
“The reviewer should state, more or less up front, what the book’s author sees as his or her task. How frequently does a reviewer ignore the author’s intentions and tell readers how he or she would have written the book! The latter tack is a permissible part of book reviewing, but should only come after giving the book’s author a fair break in his/her terms first. In that fashion, readers can tell whether they wish to read the book for themselves.

As part of the description of the authors’ intentions, we need also to be informed, as neutrally as possible, how authors carry out the task. How do they organize their materials? What resources (sources) do they bring to their exposition? How do they structure their materials? How do they write? There a host of such questions that a questing reader of a review might like to have answered, as a guide to whether she or he wishes to read the book.

At this point, or somewhere else in the review, it is perfectly fair for the reviewers to declare their own parti pris…Closely connected to this point is the opportunity for reviewers to declare openly their favored approach. This is where the temptation to write a different book from that of the actual author can and should be actively engaged, acknowledged, and dealt with. At least then we can compare different approaches to the same theme.

Another need in a reviewer is to tell readers how well or badly the author carried out the task, as defined in the author’s own terms. The reviewer should do this even when he or she disagrees more or less completely with what the author set out to do. This is a form of impartial judgment, and … it is a legitimate [and integral] part of reviewing.

In the end the review has the right, and the duty, to stand back and evaluate the particular approach and execution adapted by the book’s author [See attached essay in your syllabus, and previous class meetings, for information]. As long as the author receives a fair hearing the reviewer can be sharp or benign, highly critical or laudatory. By now, the reader of the review has had a fair chance to review the reviewer as well as the book under review.

The rules, as given above, are simple and obvious. Set forth in rather dry terms, they are not intended as a straight jacket, but merely a template for how reviews ought to be written…Reviewing is an art, a creative endeavor in its own right, but one that has serious obligations to the other “artist,” the author of the book one is reviewing.”