television the art of television.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Bogart, Leo. The Age of Television. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1956.

Canby, Henry Seidel. Definitions, Essays in Contemporary Criticism. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1922.

Carnell, Edward John. TV Servant or Master. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Erdman Publishing Co., 1950.

Criticism in America, Its Functions and Status. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924.

The Eighth Art. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1962.

Elliot, William Y. Television's Impact on American Culture. East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1956.

Fischer, Edward. The Screen Arts. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960.

Frick, Constance. The Dramatic Criticism of George Jean Nathan. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1943.

Frye, Northrop. The Well Tempered Critic. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1963.

Glick, Ira O., and Levy, Sidney J. Living With TV. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962.

Klapper, Joseph T. The Effects of Mass Communications. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960.

Lynch, William F. S.J. The Image Industries. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959.

Marx, Herbert L. Jr. TV and Radio in American Life. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1953.

Matthiessen, Francis O. The Responsibilities of the Critic. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Nathan, George Jean. The Critic and the Drama. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922.

_____. Materia Critica. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924.

_____. Art of the Night. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928.

_____. The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932.

O'Hara, Robert C. Media for the Millions. New York: Random House, 1961.

Schramm, Wilbur. Responsibility in Mass Communications. New York: Harper Bros., 1957.

_____, Lyle, Jack, and Parker, Edwin B. TV in the Lives of our Children. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1961.

Seldes, Gilbert. The Great Audience. New York: The Viking Press, 1950.

_____. The Public Arts. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956.

Siepmann, Charles A. Radio's Second Chance. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1946.

Wylie, Max (ed.). Best Broadcasts of 1939-40. New York: Whittlesey House, 1940.

_____. Clear Channels. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955.

Articles and Periodicals

Broadcasting Magazine, September 14, 1964.

Broadcasting Yearbook, 1964.

Broun, Heywood, "Radio," Nation, May 27, 1936, p. 686.

Chicago Daily News, September-November, 1961.

Chicago Daily Tribune, September-November, 1961.

Chicago Sun-Times, September-November, 1961.

Cleveland Plain Dealer, September-November, 1961.

Cleveland Press, September-November, 1961.

Cousins, Norman. "The Time Trap," Saturday Review, XXXII, December 24, 1959, p. 52.

Crosby, John. "Seven Deadly Sins of the Air," Life, XXXI, November 6, 1950, pp. 147-48+.

"Crosby's First Birthday," Newsweek, XXXI, May 29, 1947, p. 66.

Detroit Free Press, September-November, 1961.

Detroit News, September-November, 1961.

Gould, Jack. "The Low State of TV," New York Times, October 19, 1962, sec. 2, p. 13.

_____. New York Times Magazine, January 14, 1962, pp. 14-15+.

Horowitz, Murray. "Critics as TV Image Makers," Variety, September 25, 1963, pp. 29, 46+.

Landry, Robert J., "Wanted Radio Critics," Public Opinion Quarterly, IV, December, 1940, p. 620.

Lichty, Lawrence. "What Does a TV Critic Write About?," Journal of Broadcasting, XVII, Fall, 1963, p. 353.

Lippmann, Walter, New York Herald Tribune, September 7, 1954.

Los Angeles Herald, September-November, 1961.

Los Angeles Times, September-November, 1961.

"Measuring the Giant," Time, LXIIV, November 9, 1959, p. 77.

New York Herald Tribune, September-November, 1961.

New York Journal American, September-November, 1961.

New York Times, September-November, 1961.

Newsweek, LIX, February 9, 1962, p. 80.

Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, September-November, 1961.

Philadelphia Inquirer, September-November, 1961.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, September-November, 1961.

Pittsburgh Press, September-November, 1961.

Robinson, Hubbell, Jr., "The Hatchet Man," Saturday Review, XLII, March 14, 1959, p. 56.

San Francisco Chronicle, September-November, 1961.

San Francisco Examiner, September-November, 1961.

San Francisco News Call Bulletin, September-November, 1961.

Sarnoff, Robert, Harpers, CCXIX, July, 1959, p. 27.

The Television Factbook, 1962-63 edition, p. 24-A.

Washington Evening Star, September-November, 1961.

Washington Post and Times Herald, September-November, 1961.

Weld, Arthur, Jr., "More TV Criticism Please," NAEB Journal, XXI, June, 1962, pp. 4-7.

Unpublished Materials

Smith, Ralph L. A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the United States 1920-1955, (unpublished University of Wisconsin Doctoral Dissertation, 1959).