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A Systematic Communication Study of a Theatre Audience

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Rosanne Singer

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THE NATURE AND PATTERN OF USAGE OF THEATRE CRITICISM
AND THE COMMUNICATION ROLE OF THE THEATRE CRITIC:
A SYSTEMATIC COMMUNICATION STUDY OF A THEATRE AUDIENCE

By
Rosanne Singer

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ABSTRACT

THE NATURE AND PATTERN OF USAGE OF THEATRE CRITICISM AND THE COMMUNICATION ROLE OF THE THEATRE CRITIC: A SYSTEMATIC COMMUNICATION STUDY OF A THEATRE AUDIENCE

By

Rosanne Singer

This study investigated the communication influences of local theatre review and criticism on several nights audiences of a BoarsHead Theater play. In addition, the researcher attempted to ascertain audience perceptions of the role of the theatre critic. The researcher employed survey research techniques in which self-administered questionnaires were distributed to four nights audiences. This was supplemented by analytical and documentary techniques of historical research on the development of theatre criticism as an art form. The researcher found that approximately half of the respondents acknowledged using theatre criticism for selecting plays to see and approximately one-third acknowledged using criticism for evaluation of plays already viewed. The BoarsHead respondents may have been an unusual sample in that more than half were season subscribers, and nearly 75 percent reported attending theatrical performances more than six times in a given year.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary theatre criticism is the result of a centuries-long developmental process. Samuel Littlewood claims that a form of drama and drama criticism originated in prehistoric times.

One has to admit the existence of drama and criticism long before writing. The barbarian dancers and the chief or high priest who gave his all-important opinion were for ages without any means of ensuring the survival of their ideas, save by hearsay and consequent tradition. These were, as we know, vastly effective. The amount of great drama which goes back to prehistoric origins is considerable.

In answering the question, 'Who was the first critic?', Littlewood states that practically all prehistoric gatherings out of which drama sprang had a religious base, with the figure of the priest in the background. "Going back to the primitive it is difficult to get away from a feeling that the first people to cherish communal expression of emotions, gay or grave, were the priests." However, once drama departed from religion, the inspiration and interpretation

function of the priest diminished.¹

Littlewood finds little of dramatic worth in the period between the Egyptians and the Greeks.

The five great empires which succeeded each other on and around the plains of Mesopotamia--the Chaldean, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Median, and the Persian--left nothing to inspire dramatic criticism in the time between the Egyptians and the Greeks.²

Theatre criticism, an art form, originated in the writings of Aristotle and the Greek theatre,³ although Littlewood states: "A remarkable thing is that...neither Plato in his Symposium nor Aristotle in his Poetic manages to rise anywhere near the recognition of criticism as an art."⁴ Nevertheless, Greek dramatic form displayed a sophistication previously unmatched, thus paving the way for the development of theatre criticism. Sobel writes:

Theatrical criticism is as old as the drama, natural and necessary to it. It governs its growth and development, for the acceptance and reaction of audiences to dramas determine to a great extent the course and nature of future acting, dramatic technique, production and writing. And, of course, the opinions and expressed views of informal or authoritative persons has had, has, and will always have an important influence on popular opinion.⁵

¹Samuel R. Littlewood, The Art of Dramatic Criticism (London: Sir Isaac Putnam & Sons, LTD., 1952), pp. 6-7.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Barrett H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd Co., 1918), p. 5.

⁴Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 9.

⁵Bernard Sobel, ed., The New Theatre Handbook and the Digest of Plays (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1959), pp. 149-150.

Bernard Dukore claims that the Greek playwright Aristophanes is the earliest critic whose work has survived, for in his various satiric, farcical comedies he parodies the tragic form and playwrights such as Aeschylus and Euripides. However, it is Aristotle's Poetics that provide the earliest available study and definition of tragic theory that has been explored by theorists and playwrights for centuries. Horace's Art of Poetry, the only complete treatise on dramatic theory to have survived from ancient Rome, influenced Renaissance critics and playwrights.

Late Roman Empire and early Medieval dramatic theorists were forced to battle an increasingly strong belief that "theatrical spectacles of all types--tragedies, circuses, whatever--are among the sins of the world, offend God, and should be shunned by all Christians." The writer Tertullianus in On The Spectacles (197-202 A.D.) influenced Church policy with this conviction and his charge that theatre belonged to the Devil and was little more than a form of lust.⁶

Littlewood writes that "despite the theatrical barrenness of imperial Rome there did emerge one critic whose work lives and deserves to live, although it had practically no influence on the circus-going multitude of the time." The writer was Longinus, the third century author of On The Sublime. According to him, pure sincerity was the first essential of

⁶Bernard F. Dukore, Dramatic Theory and Criticism (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), pp. 1-83.

the sublime, and he believed that meanness and triviality in art could not convey the kind of passion which would ignite an audience.⁷

In his opposition to the theatre, Saint Augustine claimed that its dedication to pagan gods incited people to immoral behavior. In the fourth century A.D. the writer Donatus, however, kept alive classical dramatic ideas, and the medieval author Boccaccio defended poetry against those who opposed it on religious grounds.⁸

In the late Middle Ages the attitude toward drama underwent a change, and the church, the very institution that had formerly cursed theatre, now fostered its growth. "The rebirth of the drama in medieval times was to come, broadly as well as individually, through the church which had suppressed it." The church's renewed interest in the drama took the form of public miracle plays and mysteries. The tragic masterpiece, Everyman, is the most famous work to have come out of this period. Thus, after nearly a millenium during which the public relied upon traveling minstrels for entertainment, new dramatic forms gained respectability.⁹

With the Renaissance era the management of miracle

⁷Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 12.

⁸Dukore, Dramatic Theory, p. 83.

⁹Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 19-21.

plays and mysteries gradually was transferred from the church to the individual towns. In addition to the reappearance of the professional actor which accompanied this increasing secularization of theatre, a new form of entertainment developed. Termed the 'interlude,' it covered:

almost every sort of performance, grave and gay, short and long, public and private, from Plautine farce to heavy morality....The interlude was able to cover almost all that lay between the miracle-play and morality and the full-fledged drama and romantic comedy of the Elizabethans.¹⁰

Rediscovery of the Greek dramatic form and criticism occurred during the Renaissance. In 1536 two Italian writers, Alessandro Pazzi and Bernardino Daniello, acknowledged the influence of Aristotle's Poetics on contemporary thought. Pazzi published a Latin translation of the Poetics, and Daniello published his own Poetics which was influenced by Aristotle and Horace. Another Renaissance scholar, Julius Caesar Scaliger, was partly responsible for the influence of Aristotle's theories throughout Europe.¹¹

Littlewood comments that the beginnings of Elizabethan criticism were not promising. Criticism, he writes, "began, where it had triumphantly ended over a thousand years before, with the clergy." The first mention of London theatres occurred in a sermon preached by a Reverend T. Wilcocke in 1577 in which he stated that "the cause of

¹⁰Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 21-26.

¹¹Dukore, Dramatic Theory, p. 119.

plagues is sinne, if you look to it well, and the cause of sinne are playes; therefore the cause of plagues are playes." Shortly after Wilcocke, John Stockwood, schoolmaster of Tonbridge, bemoaned that filthy plays attracted thousands of spectators whereas an hour's tolling of a church bell could barely bring one hundred people to hear a sermon.¹²

According to Dukore, John Northbrooke in 1577 wrote "the earliest, systematic, separate attack, apart from sermons" on dramatic productions. Entitled Treatise, the work reflects the hostile attitude many Elizabethans held toward the theatre.¹³ A similar attitude is expressed in Stephen Gosson's 1579 Schoole of Abuse which Littlewood describes as the first effort at anything like intelligent criticism in English. Blaming theatre for the deterioration of English manners and morals, Gosson is, according to Littlewood, out to entertain at all costs.

Like many modern critics he imagines that the best way to achieve this is by violent attack, enriched by choice allusions, racy anecdotes, and supposedly sensational revelations. In a word he was a journalist of his period, not of the best type, but brilliant in his own kind.¹⁴

Sir Philip Sidney attacks Gosson in his 1583 Defense of Poesy [sic], and delineates the Aristotelian dramatic

¹²Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 30-31.

¹³Dukore, Dramatic Theory, p. 157.

¹⁴Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 31.

unities for the first time in English criticism. Discussing Aristotle's rules concerning comedy and tragedy and criticizing modern plays, he states: "Our tragedies and comedies observe rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful poetry."¹⁵

The most famous Elizabethan dramatist, Shakespeare, inspired theatre criticism from several writers. Francis Meres, writing in 1598 in Wit's Treasury, states: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is most excellent in both kinds for the stage." Ben Jonson terms Shakespeare, "Soul of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage!"¹⁶ Of primary importance as critic to both the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre was Charles Lamb.¹⁷

Approximately mid-seventeenth century begins the age of criticism:

the age when the cultivated world, having discovered that a new great force in art had come into being, set itself to discuss the why and how....It was an age when everybody was a critic....Whole shelf-loads of pamphlets fostered the interminable discussion of those supposed laws--the unities of time, place, and action.¹⁸

Stanley Kauffmann also traces the origin of English-language theatre criticism to the late seventeenth century or the era

¹⁵Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 33.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 76.

of Restoration Comedy.¹⁹ Bernard Sobel speculates that the origin of theatre criticism as a profession was in the informal institution of Fop's Corner in the Restoration Theatre. Apparently the public avidly awaited the verdict of a group of wits who remained after a play was over to discuss it and who had the power to determine the production's success or failure. These men also critiqued a play during its performance and spoke the criticism aloud.²⁰ A piece written in 1698 by Jeremy Collier apparently influenced the future of Restoration theatre. Collier's Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage criticized the crudity of the Restoration stage with such comments as:

To put lewdness into a thriving condition, to give it an equipage of quality, and to treat it with ceremony and respect, is the way to confound the understanding, to fortify the charm and to make the mischief invincible.²¹

Littlewood states that with the arrival of journalism as a profession in the 1700s, dramatic criticism should have been born, but was not.

Little criticism worth preserving appeared till well on in the eighteenth century. 'Critics,' even as late as Garrick's time, meant coffee-house gossips. Even those who got into print at any length did not always do honor to their calling.²²

¹⁹ Stanley Kauffmann, Persons of the Drama: Theater Criticism and Comment (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), pp. 370-371.

²⁰ Sobel, The New Theatre Handbook, pp. 149-150.

²¹ Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 81-82.

²² Ibid., p. 84.

He writes that an important development in the history of English criticism through the middle years of the eighteenth century was the transfer of focus from plays to actors.²³ With the arrival of such great actors and actresses as Garrick, Siddons, Kemble, Kean and Macready, criticism, he writes, "tended in England, during the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, to become a chorus of praise, or at least of analytical observations about the great actor or actress of the time being."

