

18th January 2022

Reviewers

“O you chorus of indolent reviewers.”

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Milton, Hendecasyllabics

No sooner do I get an *Amazon* delivery than I'm invited to review my purchase. One star to five stars is the start. Then it's suitability, value-for-money, packaging, speed of delivery, and that's before you get into "ease of purchase" and "navigating the website" issues. Everyone can be a reviewer these days. Holidays, visitor-attractions, clothes, train companies, air-fresheners. We're all reviewers, it seems. And which of us hasn't "filtered" an on-line search to find which customer reviews come highest?

In 1856, the English poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, published a series of lectures he'd delivered four decades earlier, entitled *Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton*. In the opening lecture he said this:

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

I hope when we review things it's *not* because we've failed in other aspects of our lives and therefore "turn critics", but because we're honest, and discerning, and want to be of help to future customers.

A drama company were condemned for their "shoddy performance" by a renowned theatre critic. The actors took issue with this, considering the criticism unjustified. But rather than entering into a protracted debate with the critic, they had this letter published in the local newspaper:

Sir: Regarding your theatre critic's review of our recent performance, may we suggest that "He that is without sin should stone the cast first."

It's a clever twist on the advice from Jesus when the Pharisees were trying to trap him into condemning an adulterous woman. So while it might be commonplace – and occasionally useful – to review goods, services and even drama productions, let's be careful about how we review other people. It's too easy to "turn critics" and throw that first stone. When it comes to judging those around us, how unfortunate it would be if we were one of those who'd joined Tennyson's "chorus of indolent reviewers".

A prayer for today

Lord, let me review my own life before I start reviewing someone else's.

Oh, and might I get a good review for that from you? Amen