

Criticism binds local writers

By JUDY OWEN
Criticism. Some of us avoid it like the plague wrapping ourselves in a protective cocoon preferring to accept only the compliments.
But criticism is the glue that has held a small group of area poets and fiction writers together for the last three years.
Strengthening the bond is the need to rub elbows with other people who are writers, according to Sherry Quiroz of Franklin.
It began when Ms. Quiroz and Judy LaVercombe who met in a creative writing class taught by Judith Goren at The Community House decided to sit together from time to time and read each other's work.
The two were reading the first draft of Ms. LaVercombe's novel, "Ordinary People," written under the name of Judith Goren and published last month by Viking Press.
"In those days, Judy was afraid to call herself a writer," Ms. Quiroz said. "We were a couple of housewives who sat in her kitchen or mine, drinking coffee and talking about the problems of writing a story and how to schedule

writing time when you have a family to take care of."
"We really thought the kind of success Judy has now was completely impossible," she said.
The group took shape when the two began meeting other writers through creative writing workshops.
Judith McCombs of Farmington is another member of the group who has been encouraged to continue with her writing.
At last, she credits the group with keeping her at the typewriter during her pregnancy last year and getting her back at the typewriter soon after the baby was born.
"I didn't write for a year after my first child was born," she said. "After the second child, I was back writing in a few months and I know it was because of the group."
Ms. McCombs, who teaches literature and creative writing at the Center for Creative Studies, has published a collection of her poetry entitled "Sisters and Other Selves" and has had work published in such magazines as Poetry of Chicago and the Bantam anthology, "We Became New."

The group meets every several weeks during the year, according to Ms. McCombs. It's inactive every summer.
"We do more creating during the school year when we're busier," she said.
All of the members of the group had gone beyond the college workshop stage, she said. All are publishing, all are teachers and almost all have or are teaching creative writing in some setting.
Ms. McCombs believes that it is the informal pressure of the group that has kept her writing.
Members, especially the poets, are expected to have something prepared for each group meeting.
"It's the idea of having an audience, criticism and feedback," she said.
"Many writers feel that it is difficult to continue writing in isolation," she said. "That is the reason for the workshops. They provide a peer group."
Ms. McCombs usually writes for two days before the group meets and then she works after.
As a fiction writer, Ms. Quiroz tries to be more steady in her approach, but she said, "A short story is the kind of thing you do all in one breath. It comes at me and I write to get rid of it."
"That's the first draft. Then I rewrite. I like to rewrite better than anything else," she said.
Ms. Quiroz does not come to the meetings prepared to read to the group as often as the other members.
When she is not working on a short story she has been doing some translations from Spanish writers. Besides aiding her in developing new techniques for her own writing, she has

found that she turns to the thesaurus more often for her work.
The group, which has had as many as 11 members, is down to about six members, presently. There are three poets, one fiction writer and two novelists.
Ms. Quiroz likes the size. Each member reads a prepared work and then hears criticism from the others.
At Ms. McCombs' suggestion, she writes down all of the criticism and later uses what she wants and ignores the rest.
"I usually decide about two rewrites later that they were right," Ms. Quiroz said.
The group would like to serve as a model for people who would like to form a similar group, Ms. McCombs said.
"Any writer who doesn't know working writers with whom she or he can get together, should go to classes like the one taught by Judy Goren at The Community House and look for other writers to get together," she said.
The first time I was exposed to group criticism like this was before our group started in a class at the community house," Ms. Quiroz said. "Whenever my work got any negative criticism, I used to leave the class filled with self-pity and go to my car across the street."
"But after awhile I realized that as I drove home, by the time I got to the intersection of Maple and Telegraph, I had almost always begun to think of ways to improve the work and by Franklin and Maple I was dying to get home and start rewriting. And the work did improve," she said.
Ms. Quiroz has had stories published in "Waves," "Wayne Literary Review" and the anthology, "Moving to Anarc-tica."
Other area persons who have participated in the group are Mitzi Alvin of Franklin, Ann Laas of Birmingham and Deborah Richardson of Birmingham, all poets.
"Before and after all the criticism, it all comes down to the writer alone in a room with his typewriter," Ms. Quiroz said.
"Still, who that writer is at that moment alone with his typewriter is a product of everything that has happened to him before, and if he's lucky, that includes the help and encouragement of other people who are writers."

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Teachers featured in play

Three area residents, all teachers, are featured in the current production of "The Apple Tree" at the Macomb Theatre at-the-Barn. The play, a musical adaptation of three popular short stories, calls for the same three actors to play the lead characters in each of the tales.
Charles Van Hoose, a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools, plays Adam in the "Diary of Adam and Eve," "Sanjar the wazir" in the "Lady and the Tiger," and Pto in the satirical spoof of Hollywood, "Passionella." His credits include not only most of the area theatres but New York as well. He is currently the associate director for Macomb Theatre at-the-Barn. He recently received critical acclaim for his performance in University of Detroit and Marygrove's production of "Charlie's Aunt."

Timothy Lenta, a math teacher at Adams High School in Rochester, portrays the Snake in the first play, the balladeer in the second and the narrator in the third. He forms the link that connects the three musicals. His most recent role at the Barn was Neal in "Fiorita." He has also served as technical director of Rochester Schools for five years.

Mr. Felice Novak teaches Speech and Theatre at St. Florian's High School in Hamtramck.

Besides teaching and directing high school theatre she has performed in a variety of musicals and straight shows while continuing her graduate studies at U of D. Her part calls for seven costume changes. She plays Eve, an oriental princess and Passionella, a star struck under-wench.

"The Apple Tree" opened on July 9 and continues Wednesdays to Sundays through July 25. Tickets can be reserved at the box office located in the theatre at 16500 Hall Road at Garfield in Mt. Clemens.

The box office is open daily (except Monday) between noon and 6 p.m. Phone reservations can be made by calling 288-4822.

The Macomb Theatre at-the-Barn, under the direction of Arthur P. Rizzo, is a semi-professional company under the sponsorship of the Division of Continuing Education, Macomb County Community College.

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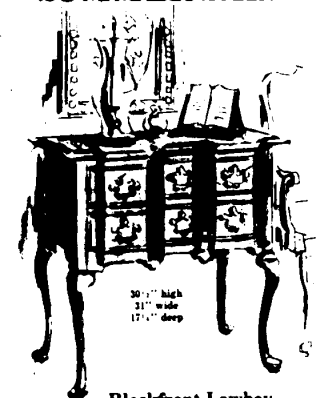
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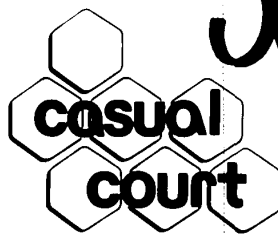
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