Littlewood claims that no criticism in England at this time rivaled the creative work of Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) in Germany who "'gave Goethe to Germany' and whose own lively and forceful personality shines through every page he wrote."²⁴ Considered Germany's first major drama critic, Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy began as a twice-weekly series of reviews of productions by the Hamburg National Theatre. Those pieces, however, later appeared less frequently and grew increasingly theoretical in their examination of tragedy, comedy and dramatic action.

Littlewood also states that no English critic achieved the effect of Lessing's French contemporary, Diderot. "Diderot's real value to the French stage was that, both as dramatist and critic, he helped introduce there the drama of current middle-class life." Littlewood censures English critics of the time for being blinded by the importance of

²³Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 82.

²⁴Ibid., p. 87.

the actor and actress and unable to analyze the production or play itself.²⁵

Dukore writes that comedy, as well as tragedy, preoccupied nineteenth century English critics. George Meredith distinguished between satire, irony, comedy and humor and stressed that:

True comedy requires an elite, a cultivated society with vital intellectual activity and social equality of the sexes. The test of true comedy is whether it awakens thoughtful laughter and the test of a country's civilization is whether such comedy flourishes.²⁶

Littlewood claims that nineteenth century English criticism followed in the steps of the eighteenth century style by focusing too heavily upon the actor rather than the production as a whole.

Between Kean and Irving, in England at any rate, it remained almost entirely dependent, for anything that could be called inspiration, upon the actor. As great acting itself was scarce, it followed that in these circumstances great criticism itself was scarcer still. Hardly a line lives on its own account.

He also states that dramatists of this period failed to find any critic to write about them inspiringlly.²⁷

The Theatres Act of 1843 freed English theatres from the old patent monopoly with the accompanying result:

²⁵Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 88-89.

²⁶Dukore, Dramatic Theory, p. 577.

²⁷Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, pp. 118-119.

With twenty theatres arriving within a generation where there had been only three and some unsanctioned entertainments, dramatic criticism soon became very nearly, if not quite, a whole-time profession.²⁸

According to Littlewood, Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) can be termed, as William Archer describes him in the introduction to Dramatic Essays, 'the first English dramatic critic.'

"This is in the sense that he was the 'first writer of any note who made it his business to see and report upon all the principal theatrical events of the day.'"²⁹

The nineteenth century actor Sir Henry Irving (1838-1905), so Littlewood states, made dramatic criticism worth writing. "His productions at the Lyceum were the first for a long while over which even the average critic was allowed to turn the column. Yet the critics as a body do not shine in relation to him."³⁰

Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) also influenced the art of criticism and the work of late nineteenth century critics Archer, Walkley, Shaw and Grein, four pioneer English critics. "By the 'nineties (1890s) dramatic criticism in London had undoubtedly become something like a small profession, though it still had to be eked out for the most part with other occupations." Littlewood writes that apart from nineteenth century theatre critic Clement

²⁸Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 120.

²⁹Ibid., p. 93.

³⁰Ibid., p. 124.

Scott, only one critic "set himself from the first to be a dramatic critic and nothing else and to give dramatic criticism professional dignity and distinction on its own account." This was William Archer, mentioned above.³¹

Playwrights George Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde turned to criticism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Wilde believed that art should obey only laws intrinsic to itself and not conform to external standards, whether of morality or even resemblance to reality. Shaw, on the other hand, stressed the social utility and value of plays dealing with societal problems.

In the mid-nineteenth century in the United States, poet Walt Whitman wrote theatre reviews for The Brooklyn Eagle, condemning the triviality of the American theatre that modeled itself on old-world ideals. He stressed the need for a native type of American artist who would capture the new world expanse and spirit.³² He often harshly criticized touring British actors and productions over which other New York City newspapers fawned.

During the nineteenth century newspapers and periodicals reached mass audiences, giving theatre criticism a new form and paving the way for criticism as a paid profession. Sobel writes that "as newspapers and periodicals developed, expert opinion on theatre matters was recognized as an

³¹Littlewood, Dramatic Criticism, p. 127.

³²Dukore, Dramatic Theory, pp. 578, 859.

important public interest.³³ M.E. Comtois states:

Theatre criticism, as a profession is largely a 20th century phenomenon. Men of letters--Sir Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Dr. Johnson, even Samuel Pepys--wrote about the theater upon occasion, but to make a career of going to the theater and writing about it, no. It took George Bernard Shaw and Max Beerbohm, in London in the first decades of this century, to establish a reputation for the theater critic as a professional writer and sometime artist.³⁴

Today theatre criticism is a regular feature in many daily and weekly American newspapers and in such news weeklies as Time and Newsweek. "The medium of criticism as such is now firmly established as part of a reader's reading matter," says Kauffmann.³⁵

Modern criticism, however, often seems to lack validity or credibility for audiences, and theatre critics inspire contempt in many segments of the population. Lehman Engel writes: "One of the most destructive elements to be found at the core of too many reviews is anger."³⁶ On the other hand, responsible criticism can enrich the play-going experience by elucidating the playwright's intent and providing explanations for the relative success or failure

³³Sobel, The New Theatre Handbook, p. 150.

³⁴M.E. Comtois and Lynn F. Miller, Contemporary American Theater Critics: A Directory and Anthology of Their Works (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1977), p. xviii.

³⁵Kauffmann, Persons of the Drama, p. 374.

³⁶Lehman Engel, The Critics (New York: MacMillan, 1976), p. xvi.

of a production. Concerning experimental theatre, for example, the informed critic can give audiences a framework within which to place unfamiliar impressions or techniques, thus lessening possible audience alienation.

Presumably then, critics write to transmit their opinions to readers. However, until recently little attempt has been made to analyze the process and influence of this criticism. Individual critics have offered their own definitions of criticism and their role in the play-going process, but few systematic studies have analyzed criticism as a whole and its role in the communication process. This lack is particularly evident in the area of media audience research. Although theatre criticism is supposedly written for mass audiences--television viewers and newspaper and magazine readers--the reader has been considered an undefined, passive consumer of the criticism.

Two studies, one conducted in 1963 and the other in 1976, analyzed the influence of criticism by examining audience response in terms of theatre attendance figures. The studies concentrated primarily on the extent to which written criticism affected the run of a play. For example, a 1963 study by Leitner, Moss and Tannenbaum analyzed the role played by seven New York City daily newspapers on audience play selection.³⁷ The researchers considered the

³⁷Margaret Leitner, Sanford Moss and Percy H. Tannenbaum, "Who Makes the Play Run?" Journalism Quarterly XL (Summer 1963): 375-377.

entire group of plays that opened during the 1953-1954 Broadway season. Thirty-nine plays were selected and all reviews of them analyzed through a seven-point scale ranging from "very favorable" to "very unfavorable." The study calculated the run of each play, and using that as the dependent variable, correlated it with the seven reviews, the independent variables. Results of the research showed that reviewers' ratings accounted for about 65 percent of the total variance in the length of play runs.

A 1976 study reported in MORE magazine examined 779 New York City newspaper reviews written by five major critics of 206 plays that opened on Broadway from 1967 to 1976. As with the Leitner study, the researchers rated the reviews according to strength of recommendation and correlated that with the run of the shows. Three independent readers studied the reviews and rated them on a five-point scale ranging from a "rejection" to a "strong recommendation." The readers established a significant positive correlation between a strongly negative or strongly positive critique and the length of the run of a play. Of these two, the higher correlation existed for the strongly negative review. The researchers found much less correlation between mixed reviews and a show's success or failure. They observed a tendency among critics to write at the extremes of opinion, and nearly half of the 779 reviews either rejected or strongly recommended a production.³⁸

³⁸Gerald Nachman, "Who's Afraid of the Broadway Critics?" MORE (July/August): 18-22.

Both of these studies investigated the common assumption that theatre critics influence audience behavior--in this case play attendance. However, there was difficulty in establishing a causal relationship between the review and the audience decision to attend a play. Partly responsible for this inability to assign cause was the lack of research available on audience utilization of theatre criticism. Given the chance to define the influence of criticism on their play-going habits, audiences have further aided in pinpointing review usage.

Anthony Mennuti, a 1977 master of arts degree candidate at Temple University, recognized the need for questioning audiences on how they utilize criticism. From his reading he derived certain functions of criticism as perceived by practitioners (e.g., John Simon, Pauline Kael). These were: 1) gatekeeper/selector (making recommendations to viewer as to which selections would best serve his interest and time); 2) opinion leader/evaluator (finding what is good and what is bad in a work of art, and making the difference known to the audience); and 3) feedback (representing the audience to the artist).³⁹ He then attempted to test whether "individual audience members report that they actually make use of criticism to serve the same functions which were identified from the literature."⁴⁰

³⁹Anthony Mennuti, "The Communication Functions of Film, Theater, and Television Criticism and Their Utilization by a College-Level Audience" (Master's Thesis, Temple University, 1976), pp. 16-20.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 2.

Although Mennuti's questionnaire investigates audience response to criticism, it contains certain flaws. Question responses are not numbered to facilitate coding, double and triple-barreled questions occur and awkwardly worded statements appear. Of 1,000 questionnaires sent out, Mennuti received 206 responses, a return rate of approximately 20 percent. Although this may not be atypical for mailed questionnaire response, it is rather a meager return from which to make reliable and valid generalizations. Because Mennuti's entire sample consists of Temple University alumni, the demographic characteristics of a general audience of theatregoers are lacking. A study investigating criticism utilization by a more general, heterogeneous and somewhat representative audience could be considered useful and scholarly. Therefore, this researcher proposes to study theatre criticism usage--how a specific theatre audience utilizes criticism and the extent to which it influences play-going decisions--among a BoarsHead Theater audience.⁴¹ It is hoped that the study would provide some data on reasons for general audience utilization of written theatre criticism. Additionally, it is hoped that the findings of the study would contribute toward building a middle-range theory regarding influence of theatre review and criticism as communication processes.

⁴¹The BoarsHead Theater is a small, professional, mid-Michigan theatre group located in Lansing, Michigan.

BACKGROUND ASSUMPTIONS

Available studies indicate that a significant positive correlation exists between theatre reviews and audience behavior, operationally defined as attendance figures for a specific performance. Leitner, Moss and Tannenbaum, for example, found that reviewers' ratings accounted for about 65 percent of the total variance in the length of play runs on Broadway. The 1976 MORE article reported that when theatre critics wrote at the extremes of opinion (panned a play or wrote a rave notice), a strong correlation existed between criticism and play attendance. A significant number of Mennuti's 206 respondents acknowledged utilizing written theatre criticism in determining play selection and subsequent play evaluation. Apparently readers pay attention to what critics say, and this influences their play-going behavior to varying degrees.

