Critic as Writer  
(L13 440 01)  
Spring 2019 / T & R: 1-2:30pm 

Prof: Dr. Martin Riker  
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Office hours: T/R noon to 1pm, or by appointment  
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Required Texts: these are available at Subterranean Books on Delmar, but you can also order from them online here: http://store.subbooks.com/martin-riker-critic-writer

All other assigned readings will be handed out.

*The Argonauts*, by Maggie Nelson  
*Essayism*, by Brian Dillon  
*To After That (TOAF)*, by Renee Gladman  
*My Emily Dickinson*, by Susan Howe  
*Camera Lucida*, by Roland Barthes  
*These Possible Lives*, by Fleur Jaeggy

Goal  
This course will take “literary criticism” to mean critical writing that is itself literary. Though there is a survey quality to the course (we’ll be looking at many different types of critical writing) the emphasis is always on critical writing as an art form, but an art whose varied forms are strongly determined by their subjects and rhetorical environments.

For the survey aspect, we’ll read book reviews to manifestos to book-length poetic-critical hybrids. The point is not really compare-and-contrasting but rather considering each form within its rhetorical context and seeing what we can learn. We’ll sometimes look at how a single writer handles various subjects, and at other times how various writers handle a single subject. We’ll read authors who contradict one another, and others who build off one another, and sometimes we’ll read two authors who contradict one another but build off the same author.

Maggie Nelson, in one of our books for this semester, writes that “artistry trumps mastery,” and this class will take that as a mantra while also recognizing it as self-evidently false; false because it is precisely Nelson’s mastery (her considerable knowledge and reading background) that makes possible her artistry. So, while our end is artistry, our means is mastery—in other words, we will write only a little, and read quite a lot.

The goal is to come out knowing more than you used to about various critical traditions and ways of writing, so that as a writer you will have a wider range of possibilities available to you, and as critic you will enjoy the artistic freedom that comes with knowing what you’re talking about.

Participation  
Key to this class’s success—and your own—is your participation. The class will be run more or less as a graduate seminar; we’ll read books and talk about them. The expectation is that everyone will have done all the reading and everyone will participate in the conversation.
Writing Assignments

1) A book review (1,000 words)—and for this we will be using galleys (reviewer copies) of recent or forthcoming titles, so that you will be reviewing a book that is currently being published, and can (perhaps? hopefully?) publish your review.

2) A manifesto (1,000 words)—which can be about literature or art or music or culture but which should be in conversation, formally/stylistically, with readings from the class. There will be a presentation (more like a sharing-with-the-group) involved.

3) A monograph (7-15 pages)—where you will choose an author in whose work you have some expertise and will compose a monograph-type essay as conventional or unconventional as you like (the monographs we will read will tend to be fairly unconventional). These will be discussed by the whole class as a group—“workshopped” might be too strong a term, but that’s the idea.

Grades
You need to come to class on time, do the work, and be a lively, engaged, respectful part of discussion. Leave your computers and phones off while in class. Your grade will be based on your assignments but also on your demonstrated engagement with the material, and your respectful engagement with your classmates. Whenever possible, please inform me of absences ahead of time. Every absence is considered in relation to participation, but after two absences your grade starts automatically going down 1/3 letter grade per absence. If you have extenuating circumstances that will cause multiple absences, talk to me about them.

A breakdown of grading percentages:
Participation & discussion: 30%
Book Review: 20%
Manifesto: 20%
Monograph: 30%

Schedule
(I may sometimes change the readings—handouts—if I think a different reading than the one on the schedule might better benefit the class. Of course, any changes will be announced ahead of time. PLEASE NOTE: All materials discussed in class on the days listed below.)

STYLES, MODES, APPROACHES

Week One 1/15 & 1/17
- Tues: course introduction, syllabus; review books handed out
- Thurs: individual introductions; NYTBR short reviews (handout)

Week Two 1/22 & 1/24
- Tues: commercial modes: WSJ Saturday and NYTBR Sunday Review sections
- Thurs: Approaches to visual arts: Yau, Myles, Vincler (handouts)

Week Three 1/29 & 1/31
- Tues: Approaches to music: Cage, Ross, Schoenberg (handouts); book reviews due
- Thurs: Approaches to “reading”: Barthes (handouts):
Week Four 2/5 & 2/7
- Tues: *Camera Lucida* first half
- Thurs: *Camera Lucida* second half

Week Five 2/12 & 2/14
- Tues: Maggie Nelson interview (handout) & *The Argonauts* first half
- Thurs: *The Argonauts* second half

**MANIFESTOS AND ARS POETICA**

Week Six 2/19 & 2/21
- Tues: Baldwin, Poe, Woolf (handouts)
- Thurs: Marinetti, Loy, Stein, Schwitters (all handouts)

Week Seven 2/26 & 2/28
- Tues: Barthelme, Acker, Reed, Delany (handouts)
- Thurs: New Narrative: Gluck, Lu (essay), Lu (excerpt) (handouts)

Week Eight 3/5 & 3/7
- Tues: *Essayism* (first half)
- Thurs: *Essayism* (second half)

Week Nine SPRING BREAK

Week Ten 3/19 & 3/21
- Tues: manifesto presentations group 1; **manifestos due**
- Thurs: manifesto presentations group 2

**MONOGRAPHS**

Week Eleven 3/26 & 3/28
- Tues: *My Emily Dickinson*
- Thurs: NO CLASS (AWP)

Week Twelve 4/2 & 4/4
- Tues: *The Glass Essay* (Carson - handout)
- Thurs: Maureen McLane essays (handout)

Week Thirteen 4/9 & 4/11
- Tues: *To After That* (TOAF)
- Thurs: monograph workshops

Week Fourteen 4/16 & 4/18
- Tues: monograph workshops
- Thurs: monograph workshops

Week Fifteen 4/23 & 4/25
- Tues: monograph workshops
- Thurs: *These Possible Lives*

**Final monographs due in my department mailbox 4/25**