Based upon these and other studies, the following background assumptions are made:

1. The theatre critic plays a communication role (in particular the transmission of information function) in the theatregoing process;
2. Theatre criticism influences audience decisions concerning which plays to see;
3. Theatre criticism influences audience evaluation of a play after viewing it;
4. Audiences do acknowledge utilizing theatre criticism

in selecting which plays to see;

5. Audiences do acknowledge utilizing theatre criticism in evaluating plays after they have seen them;

6. Certain people perceive themselves as opinion leaders in the area of theatregoing;

7. Opinion leaders consume a great deal of theatre criticism;

8. Utilization of theatre criticism and frequency of theatregoing are interrelated.

9. Certain demographic characteristics such as age, income and education also are assumed to be indicators of the utilization of theatre criticism.

CENTRAL PROPOSITION

Based on the foregoing assumptions, then, the central proposition for the study is that the communication roles and functions and the usage of theatre criticism are functionally related and that these relationships are constant and cumulative.

RATIONALE

In general, theatre criticism has not been systematically researched, although individual writers since Aristotle have theorized about the nature of the drama and dramatic form. Wilbur Schramm states: "Communication is the fundamental social process," and it has also come to be considered "a

relationship, an act of sharing, rather than something someone does to someone else."⁴² However, theatre audience research to date has seldom reflected this communication aspect of criticism. Schramm points out:

The most dramatic change in general communication theory during the last forty years has been the gradual abandonment of the idea of the passive audience, and its replacement by the concept of a highly active, highly selective audience, manipulating rather than being manipulated by a message--a full partner in the communication process.⁴³

If communication has indeed acquired this new character, then research on theatre criticism has yet to catch up with it. Mennuti found studies that "have concerned themselves with analysis of the type and content of works reviewed by critics, or with the determination of the self-identified function of critics, or with the identification of judgmental criteria." His thesis was unique "in its concern with an audience's response to criticism...as an attempt to determine the precise use to which audience members put their perception of the critic's opinion."⁴⁴ Because of this dearth of knowledge in the area of the influence of theatre criticism, further study is necessary. This researcher's work should help fill this gap in communication research. The findings

⁴²Wilbur Schramm, "The Nature of Communication Between Humans," in The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, eds. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 5,8..

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Mennuti, The Communication Functions, p. 9.

should provide reliable and valid data on the basis of which at least a middle-range theory about the communication functions of theatre criticism could be proposed.

Theatre criticism as an art form is becoming increasingly important as the cultural level increases in the United States. Theatre is no longer predominantly associated with New York City, and even small communities often have their own theatre groups. The United States is experiencing a change in its cultural tone, therefore, journalism and science must address themselves to that growth through new information and research approaches. This proposed study should contribute to the methodology of research of the communication role. Because Mennuti's study lacked reliability and validity and employed an inadequate questionnaire, a new instrument is necessary. This study should provide a more satisfactory questionnaire along with conclusions based on a more representative sample of theatregoers.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. What are the communication influences of theatre review and criticism on theatre audiences?

Objectives of Study. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: 1) to provide a brief history of the development of theatre criticism as an art form; 2) to delineate a pattern of exposure on a BoarsHead Theater audience to theatre review and criticism; 3) to ascertain audience response to a play as a result of this exposure; 4) to identify some indicators of the exposure to criticism; 5) to assess some audience perceptions of the role of the theatre critic; and 6) to draw some conclusions and suggest some recommendations.

CONCERNS OF THE STUDY

1. To what extent does the level of attendance at theatrical performances influence the use of theatre criticism? Are audience members who frequently attend

theatre more or less likely to use theatre criticism to select a play to see and to evaluate a performance already viewed?

2. To what extent does theatre criticism influence selection of a play? Do most audience members acknowledge that they use theatre criticism for selection? What media source is commonly relied on for selection of plays? (e.g., newspaper, magazine, radio)

3. To what extent does theatre criticism influence evaluation of a play after it has been viewed? Do most audience members acknowledge the evaluation function of criticism? What medium do they rely most heavily upon as a source of evaluation information?

4. To what extent does theatre criticism influence theatregoing in general? Do a similar number of audience members who acknowledge using theatre criticism for selection and evaluation also acknowledge that theatre criticism influences their theatregoing behavior in general?

5. To what extent do opinion leaders utilize theatre criticism differently from non-opinion leaders? Do a large percentage of audience members consider themselves opinion leaders? Do opinion leaders use theatre criticism more for its selection function or its evaluation function? Do opinion leaders use theatre criticism more or less than audience members who are not opinion leaders?

6. To what extent does educational level influence

acknowledged use of theatre criticism? Do audience members with a higher level of education rely on theatre criticism for selection and evaluation more or less than those audience members with a lower level of education?

7. To what extent does income level influence acknowledged use of theatre criticism?

8. To what extent does being a BoarsHead Theater season subscriber influence acknowledged use of theatre criticism? Because season subscribers have already paid for their tickets, do they discount the use of theatre criticism for selecting a play to see? Is there any difference in the acknowledged use of theatre criticism for evaluation between season subscribers and non-subscribers?

9. To what extent does age influence acknowledged use of theatre criticism?

10. What communication role does theatre criticism and the theatre critic play? Which of the various aspects of the critic's role indicated on the questionnaire do audience members acknowledge as important? For example, do audience members read criticism for its entertainment value? Do audience members believe that the role of the critic is to raise the standards of a particular art form?

These are some of the problem questions that this study attempts to answer.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Theatre criticism: Theatre criticism has been technically defined here as critical appraisal of virtually all elements of a theatrical production and evaluative communication regarding the production-performance continuum directed toward a mass audience.

2. Theatre critic: A journalist-reviewer who within a restricted time must evaluate virtually all elements of a theatrical production, directing this criticism toward a mass audience.

3. Audience: In the context of this study, the viewers and hearers of a theatrical performance.

4. Communication: The interaction that occurs when a source or communicator relates a message to a receiver. In the context of this study, the theatre critic acts as communicator through the medium of written review and criticism, transmitting information and evaluative comment to a mass audience of readers.

ORGANIZATION OF REMAINDER OF THESIS

Chapter III will discuss the methodology employed in the execution of this study--specifically, the questionnaire administered, the audiences selected to participate, the manner of questionnaire distribution and return.

In Chapter IV the researcher will report the findings

from the questionnaires returned with respect to such areas as acknowledged use of theatre criticism in selecting a play to see or use of reviews in evaluating a play already viewed.

Chapter V will summarize the findings and generate certain conclusions about aspects and degree of influence of theatre criticism on audiences and the perceived role of the theatre critic. This chapter will also suggest areas for further research.

Chapter VI will discuss the researcher's personal views on the role of the theatre critic, in particular the small city critic.

The bibliography and certain appendices will constitute the concluding sections of this report.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CENTRAL PROPOSITION AND HYPOTHESES

Based upon the background assumptions related in Chapter I of this report, the central proposition for the study is that the communication roles and functions and the usage of theatre criticism are functionally related and that these relationships are constant and cumulative. A set of relational hypotheses based upon this proposition has been formulated, containing the following independent and dependent variables: number of theatrical performances attended in a given year, opinion leadership, education, subscription to BoarsHead Theater season of plays, influence of review and criticism in theatregoing process.

THE METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study employed survey research techniques in which self-administered questionnaires were distributed over four nights to audiences attending a BoarsHead Theater play. The survey portion of the study is supplemented by analytical and documentary techniques of historical research on theatre critics and criticism. A primary source of

historical information on the development of theatre criticism as an art is Bernard Dukore's text Dramatic Theory and Criticism.

Since each play presented at the BoarsHead Theater typically runs Thursday through Sunday for three weeks, the questionnaires were distributed on those four different nights. During the first week of David Mamet's play A Life in the Theatre the researcher distributed questionnaires to Thursday and Friday audiences. The second week the researcher distributed questionnaires to Saturday and Sunday audiences.

Questionnaires and accompanying cover letters were folded in half, stuffed into the playbills and distributed to audience members by BoarsHead ushers. All members of the audience during the aforesaid sample nights were given the questionnaires as they entered the theatre proper.

The assumption was that audiences on four different nights would be representative of the BoarsHead theatregoers. Through a carefully designed procedure, the duplication of the members of the audience in the study was avoided.

The researcher sat in the theatre lobby during intermission and at the end of the show so audience members knew where to return completed questionnaires as instructed. Audience members either completed their questionnaires during the 10-minute intermission or returned them after the show.

Over the four nights the researcher distributed a total of 482 questionnaires to the BoarsHead audiences and

received 182 usable returns for an effective completion rate of 38 percent. This return rate was obviously lower than expected. But Schrier suggests that 40 percent is a high enough return from which to obtain reliable results.¹ Nevertheless, any interpretation or generalizations based on this study should be treated guardedly because of the aforesaid low rate of completion.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The prototype for this questionnaire is Anthony Mennuti's three-part 1977 questionnaire on theatre, film and television criticism. However, the questionnaire for this study expanded Mennuti's instrument and refined it as to validity and reliability of the items. Also, the physical design of the questionnaire was modified, making it easier to fill out in a limited amount of time. (See Appendix B, page 69 for a copy of the questionnaire)

CODING, PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Processing and analysis of data were conducted at Michigan State University with the aid of CDC 6500 computing system.

¹Fred P. Schrier, Modern Marketing Research: A Behavioral Science Approach (Belmont: Wordsworth Publishing Co., 1968), p. 198.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study are reported here under the following organizational plan: 1) demographic and psychographic characteristics of the respondents, 2) influence of theatre review and criticism on the theatregoing behavior of the respondents, 3) the respondents' perception of the role of theatre criticism and the critic, and finally, 4) indicators of the aforesaid influence.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The findings indicate that almost 45 percent of the respondents are male and 51 percent are female. Four percent of the respondents chose not to answer the question regarding sex of the respondent.

Insofar as age composition of the respondents is concerned, the findings indicate that almost 24 percent are between 26 and 30 years. In comparison, almost 17 percent are in the 31-35 age group and 11 percent each in the 41-45 and 51-55 years category. No respondent is younger than 21 years of age and only 1 percent of the respondents are over 65. It appears then that the respondents in the study

tend to be relatively young. This finding may be explained in terms of: 1) the shifting demographics and lifestyle characteristics of younger people, 2) availability of leisure time, 3) economic means for consumption of highbrow culture, and 4) upward mobility of the respondents. Additionally, the proximity of several institutions of higher learning (e.g., Michigan State University, Lansing Community College) may contribute toward younger people's orientation toward the theatre.

As expected, the findings indicate that the educational level of the respondents is high. Almost 87 percent indicate that they have completed some college level work; in fact, 76 percent of the respondents are college graduates. In comparison, less than 5 percent have completed only the high school level of academic work, and about 1 percent possess the various types of vocational-technical training.

The high level of education can be explained in the following manner: Theatre in the United States has never appealed to a large segment of the population as it does in England, for example, where theatregoing is more a public habit and less expensive than in the United States. Although American theatre is gradually acquiring more of a following as community theatres and repertory companies spring up across the country, it still possesses the stigma of being too high brow for many people. It is not the popular, mass entertainment form that television or film is. Acceptance of the theatre is often a reflection of advanced education

where students read plays as part of required English classes and become familiar with such dramatists as Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller. Whereas film on the whole is readily accessible to most people, theatre is more of an acquired taste.

Because theatre is likely to require more audience input and thought than a film where all is flashed before the often passive spectator, education would prepare an audience for this different type of intellectual stimulation. In addition, because education and income are often related, those with higher levels of education are likely to have the money to attend theatre, whereas television and movies are less expensive.

As expected from the high level of formal education of the respondents, income level also exceeds that of the general population. In fact, 20 percent of the respondents report incomes of more than \$41,000. The mean total family income for the respondents is approximately \$27,000 as compared to an average personal income of \$7,019 per capita in the general United States population.¹ In comparison, only 3 percent of the respondents indicate that their total family income is less than \$6,000 or poverty level. Since 6 percent of the respondents also indicate a student status, this might explain these low income levels. Only one respondent is retired and only two report that they are unemployed.

¹Reader's Digest 1979 Almanac and Yearbook (United States: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1979), p. 876.

The majority of the BoarsHead respondents or 65 percent report their employment status as professional. Those who indicate that they belong to the proprietor-manager category comprise the second largest employment grouping with a 12 percent response. In comparison, only 5 percent of the respondents indicate employment in either skilled or semi-skilled professions. No BoarsHead respondents report employment in the unskilled, farming or housewife fields. Again, these findings confirm the impression that theatre attendance is almost a function of class difference. Those people with a high level of education and income and employed in fields granted a higher level of prestige appear more likely to attend theatrical performances than those who are not.

High response in other occupation categories would not correspond with education and income level indicated previously among the respondents. Such employment categories as clerical-sales, skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, and farming may offer lucrative incomes, yet they do not customarily require a high level of education. Skilled workers usually attend special vocational schools either instead of high school or in addition to high school. Clerical-sales also does not often require more than a high school education, although over-educated applicants occasionally fill such positions. On the whole, however, the categories that received little or no response typically are those employment areas that do not demand a high level of education. As a result, the people employed in those fields would likely

chose entertainment based on that background. Because theatre attendance usually demands a degree of cultural sophistication, it is unlikely this segment of the population possesses the necessary background or familiarity for enjoyment.

The BoarsHead respondents do not reply as expected to question 10 inquiring to which civic, political, labor, cultural or professional groups they belong. Fifty-eight percent either left the question blank or wrote "none;" 35 percent of the sample indicates either one group or two-three groups. In comparison only 7 percent of the respondents report belonging to more than three groups. Considering the professional employment and income of the majority of the respondents, the researcher expected that degree of affiliation would be relatively high. One possibility is that patrons wish to maintain complete anonymity and feel that indicating certain groups would pinpoint their identities. Area cultural groups, in particular, are often small, and many of those involved belong to more than one group. An indication of all the groups might betray more information than a respondent is willing to divulge. Also, group membership is the one demographic variable that required more than placing a check by an appropriate answer. Since the item appears near the end of the survey, respondents may not have wished to spend the time listing groups.

Concerning this demographic variable in particular, the researcher thinks the findings lack validity. She would

question whether it is valid to state that although BoarsHead audiences are highly educated and earn well beyond the national average income, they do not show a high degree of affiliation.

Results of the four nights' audiences indicate that 62 percent of the sample resides in Lansing or East Lansing. Other concentrations of response occur in the categories of Okemos (9%), Waverly (6%) and "Other" (9%). In addition to proximity to the BoarsHead Theater, the researcher would expect East Lansing residents in particular to possess a level of education and income that might warrant regular theatre attendance; many people who reside in East Lansing are associated with Michigan State University. In comparison, residents of more rural areas such as Bath, Dansville, Mason, Holt or Stockbridge, for example, are meagerly represented in this sample. In addition to distance from Lansing, the populations of these towns differ in makeup from those of East Lansing, Okemos and Lansing. Occupational breakdown is less heavily weighted toward the professional and proprietor-manager, income level is lower and attitude toward higher education differs. Such occupations as farming and skilled work assume greater importance in these locales with a corresponding decrease in exposure to and interest in theatrical performances.

Interestingly, only 3 percent of the sample indicate a residence in Grand Ledge. Because the BoarsHead summer

theatre is located at Fitzgerald Park in Grand Ledge, the researcher anticipated that residents of this area would be familiar with the BoarsHead Theater and inclined to patronize their winter theatre in Lansing. If this sample is representative of the BoarsHead Theater population, the summer patrons differ demographically from the winter season attenders.

Response to Question 1: How many times do you go to theatrical performances in a given year? and to Question 17: Are you a season subscriber to the BoarsHead Theater? are discussed together. An overwhelming 74 percent of the respondents indicate that they attend theatrical performances six or more times in a given year. Those who attend four-five theatrical performances in a given year comprise the second largest grouping with a 14 percent response. In comparison, only 1 percent of the respondents indicate that they attend one theatrical performance per year. Considering that in a given year there are not many local shows, this indicates that a majority of the respondents attend theatre habitually and not as an isolated, special event. Within the general population this level of attendance might be expected in such major centers as New York City or Chicago, for example, but it is not the norm for the entire country. Families seeking entertainment may think of going to the movies on a weekend or staying in to watch a regular line-up of television shows, but they seldom plan to attend a play.

This high level of exposure to theatrical performances

can be partially explained by the finding that season subscribers to the BoarsHead Theater comprise 54 percent of the sample. Because these patrons have pre-paid for more than six shows per year, chances are they plan to attend that number of performances. The other approximately 20 percent of the respondents who indicate that they attend theatre six or more times per year is less easily explained. One likelihood is that patrons who frequently attend BoarsHead performances are not necessarily season subscribers. They may prefer the freedom to select each play as it comes up rather than to finalize a decision at the start of the season. In addition to the BoarsHead Theater in the Lansing area, Michigan State University's Performing Arts Company offers a season of plays as does the Okemos Barn Theatre or the Lansing Civic Players. Because 62 percent of the respondents indicate that they reside in Lansing or East Lansing, it is likely that they have access to these other companies.

The 65 percent of the respondents who indicate that other people seek them out for information or opinions on theatrical performances either "frequently" or "occasionally" is not surprising in light of the 74 percent of the sample who attend theatrical performances six or more times in a given year. This is clearly a theatrically active group of respondents for whom theatregoing is customary. Therefore, simply through increased exposure their familiarity with

theatre is greater than those people who seldom attend. The frequent attenders are likely sources of information and opinion about theatrical performances and would therefore be viewed by others as opinion leaders.

Of the 65 percent who indicate that they are either frequent or occasional opinion leaders, however, only 13 percent report that they are frequent sources of play opinion. This result seems logical. In most groups only a relatively small number of members can claim to be strong, consistent opinion leaders. Too great a number of these leaders would result in confusion and inefficiency in communication and information flow. Those patrons who attend an entire season of BoarsHead plays may be occasionally solicited for information yet at the same time not possess exceptional background or insight into drama. Enjoyment may be the primary motive for attending theatre without any accompanying desire to evaluate what has been viewed. However, there would also exist a group of patrons more heavily involved in theatre who may occasionally perform themselves, attend several area theatres and have some training in the field. These would likely be the opinion leaders whose views are frequently sought. However, they form a minority.

INFLUENCE OF CRITICISM

While Mennuti found that a significant number of his Temple University respondents acknowledged using theatre

review and criticism for selecting plays to see and evaluating performances already viewed, only 51 percent of the BoarsHead respondents acknowledge the selection function and 33 percent the evaluation function. In comparison, 48 percent of the respondents indicate that they do not utilize review and criticism in selecting a play to see and 65 percent report that they do not employ criticism in evaluating a play after seeing it. Considering the large number of season subscribers in the sample, it is not unusual that the selection function of written criticism should be diminished. Mennuti's respondents were predominantly east coast residents who attended theatre in such centers as New York City, Boston and Philadelphia. They would not, for example, subscribe to a season of Broadway plays, since tickets are not purchased in that fashion. Therefore, they rely on expert advice to decide what to see.

The theatrical offerings in a small city, however, are less overwhelming than in a major center, and word-of-mouth plays a significant role in familiarizing residents with available productions. The critic, therefore, is less a source of necessary information and opinion. A source of selection information might only assume importance when the number of possible selections is great enough to warrant an objective opinion. The number of theatrical performances occurring simultaneously in Lansing is not great, therefore someone deciding to spend an evening at the theatre may attend a certain play regardless of critical praise or panning. There is simply not a wide enough offering to give

the small city critic great power in attracting patrons to or discouraging patrons from attending specific performances. Although the researcher had originally expected her findings to confirm Mennuti's results, after consideration she is not surprised that a Lansing critic plays a considerably different role in theatre attendance than the major city critic.

Unexpectedly, only one third of the BoarsHead sample acknowledges the evaluation function of theatre review and criticism. It seems common that someone who attends a theatrical performance before any reviews appear might subsequently look for a review with which to compare his or her views. Based on several respondents' written comments at the end of the questionnaire, the researcher has concluded that avid theatregoers in the area do not credit local critics with superior knowledge or understanding of theatre. They view the critic as only one individual whose opinion is neither more nor less valuable than any other's. Conceivably then, a comparison of opinions is of little interest to them.

An interesting aspect of audience response to the survey is that while many patrons reply that they do not use criticism for selection or evaluation of plays, they nevertheless disregard the screen questions and indicate sources of criticism they utilize for those very functions. This offers several possible explanations. Respondents may have missed the bracketed section stating IF YES, ANSWER QUESTION 3, for example. In stating that they do not use

review and criticism for selection or evaluation, audience members may mean that they seldom do (not an absolute "no"). Some audience members may want to appear autonomous in their decision-making, at the same time revealing that written criticism influences them by filling in appropriate sources of review information.

Of all the sources of review and criticism, newspapers provide the largest number of respondents with review information. Sixty-two percent of the respondents indicate that they utilize newspapers either "frequently" or "occasionally" for play selection information, and 45 percent acknowledge using newspapers "frequently" or "occasionally" for play evaluation information. A large number of respondents left these items blank due to screen questions instructing them to omit listing sources if they do not use reviews for selection and evaluation of plays. Thus, 30 percent of the respondents left newspapers blank for the selection function, and 44 percent did not respond to newspapers as sources of evaluation. The high percentage of respondents who indicate that newspapers are their primary source of play selection and evaluation information is not surprising considering several local newspapers regularly review BoarsHead plays. The researcher had anticipated that if respondents acknowledge using any source of review and criticism it would be a newspaper.

"Other people" are also apparently a major source of review and criticism information for the BoarsHead respondents. Fifty-six percent indicate that they rely on

other people for play selection information either "frequently" or "occasionally." Forty-three percent of the respondents report that other people "frequently" or "occasionally" provide them with play evaluation information. Understandably, many audience members rely upon other people for reactions and information about plays since Lansing theatregoers comprise a relatively small number, and many are familiar with one another. Often performers with one local theatre group are season subscribers to another company. Exchange of information and communication occur rapidly and efficiently.

The researcher is surprised at the relatively large percentage of respondents who report that magazines provide them with play selection and evaluation information. Thirty-two percent state that they rely on magazines for selection information either "frequently" or "occasionally," and 30 percent report that magazines "frequently" or "occasionally" provide them with evaluation information. No area magazine with which the researcher is familiar contains such information, although Scene, a State Journal Saturday supplement, might be considered a magazine. However, while Scene provides coverage that might encourage play selection, it never contains play evaluation information.

As expected, relatively few respondents indicate that they use the radio or television for play selection and evaluation information. Only 12 percent of the respondents report relying on television either "frequently" or "occasionally" for play selection and only 9 percent indicate

that they utilize television for play evaluation information. In comparison, 63 percent of the respondents either leave the television item blank or indicate that they never use it for selection, and 77 percent report that television never provides them with play evaluation information.

Similar response occurs with respect to radio as a source of play selection and evaluation information. Only 10 percent of the respondents report using radio to select a play, and only 6 percent acknowledge that radio is a frequent or occasional source of play evaluation information. Seventy percent of the respondents either leave the radio item blank or report that they never use it for play selection; 78 percent indicate that radio never provides them with play evaluation information.

The researcher had anticipated that television and radio would play minor roles in providing respondents with selection and evaluation coverage. Although BoarsHead Theater advertising appears on television and radio occasionally, newspapers carry more consistent coverage. Also, as far as the researcher is aware, no television or radio station provides evaluation of BoarsHead performances already viewed.

The relatively small percentage (29%) of the BoarsHead respondents who indicate that review and criticism has either "very much influence" or "pretty much influence" on their theatregoing can perhaps again be explained by the large number of season subscribers in the sample. Even those who are not season subscribers but do attend theatrical performances

six or more times per year might not be dissuaded by a negative review. They may enjoy attending plays, and there are simply not enough performances in the area to permit them to be completely guided by written criticism. The more than 50 percent of the respondents who indicate that review and criticism has "not much influence" on their theatregoing are nevertheless stating that some influence exists. A possible interpretation is that on occasion criticism does persuade them to attend theatre or dissuade them from going. Or they may be indicating that in the overall theatregoing process, criticism is one of many factors (e.g., other people) that plays a consistent part in the selection or evaluation of a play. In itself, however, the written criticism is not a major determinant.

THE ROLE OF CRITICISM AND THE CRITIC

When Mennuti delineated some of the functions review and criticism serve, he considered that people might use written criticism as a 'surrogate,' to replace seeing specific productions. In other words:

It involves the possibility that some potential audience member might, at times, read criticism about a play, film or television program in place of actually going to see it. This creates a kind of 'surface' knowledge of a work of art, rather than an actual aesthetic experience with it.²

²Mennuti, The Communication Functions, p. 78.

Apparently that is a valid function for the BoarsHead respondents because 68 percent acknowledge that criticism "helps keep me well informed, especially about plays which I have not seen" (Item 7A). By comparison, only 16 percent indicate that this function of criticism is either "unimportant" or "least important." This response seems to go along with the theatrical interest, educational level and large number of opinion leaders in the sample. These theatre patrons would simply want to be aware of theatre events in the area, and with the relatively small number of simultaneous theatrical performances, this would not be difficult. While they may criticize local reviewers, patrons nevertheless obtain general information from a review about plays on the local level.

The researcher expected a similar response to question two: Do you use theatre review and criticism in deciding about which play to see? and function 7B: It helps me decide what to see. While 51 percent answer "yes" to question two, 60 percent indicate that 7B is a "most important" or "just important" function of criticism. This inconsistency is especially surprising considering that the wording of the questions is nearly identical.

Statement 7E also represents a selection function of criticism and should receive a response similar to question two or statement 7B. However, only 47 percent respond that "It saves me time by helping me avoid plays I probably would not like" is either a "most important" or "just important" function of criticism. This represents quite a difference

from the 60 percent of the respondents who acknowledge that 7B is either most or just important. One possibility is that the wording of the two statements elicits divergent responses. Statement 7E is negatively worded with the use of "avoid" and "would not like." Perhaps audience members use theatre criticism to decide what to see in both a negative and positive sense. Statement 7E, however, only indicates the negative aspect of avoiding a certain play without incorporating that criticism might encourage a patron to see a particular production.

Inconsistency also exists between the response to question four: Do you use theatre review and criticism to evaluate a play after you have seen it? and function 7D: It helps me understand complex plays which I have seen. While 33 percent respond "yes" to question four, 44 percent indicate that function 7D is either "most important" or "just important." Essentially the two questions focus on the evaluation function of criticism, although audiences may not perceive them as identical, which would account for the 11 percent difference.

As with statement 7D, statement 7F: It gives me expanded insight into why I like or did not like what I saw, represents an evaluation aspect of theatre criticism. The response to the two statements is close, with 44 percent judging 7D as either most or just important, and 42 percent acknowledging 7F as either most or just important. However, an inconsistency exists between the two statements in section 7 and question four: Do you use theatre review and criticism to evaluate a

play after you have seen it? Since all three questions refer to the evaluation function of criticism they should elicit fairly identical percentage responses. However, the term "evaluate" may seem vague to respondents, whereas "understand complex plays" and "expanded insight into why I like or did not like what I saw" may communicate more efficiently and specifically.

From the response to question 8 on theatre criticism and critics, a picture emerges of the audience view of the critic. Most evident from the results is that audiences think the critic should "focus attention on the essential qualities of a work of art." Seventy-three percent of the BoarsHead sample either "strongly agree" or "agree" with the statement, while only 9 percent either "strongly disagree" or "disagree." The opposite statement: The function of criticism is to focus attention on the essential deficiencies of a work of art, elicits a "strongly agree" or "agree" from only 39 percent of the respondents. Forty-five percent of the respondents either "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the statement.

In their comments at the end of the questionnaire respondents reinforce disapproval of the critic who emphasizes the negative aspects of a production. One patron writes, "I resent personal opinions that tear down, deflate and offer no opportunity to learn what the viewing public may have seen. Most plays in the Lansing/East Lansing area are done by amateurs. They are growing all the time."

Another respondent states, "Criticism is most important, but so many critics feel it is their right to abuse, particularly on the local level."

An encouraging result is that a majority of respondents (60%) either "strongly disagree" or "disagree" with the statement: Criticism is unnecessary because the public can think for itself. Therefore, most respondents acknowledge that the theatre critic plays a necessary role in the communication process. Indications are that audiences do not deny the necessity of the critic; rather they disagree with the role as practiced by most critics. One respondent writes in the comments section of the questionnaire, "I would pay attention to the critics if there were any in this area worth reading." Another patron writes, "This year's plays are dismal in comparison to previous years. The 'critics' writing in the local papers have looked the other way more than they should have." One respondent states, "Most critics are so esoteric, biased and boring that we could do without them. They think of themselves as important. Maybe a few are; most of them are useless."

An obvious communication gap exists between the theatre critic and the reader. Audiences have expectations of the role of the critic which are not being fulfilled. Nevertheless, theatre patrons do read the criticism and utilize it to some degree, indicating that a total break in communication has not occurred.

While most respondents do not comment at the end of the questionnaire, some that do offer views of criticism and

the critic's role in general. "Reviews, in my humble opinion," one patron writes, "should offer the reading public a bit on the talents of the director, set design, costumes (they are all elements in which we see the whole). I appreciate reading what will be constructive criticism to enable actors to grow, stretch and improve." Another respondent comments, "A critic is, or should be, a scholar or philosopher trying to help a culture understand itself through its art." A third BoarsHead patron states, "Critics perform a certain function--to challenge each and every element of the theatre, content, context and execution of the play."

HYPOTHESES

The various hypotheses that the researcher generated based on such variables as theatre attendance, opinion leadership and education, did not prove tenable, with the exception of a hypothesis that tested the relationship between season subscription and the use of criticism for selecting a play to view. The relevant hypothesis proposes that "Audience members who are not BoarsHead season subscribers are more likely to use theatre criticism in selecting a play to see than those who are season subscribers." As expected, a strong negative correlation exists between the two variables ($X^2 = 11.98$, $p < .001$). Conversely, those who are season subscribers are far less likely to rely upon written criticism for its selection function.

CHAPTER V

SOME CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

CONCLUSIONS

Theatre review and criticism is a centuries-old art form that is now communicated through mass audience channels such as newspapers and magazines. Nevertheless, audience oriented research in the area of criticism is limited. Based on this researcher's study where audience members could, to some degree, express their reactions to criticism and the theatre critic, a communication gap exists between the communicator and the receiver. This field requires further research and a more refined methodology for tapping a representative audience response. Because only one other study previous to this researcher's even explored audience utilization of theatre review and criticism, theory in the field is still in its initial stages. Nevertheless, continued empirical research is vital in order to improve the efficiency of this necessary form of communication and to further define the role of the theatre critic in this process.

GENERALIZATIONS

Because of the small sample size in this study, it would be risky to make generalizations about the pattern of utilization of theatre review and criticism among the BoarsHead Theater population. In addition, the researcher can do little more than speculate about the influence of criticism on audiences in general. Nevertheless, the researcher is confident that her findings have provided some heuristic evidence toward further testing of the central proposition that the communication roles and functions and the usage of theatre criticism are functionally related. Continued research based on a more representative sample is necessary. This study has also suggested several areas of interest requiring further exploration.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Before employing this questionnaire for another study on utilization of theatre review and criticism, the researcher would suggest rewording of two sections: 1) the statements on reasons for using criticism and 2) the section on the role of criticism and the theatre critic. When Mennuti devised his Temple University alumni questionnaire he quoted such statements as "The good critic is, first and foremost, a teacher who induces us to think and widen our horizons" directly from books written by practicing critics. While in the context of these books the statements may be clear,

in isolation they lack a clarity that confuses audience members. One patron comments that "some questions are rather ambiguous" and various respondents write "confusing" next to some of the statements.

Therefore, the researcher would suggest preserving the meaning of the statements but revising them for public consumption. Because BoarsHead audience members did not immediately understand certain statements, they left them blank, or if they responded, may have done so without complete comprehension of what was being asked. Some respondents objected to the length of the questionnaire (four pages) but may not have done so if the questions had been more efficiently presented.

Further research might replicate the present study either at the BoarsHead Theater or in a city of similar size to Lansing and at a small professional theatre like the BoarsHead. Since audience research in utilization of review and criticism is relatively unexplored, the present study is merely a step in the direction of what is possible. A replication might aim for a larger sample size and perhaps then, more reliable results. Further research employing this questionnaire might also incorporate more personal interview. At least one BoarsHead respondent suggests that open-ended questions might provide more reliable results. Another respondent writes that the questionnaire did not list half of the reasons for which he and his wife read theatre

criticism. Thus, personal interview would be particularly useful in this area of audience research where so little has been done to date. Theatre patrons, if allowed, might suggest reasons for the utilization of review and criticism previously unexplored. This could provide the basis for a more efficient, exact questionnaire to be employed in future research.

It would be interesting to establish a trend of utilization of theatre review and criticism in smaller cities such as Lansing. Perhaps the selection function of criticism has little relevance in smaller cities, although the evaluation function might prove important. People might still enjoy reading a competent review after seeing a show just to determine if the critic confirms their reactions. It would also be valuable to understand whether audiences view the role of the critic differently in small cities than in large. Some of this researcher's feedback indicates that many audience members in the sample prefer the critic to be almost a public relations representative for the theatre, someone to uncritically foster and praise local productions. These sample people would probably not expect the same of a New York Times critic. However, theatre in Lansing has a personal touch with many of the same people attending and performing in plays. Therefore, these people are more likely to be tolerant of each other's work and less tolerant of a critical review.

Several BoarsHead respondents indicate on the questionnaire

that while they do not utilize local theatre review and criticism, they do acknowledge the influence of major city critics, such as those in New York City. Therefore, when they visit New York, for example, they often select plays based on critics' suggestions. On the other hand, they question the credibility and knowledge of local critics.

For at least two reasons utilization of criticism would differ between a city such as New York and a smaller metropolis such as Lansing. Firstly, audiences perceive New York critics as better versed and experienced in theatre. As indicated in the Introduction section, two recent studies claim that New York critics' reviews account for a great deal of variance in attendance at plays. Theatre producers and directors in New York often bemoan the power of the major critics there, and box office sales rely on the opinions of such men as Walter Kerr of the New York Times or Clive Barnes of the New York Post. In Lansing, however, a musical such as Fiddler on the Roof plays to sell-out crowds despite mediocre or negative reviews from local critics. Perceived credibility is a major determinant in the influence of local review and criticism.

Secondly, there are a limited number of theatrical offerings in the Lansing area in a given year. While in New York City a theatre patron must choose among a multitude of productions appearing simultaneously, in the Lansing area it is unusual for more than one or two major productions to appear at the same time. Therefore, the

selection function of review and criticism automatically loses importance. If a patron loves attending the theatre and only one play is available to view, then he or she may go regardless of what local critics write.

A possibility for further research then might attempt to differentiate between how a local audience utilizes theatre review and criticism in a city such as Lansing and how the same audience utilizes criticism in a metropolitan area such as Chicago or New York City. Does acknowledgement of the selection function range widely within the same audience dependent upon location of the particular production? In an audience such as that at the BoarsHead Theater it would not be difficult, considering education, financial situation and theatrical interest, to locate a number of respondents who attend theatre outside this area.

Further research might also investigate whether audiences differentiate between critics on the local level. Do readers group all local critics together as incompetent, for example, or do they acknowledge the influence of some while disregarding the suggestions of others? Since there are several publications which respondents may read (Lansing State Journal, Lansing Star, State News, Grand Rapids Press and, on occasion, the Detroit Free Press), it would be possible to determine whether credibility ranges dependent on either the particular publication or the particular critic.

The BoarsHead Theater is the only professional theatre

in the Lansing area. However, other groups such as the Okemos Barn Theatre, the Lansing Civic Players and the Michigan State University Performing Arts Company offer year-round productions. A possible study might analyze whether audiences at these various theatres respond to local review and criticism differently than the BoarsHead audience. Are there fewer season subscribers at these other theatres (some may not even offer season subscriptions) and thus possibly more people dependent upon written criticism for selecting a play to see? Are the audiences demographically (education, income, etc.) very different from the BoarsHead patrons and therefore more or less likely to rely upon criticism? Perhaps patrons at some of these other theatres attend performances on the whole less frequently than the BoarsHead respondents, so that their theatregoing is less habit and more a special event. Does the reputation of a particular theatre group determine attendance to a greater degree than review and criticism? If, for example, a patron feels the BoarsHead Theater or the Okemos Barn offers top quality theatre, does he or she act on this conviction rather than anything written about the show?

A number of respondents indicate that other people influence their selections of plays to see and evaluation of plays afterwards. This is possible in a small city such as Lansing where, as stated before, those interested in theatre often know each other and can pass on information about theatrical productions. However, is this true of other

cities of similar size to Lansing? Does word-of-mouth play a significant role in theatre attendance? Does this contribute to lessening the information and evaluation function of the critic? On the other hand, in a large city such as Chicago or New York there are many theatrical productions showing at once and a multitude of people involved in the arts. Whereas Lansing audiences may have personal contact with area performers, this is less likely in a large city. Therefore, large city residents might rely more heavily on an outside source--the theatre critic. It would be interesting to evaluate the relative importance of other people in theatre attendance in a small city as compared to a large one.

Further research might explore whether an identical audience employs review and criticism differently, dependent on the particular play. As previously mentioned, a 1978 BoarsHead Theater production of Fiddler on the Roof played to sell-out crowds nearly every night despite mediocre reviews at best. By now, however, Fiddler on the Roof is also a household title and its songs familiar to many people. Therefore, if a patron loves the show, he or she may attend a performance regardless of written reviews that pan it. Audiences may attend in tribute to the show itself, not the theatre's particular production.

However, audiences are not likely to view other shows similarly. During the 1978-1979 season, the BoarsHead Theater produced several little-known shows, including a German farce entitled The Underpants and David Mamet's 1977

piece, A Life in the Theatre. Few audience members had previous knowledge of these works and conceivably depended more on written criticism for selection and evaluation functions. Therefore, it would be interesting to measure fluctuation of review and criticism usage among the same audience members for a series of productions ranging from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

CHAPTER VI

PERSONAL VIEWS OF THE CRITIC'S ROLE

This researcher has a particular interest in theatre criticism because of her intention to pursue a career in that field. She would like to combine theatre training and a bachelor of arts degree in theatre from Michigan State University with a master of arts degree in journalism in her future employment. The information gained from conducting this study has had immediate impact on her role as theatre reviewer for The State News.

While suggesting areas for further research, this study has also aided the researcher in comprehending negative attitudes toward theatre critics. The increasingly widening gap between the reading public and the critic is something that further research might lessen. Audiences are willing to pinpoint their views of criticism and critics and supplement questionnaire responses with personal feelings. This is not to say that the critic should aim to please readers. However, he or she can increase effectiveness by comprehending what audiences demand of written criticism.

The view of the theatre critic as one who destroys has formed over years. As early as 1903, British critic A.B. Walkley wrote in Dramatic Criticism, "It is not to be gainsaid (denied) that the word 'criticism' has gradually

acquired a certain connotation of contempt."¹ Engel writes of modern day theatre reviewers:

The theater...too often suffers needlessly as a result of carelessness, personal proclivities, and an attempt on the part of certain reviewers to attract attention through irony and ridicule. Ridicule is not to be confused, as it too frequently is, with criticism.²

The theatre critic should not praise plays indiscriminately which would rob criticism of all meaning. However, he or she should love theatre and refrain from tearing down performances without offering an opportunity for growth. The critic who delights in his or her own witty contempt for particular performances is doing the art of criticism a disservice.

Even the rational critic, however, does not have an easy job; reaction to a play is subjective, and each viewer interprets a production differently. The reader expects to have his or her subjective thoughts confirmed by the critic and when they are not blames the reviewer. Engel acknowledges the different population segments that the critic must address and suggests the following:

All reviewers must surely be aware that there are many different 'publics' and that one conceivably fascinated by a Marlowe play might despise "Hello, Dolly!" or vice versa. With this kind of awareness it seems to me possible that...reviews might be slanted toward the general group that would find satisfaction in a particular presentation.³

¹A.B. Walkley, Dramatic Criticism (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970), p. 9.

²Engel, The Critics, p. xiv.

³Ibid., p. xvi.

The critic can help diminish audience hostility by sufficient background in the various theatre arts. Certain BoarsHead respondents view local critics as inadequately versed in theatre criticism and lacking knowledge in the field. One of the reasons a critic such as Walter Kerr is respected is that he practiced theatre before attempting to write criticism. As a playwright and director he gained information about acting, lighting, stage design, etc. Therefore, his opinions are based on study and experience. Rodney Bladel writes about Kerr:

Kerr's criticism, then, may be imaginative or objective, or a combination of both; as a newspaper reviewer, he is free to be directed by his own responses to the play. These responses are admittedly a matter of taste, which Kerr thinks of as an intuitive response conditioned by previous rational study and experience.⁴

Engel confirms that some previous knowledge is necessary for the theatre critic to be effective:

The question of absolute critical taste belongs, in my opinion, to the critic who has the necessary background and experience to warrant his being considered an authority and who is given the time and space for sober consideration in his journal.⁵

Walkley differentiates between two kinds of criticism, stating that there is "a right criticism and a wrong; criticism according to knowledge and good taste and criticism according to neither."⁶

⁴Roderick Bladel, Walter Kerr: An Analysis of His Criticism (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), p. 21.

⁵Engel, The Critics, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁶Walkley, Dramatic Criticism, p. 13.

Nevertheless, even with expert knowledge the critic will necessarily encounter public antagonism by the very nature of the art. And criticism is an art, according to a discussion by Walkley in 1903. "The use of any art is as a channel for the communication of ideas and emotions between man and man."⁷ As such, reactions to art are always subjective. Critic John Simon scorns the very idea of objective criticism and those who would demand objectivity of the critic:

Geometry perhaps can be objective and impersonal, as can xerography--but criticism? It is one of the most personal, most subjective arts--just like the arts of acting, directing or playwrighting. Like them, it may fail to persuade, or it may sway only in a demagogic, public-besotting manner.⁸

The speed with which most theatre criticism must be written poses another obstacle to satisfactory audience-critic communication. Sufficient consideration of a production is sometimes not possible. Engel writes:

The daily reviewer certainly has neither the time nor the space for careful consideration; yet the lack of these very things produces the conditions that make his opinion important; immediacy and instant decision-making for good or bad.⁹

Space limitations hinder the theatre critic's job and necessarily mean that certain aspects of a show will be slighted. A reader interested in stage design, for example, will blame the reviewer for downplaying that aspect of the

⁷Walkley, Dramatic Criticism, p. 57.

⁸John Simon, Singularities (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 212.

⁹Engel, The Critics, pp. xiii-xiv.

show. In reality, the critic's discussion may have been cut from the story. The critic must determine those production facets that interest the largest segment of his or her readers and focus on them. But someone will necessarily find fault.

Because theatre critics too often lack sufficient expertise, they react purely on instinct and alienate readers. The alienation will always exist to some degree but can be diminished by superior knowledge of the field. Kerr states that 'the critic's great contribution is that he is able to work out an almost mathematical equation for values that have hitherto existed spontaneously and imaginatively.'¹⁰

A theatre critic should offer something more than one BoarsHead patron's observation, "I don't believe anyone can make the definitive judgment on a work of art. Reviewers are just people with opinions who have the opportunity to get their opinions published." Granted, no final word exists on a work of art. Nevertheless, a theatre reviewer can and should possess a knowledge and insight that makes his or her considered judgment valuable to audiences and not just an opinion that happened to get published.

This study has raised questions about the role of the small city critic who wishes to encourage and foster theatre in his or her area without indiscriminately praising all performances. The growing importance of community theatres

¹⁰Bladel, Walter Kerr, p. 19.

and small repertory companies throughout the country is a positive sign that the cultural level of the United States is increasing. However, these companies often lack enough funds and proficient actors to produce quality theatre. The local reviewer wants these groups to grow, attracting both a wider audience and acting pool. However, by ignoring basic flaws in performances, the critic does not aid growth. The indiscriminate reviewer also then fails to differentiate between exceptional efforts and the usual performances because all receive positive coverage. It is possible to point out flaws in these performances while stressing positive achievements. This provides encouragement and also indicates areas that require improvement. Perhaps the small city or town reviewer does have more of an obligation to his or her readers than the major city critic. The arts will thrive in New York City simply by sheer numbers and concentration of talent. The same cannot necessarily be said of Lansing where audiences are often embarrassingly small for lesser known companies.

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APPENDICES

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM • LINTON HALL

EAST LANSING • MICHIGAN • 48824

Dear Friend:

Your opinion counts!

I am conducting a survey designed to determine how people use theatre reviews and criticism.

The research is an important part of my master's thesis at MSU. Therefore your participation in completing the attached questionnaire is crucial.

It will take only a few minutes of your time to fill the questionnaire out. Won't you please do so now.

You can fill out the appropriate answers to the questions by placing an (X) mark against the answer that most closely approximates your response.

Of course your answers will be treated in the strictest confidence and you will not be identified.

You can return your completed questionnaire either at the intermission or after the show is over at the designated spot in the lobby.

This study is done with the permission of the BoarsHead Theater and your participation is, of course, voluntary.

Thank you for your help!



Rosanne Singer

Theatre Review and Criticism Study

CONFIDENTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How many times do you go to theatrical performances in a given year?
 1. ____ one time 2. ____ 2-3 times 3. ____ 4-5 times 4. ____ 6 or more times
 7. ____ none 8. ____ don't know 9. ____ no response
2. Do you use theatre reviews and criticism in deciding about which play to see?
 1. ____ yes 2. ____ no 8. ____ don't know
 [IF YES, ANSWER QUESTION 3]
3. When you want to decide which play to see, which of the following sources of information do you use to help you in making your decision?
 [CHECK AS MANY SOURCES AS APPROPRIATE]

Source	(1) Frequently	(2) Occasionally	(3) Seldom	(4) Rarely	(5) Never	(8) Don't Know
Newspapers						
Television						
Radio						
Magazines						
Other People						
Others [SPECIFY]						

4. Do you use theatre review and criticism to evaluate a play after you have seen it?
 1. ____ yes 2. ____ no 8. ____ don't know
 [IF YES, ANSWER QUESTION 5]

5. Which of the following sources of review and theatre criticism do you use to help you evaluate a play?

[CHECK AS MANY SOURCES AS APPROPRIATE]

Source	(1) Frequently	(2) Occasionally	(3) Seldom	(4) Rarely	(5) Never	(8) Don't Know
Newspapers						
Television						
Radio						
Magazines						
Other People						
Others [SPECIFY]						

6. How often do other people seek you out for information or your opinions on theatrical performances?

1. _____ Frequently 2. _____ Occasionally 3. _____ Seldom 4. _____ Rarely
5. _____ Never 8. _____ Don't Know

7. Now here is something different. Listed below are some of the reasons for using theatre review and criticism. Would you please indicate how important or unimportant these reasons are by checking (X) the column which best approximates your response.

	(1) Most Important	(2) Just Important	(3) No Opinion	(4) Unimportant	(5) Least Important	(8) Don't Know
It helps keep me well informed, especially about plays which I have <u>not</u> seen.						
It helps me decide what to see.						
It is entertaining reading.						
It helps me understand complex plays which I have seen.						
It saves me time by helping me avoid plays I probably would not like.						
It gives me expanded insight into why I liked or did not like what I saw.						
Others [SPECIFY]						

8. Here are a set of statements made about theatre critics and criticism. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking (X) the statement that is closest to your response.

	(1) Agree Strongly	(2) Agree	(3) No Opinion	(4) Disagree	(5) Disagree Strongly	(8) Don't Know
The good critic is, first and foremost, a teacher who induces us to think and widen our horizons.						
The function of criticism is to focus attention on the essential qualities of a work of art.						
The function of criticism is to focus attention on the essential deficiencies of a work of art.						
The first and last responsibility of the critic is to raise the standards of art.						
Criticism is unnecessary because the public can think for itself.						
Without a few independent critics there is nothing between the public and the advertisers.						
A critic should not pronounce a work of art good or bad but explain why.						

9. How much influence does theatre review and criticism have on your theatre going?

1. ____ very much influence
2. ____ pretty much influence
3. ____ no opinion
4. ____ not much influence
5. ____ no influence

10. To what civic, political, labor, cultural or professional groups do you belong?
[LIST THE GROUPS]

11. What is the occupation of the head of your household?
1. ☐ Professional 2. ☐ Proprietor-Manager 3. ☐ Clerical-Sales 4. ☐ Skilled
 5. ☐ Semi-Skilled 6. ☐ Unskilled 7. ☐ Farming 8. ☐ Housewife
 9. ☐ Student 10. ☐ Retired 11. ☐ Unemployed 12. ☐ Others [SPECIFY] _____
12. How many years of schooling have you completed?
1. ☐ grade school 2. ☐ high school graduate 3. ☐ some college
 4. ☐ college graduate 5. ☐ some graduate work 6. ☐ MA completed
 7. ☐ Ph.D. completed 8. ☐ vocational training completed 9. ☐ Others [SPECIFY] _____
13. Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age group?
1. ☐ 13-17 years 2. ☐ 18-20 years 3. ☐ 21-25 years 4. ☐ 26-30 years
 5. ☐ 31-35 years 6. ☐ 36-40 years 7. ☐ 41-45 years 8. ☐ 46-50 years
 9. ☐ 51-55 years 10. ☐ 56-60 years 11. ☐ 61-65 years 12. ☐ over 65 years
14. Would you please indicate which of the following income groups corresponds closest to your total family income for 1977 before taxes?
1. ☐ less than \$6,000 2. ☐ \$6,000-9,000 3. ☐ \$9,001-12,000
 4. ☐ \$12,001-15,000 5. ☐ \$15,001-18,000 6. ☐ \$18,001-21,000
 7. ☐ \$21,001-24,000 8. ☐ \$24,001-27,000 9. ☐ \$27,001-30,000
 10. ☐ \$30,001-33,000 11. ☐ \$33,001-36,000 12. ☐ \$36,001-39,000
 13. ☐ \$39,001-41,000 14. ☐ over \$41,000 15. ☐ retired 16. ☐ unemployed
15. Sex
1. ☐ male 2. ☐ female
16. Could you please indicate in which of the following areas you reside?
1. ☐ Bath 2. ☐ Dansville 3. ☐ East Lansing 4. ☐ Grand Ledge
 5. ☐ Holt 6. ☐ Lansing 7. ☐ Mason 8. ☐ Okemos 9. ☐ Waverly
 10. ☐ Webberville 11. ☐ DeWitt 12. ☐ Haslett 13. ☐ Leslie
 14. ☐ Stockbridge 15. ☐ Williamston 16. ☐ Others [SPECIFY] _____
17. Are you a season subscriber to the BoarsHead Theater?
1. ☐ yes 2. ☐ no 3. ☐ don't know
18. If you have any additional comments please write them below.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

DEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1

Question 1: How many times do you go to theatrical performances in a given year?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - one time	2	1.1%
2 - 2-3 times	16	8.8
3 - 4-5 times	26	14.3
4 - 6 or more times	134	73.6
7 - none	2	1.1
8 - don't know	0	0
9 - no response	<u>2</u>	<u>1.1</u>
	182	100.0%

MEAN 3.74

MODE 4 (6 or more times)

STANDARD DEVIATION .95

Table 2

Question 6: How often do other people seek you out for information or your opinions on theatrical performances?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	24	13.2%
2 - Occasionally	95	52.2
3 - Seldom	25	13.7
4 - Rarely	24	13.2
5 - Never	10	5.5
8 - Don't Know	1	.5
9 - No Response	<u>3</u>	<u>1.6</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 3

Question 10: To what civic, political, labor, cultural
or professional groups do you belong?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - one group	25	13.7%
2 - two-three groups	38	20.9
3 - four-five groups	8	4.4
4 - six-seven groups	2	1.1
5 - eight-nine groups	1	.5
6 - more than nine groups	2	1.1
7 - none	19	10.4
9 - no response	<u>87</u>	<u>47.8</u>
	182	100.0%

MODE 9 (no response)

STANDARD DEVIATION 3.42

Table 4

Question 11: What is the occupation of the head of your household?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Professional	118	64.8%
2 - Proprietor-Manager	21	11.5
3 - Clerical-Sales	8	4.4
4 - Skilled	6	3.3
5 - Semi-Skilled	3	1.6
6 - Unskilled	0	0
7 - Farming	0	0
8 - Housewife	0	0
9 - Student	11	6.0
10 - Retired	8	4.4
11 - Unemployed	4	2.2
12 - Other	1	.5
Missing Case	<u>1</u>	<u>.5</u>
	182	100.0%

MODE 1 (professional)

STANDARD DEVIATION 2.99

Table 5

Question 12: How many years of schooling have you completed?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - grade school	1	.5%
2 - high school graduate	8	4.4
3 - some college	20	11.0
4 - college graduate	40	22.0
5 - some graduate work	26	14.3
6 - MA completed	51	28.0
7 - Ph.D. completed	22	12.1
8 - vocational training completed	2	1.1
9 - other	11	6.0
0 - no response	<u>1</u>	<u>.5</u>
	182	100.0%

MEAN 5.18 (some graduate work)

MODE 6 (MA completed)

STANDARD DEVIATION 1.76

Table 6

Question 13: Would you please indicate which of the following age groups corresponds to your age group?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - 13-17 years	0	0%
2 - 18-20 years	0	0
3 - 21-25 years	15	8.2
4 - 26-30 years	43	23.6
5 - 31-35 years	30	16.5
6 - 36-40 years	17	9.3
7 - 41-45 years	20	11.0
8 - 46-50 years	8	4.4
9 - 51-55 years	20	11.0
10 - 56-60 years	10	5.5
11 - 61-65 years	13	7.1
12 - over 65	2	1.1
0 - no response	<u>4</u>	<u>2.1</u>
	182	100.0%

MEAN 6.19 (36-40 years)

MODE 4 (26-30 years)

STANDARD DEVIATION 2.61

Table 7

Question 14: Would you please indicate which of the following income groups corresponds closest to your total family income for 1977 before taxes?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - less than \$6,000	7	3.3%
2 - \$6,001-9,000	10	5.5
3 - \$9,001-12,000	10	5.5
4 - \$12,001-15,000	10	5.5
5 - \$15,001-18,000	10	5.5
6 - \$18,001-21,000	12	6.6
7 - \$21,001-24,000	14	7.7
8 - \$24,001-27,000	12	6.6
9 - \$27,001-30,000	6	3.3
10 - \$30,001-33,000	12	6.6
11 - \$33,001-36,000	13	7.1
12 - \$36,001-39,000	12	6.6
13 - \$39,001-41,000	7	3.8
14 - over \$41,000	37	20.3
15 - retired	1	.5
16 - unemployed	2	1.1
0 - no response	<u>7</u>	<u>3.8</u>
	182	100.0%

MEAN 8.45 (approximately \$27,000)

MODE 14 (over \$41,000)

STANDARD DEVIATION 4.50

Table 8

Question 16: Could you please indicate in which of the following areas you reside?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Bath	2	1.1%
2 - Dansville	0	0
3 - East Lansing	50	27.5
4 - Grand Ledge	6	3.3
5 - Holt	1	.5
6 - Lansing	63	34.6
7 - Mason	5	2.7
8 - Okemos	17	9.3
9 - Waverly	10	5.5
10 - Webberville	2	1.1
11 - DeWitt	3	1.6
12 - Haslett	3	1.6
13 - Leslie	0	0
14 - Stockbridge	1	.5
15 - Williamston	0	0
16 - Other	17	9.3
Missing Cases	<u>1</u>	<u>.5</u>
	182	100.0%

MODE 6 (Lansing)

STANDARD DEVIATION 3.83

Table 9

Question 15: Sex

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Male	81	44.5%
2 - Female	93	51.1
9 - No response	<u>8</u>	<u>4.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 10

Question 17: Are you a season subscriber to the BoarsHead
Theater?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - yes	99	54.4%
2 - no	80	44.0
9 - no response	<u>3</u>	<u>1.6</u>
	182	100.0%

INFLUENCE OF CRITICISM

Table 11

Question 2: Do you use theatre review and criticism in
deciding about which play to see?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - yes	93	51.1%
2 - no	87	47.8
8 - don't know	<u>2</u>	<u>1.1</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 12

Question 4: Do you use theatre review and criticism to
evaluate a play after you have seen it?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - yes	60	33.0%
2 - no	119	65.4
8 - don't know	2	1.1
9 - no response	<u>1</u>	<u>.5</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 13

Question 3: When you want to decide which play to see, which of the following sources of information do you use to help you in making your decision?

3A Newspapers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	73	40.1%
2 - Occasionally	39	21.4
3 - Seldom	7	3.8
4 - Rarely	6	3.3
5 - Never	3	1.6
9 - No response	<u>54</u>	<u>29.7</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 14

Question 5: Which of the following sources of review and criticism do you use to help you evaluate a play?

5A Newspapers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	47	25.8%
2 - Occasionally	35	19.2
3 - Seldom	3	1.6
4 - Rarely	6	3.3
5 - Never	11	6.0
9 - No response	<u>80</u>	<u>44.0</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 15

3B Television

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	2	1.1%
2 - Occasionally	19	10.4
3 - Seldom	19	10.4
4 - Rarely	17	9.3
5 - Never	34	18.7
9 - No response	<u>91</u>	<u>50.0</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 16

5B Television

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	4	2.2%
2 - Occasionally	12	6.6
3 - Seldom	11	6.0
4 - Rarely	16	8.8
5 - Never	31	17.0
8 - Don't know	1	.5
9 - No response	<u>107</u>	<u>58.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 17

3C Radio

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	2	1.1%
2 - Occasionally	17	9.3
3 - Seldom	17	9.3
4 - Rarely	19	10.4
5 - Never	36	19.8
9 - No response	<u>91</u>	<u>50.0</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 18

5C Radio

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	2	1.1%
2 - Occasionally	8	4.4
3 - Seldom	14	7.7
4 - Rarely	15	8.2
5 - Never	35	19.2
8 - Don't know	1	.5
9 - No response	<u>107</u>	<u>58.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 19

3D Magazines

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	29	15.9%
2 - Occasionally	30	16.5
3 - Seldom	13	7.1
4 - Rarely	15	8.2
5 - Never	16	8.8
9 - No response	<u>79</u>	<u>43.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 20

5D Magazines

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	21	11.5%
2 - Occasionally	34	18.7
3 - Seldom	8	4.4
4 - Rarely	6	3.3
5 - Never	15	8.2
8 - Don't know	1	.5
9 - No response	<u>97</u>	<u>53.3</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 21

3E Other People

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	61	33.5%
2 - Occasionally	47	25.8
3 - Seldom	8	4.4
4 - Rarely	5	2.7
5 - Never	2	1.1
9 - No response	<u>59</u>	<u>32.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 22

5E Other People

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Frequently	39	21.4%
2 - Occasionally	40	22.0
3 - Seldom	8	4.4
4 - Rarely	1	.5
5 - Never	7	3.8
9 - No response	<u>87</u>	<u>47.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 23

Question 9: How much influence does theatre review and criticism have on your theatregoing?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Very much influence	5	2.7%
2 - Pretty much influence	48	26.4
3 - No opinion	3	4.9
4 - Not much influence	94	51.6
5 - No influence	19	10.4
9 - No response	<u>7</u>	<u>3.8</u>
	182	100.0%

ROLE OF CRITICISM AND CRITIC

Question 7: Listed below are some of the reasons for using review and criticism. Would you please indicate how important or unimportant these reasons are by checking (X) the column which best approximates your response.

Table 24

7A: It helps keep me well informed, especially about plays which I have not seen.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	44	24.2%
2 - Just important	79	43.4
3 - No opinion	21	11.5
4 - Unimportant	23	12.6
5 - Least important	7	3.8
9 - No response	<u>8</u>	<u>4.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 25

7B: It helps me decide what to see.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	32	17.6%
2 - Just important	78	42.9
3 - No opinion	18	9.9
4 - Unimportant	40	22.0
5 - Least important	6	3.3
9 - No response	<u>8</u>	<u>4.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 26

7C: It is entertaining reading.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	15	8.2%
2 - Just important	73	40.1
3 - No opinion	24	13.2
4 - Unimportant	29	15.9
5 - Least important	23	12.6
9 - No response	<u>18</u>	<u>9.9</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 27

7D: It helps me understand complex plays which I have seen.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	26	14.3%
2 - Just important	54	29.7
3 - No opinion	29	15.9
4 - Unimportant	41	22.5
5 - Least important	16	8.8
8 - Don't know	3	1.6
9 - No response	<u>13</u>	<u>7.1</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 28

7E: It saves me time by helping me avoid plays I probably would not like.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	27	14.8%
2 - Just important	58	31.9
3 - No opinion	25	13.7
4 - Unimportant	40	22.0
5 - Least important	21	11.5
8 - Don't know	1	.5
9 - No response	<u>10</u>	<u>5.5</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 29

7F: It gives me expanded insight into why I liked or did not like what I saw.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Most important	18	9.9%
2 - Just important	58	31.9
3 - No opinion	27	14.8
4 - Unimportant	40	22.0
5 - Least important	24	13.2
8 - Don't know	3	1.6
9 - No response	<u>12</u>	<u>6.6</u>
	182	100.0%

Question 8: Here are a set of statements made about theatre critics and criticism. Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by checking (X) the statement that is closest to your response.

Table 30

8A: The good critic is, first and foremost, a teacher who induces us to widen our horizons.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	22	12.1%
2 - Agree	78	42.9
3 - No opinion	18	9.9
4 - Disagree	36	19.8
5 - Disagree strongly	8	4.4
8 - Don't know	4	2.2
9 - No response	<u>16</u>	<u>8.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 31

8B: The function of criticism is to focus attention on the essential qualities of a work of art.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	30	16.5%
2 - Agree	102	56.0
3 - No opinion	16	8.8
4 - Disagree	15	8.2
5 - Disagree strongly	1	.5
8 - Don't know	2	1.1
9 - No response	<u>16</u>	<u>8.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 32

8C: The function of criticism is to focus attention on the essential deficiencies of a work of art.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	7	3.8%
2 - Agree	63	34.6
3 - No opinion	12	6.6
4 - Disagree	69	37.9
5 - Disagree strongly	12	6.6
8 - Don't know	3	1.6
9 - No response	<u>16</u>	<u>8.8</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 33

8D: The first and last responsibility of the critic is to raise the standards of art.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	17	9.3%
2 - Agree	38	20.9
3 - No opinion	24	13.2
4 - Disagree	62	34.1
5 - Disagree strongly	15	8.2
8 - Don't know	6	3.3
9 - No response	<u>20</u>	<u>11.0</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 34

8E: Criticism is unnecessary because the public can think for itself.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	4	2.2%
2 - Agree	19	10.4
3 - No opinion	23	12.6
4 - Disagree	86	47.3
5 - Disagree strongly	26	14.3
8 - Don't know	5	2.7
9 - No response	<u>19</u>	<u>10.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 35

8F: Without a few independent critics there is nothing
between the public and the advertisers.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	11	6.0%
2 - Agrée	67	36.8
3 - No opinion	37	20.3
4 - Disagree	39	21.4
5 - Disagree strongly	6	3.3
8 - Don't know	3	1.6
9 - No response	<u>19</u>	<u>10.4</u>
	182	100.0%

Table 36

8G: A critic should not pronounce a work of art good or bad
but explain why.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 - Agree strongly	39	21.4%
2 - Agree	84	46.2
3 - No opinion	12	6.6
4 - Disagree	20	11.0
5 - Disagree strongly	7	3.8
8 - Don't know	2	1.1
9 - No response	<u>18</u>	<u>9.9</u>
	182	100.0%