

Criticism

English 4040: Studies in Writing

Prof. Samuel Cohen

University of Missouri

Spring 2017

MW 3:00-4:15, Tate 114D

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The Course

In this course we will work on criticism. We will study it, looking at the criticism of music, art, literature, film, TV, fashion, food and looking at the forms it takes--academic, journalistic, creative—and we will write and workshop our own pieces of criticism. Students will be responsible for reading and responding to examples of criticism, supplied by the instructor and also by themselves and their classmates, in reading journals to be shared in class. Students will also be responsible for writing their own pieces of criticism and for taking part in workshopping them.

The Texts

There are no books on order for this class. All readings will be available through Canvas; please print all of the day's reading and bring it to class.

Ten Things You Should Know

1. You will have to read a lot in this class, and it is important that you keep up. If you do not think that you will be able to do so, consider another class. Also, the reading will contain adult material; if you have a problem with this sort of thing, you should not take this class, as you may not be excused from reading, listening to, and talking about this material.
2. This will be a discussion-centered class. You must print out and bring to class the text(s) under discussion, as we will refer to them frequently, and you must keep other work/reading in your bag. It is also important that you do not do certain things that disrupt discussion and your attention, such as using cell phones or computers. I also have an annoying rule about not eating in class that I'm going to stick to no matter how annoying people think it is.
3. As this will be a discussion-centered class, a portion of your grade depends on your participation. As it is difficult to participate if you are absent, I am setting the maximum number of unpenalized absences at four. On the fifth absence I will drop your cumulative grade a step (B becomes B-, B- becomes C+, etc.). Every additional absence will result in another step drop.
4. You are responsible for keeping reading journals, one entry per class meeting (*except when writing—but not revised writing--is due*), that you will bring to every class meeting. Journals will be collected a number of times during the semester; the entries will not be graded individually, but the journal as a whole will receive a grade, which will be based on the effort you put into reflecting, in any (substantive) way you wish, on the reading material for that day's meeting. Writing a bunch of entries at a time using different color pens will defeat the purpose of the reading journal; it will also make it difficult for you to refer to the day's entry when I ask you to share it in class, which I will do regularly. If I get the sense from the quality of discussion and of

the journals that people are not keeping up, the journals will be augmented with quizzes.

5. You will write five short exercises over the course of the semester to be workshopped and revised. You will also write and revise your own piece of art criticism (final version minimum 3000 words). We will workshop these final pieces at the end of the semester. No late drafts for workshop will be accepted: the workshop part of the class won't work if we've got no work to workshop. You don't have to say that five times fast, but you have to remember it. All final drafts should be submitted electronically through Canvas.

6. Your grade for the course will reflect participation in class discussion (25%), reading journals (25%), short essays (25%), and final essay (25%).

7. Essays should be written (typed, of course) using MLA style according to the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. (Also *Research and Documentation Online*: <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/humanities.html>.) Be especially aware of the section on plagiarism. I take this very seriously. See also Thing 8.

8. From the Provost's Web site: "Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor."

9. If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, or at my office. To request academic accommodations (for example, a note taker), students must also register with Disability Services, AO38 Brady Commons, 882-4696. Another resource, MU's Adaptive Computing Technology Center, 884-2828, is available to provide computing assistance to students with disabilities.

10. University of Missouri System Executive Order No. 38 lays out principles regarding the sanctity of classroom discussions at the university. The policy is described fully in Section 200.015 of the Collected Rules and Regulations. In this class, students may make audio or video recordings of course activity unless specifically prohibited by the faculty member. However, the redistribution of audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course is prohibited without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded. Students found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of Section 200.020 of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.

Schedule

W Jan 18 Introduction
 Mel Brooks, Ernest Pintoff, "The Critic"

Criticism

M Jan 23 Dwight Garner, "A Critic's Case for Critics Who Are Actually Critical"; A. O. Scott, "What Is Criticism? A Preliminary Dialogue"; Daniel Mendelsohn, "A. O. Scott's *Better Living Through Criticism*" & "A Critic's Manifesto"

W Jan 25 Arthur Danto, “The Politics of Imagination”; *Los Angeles Times*, “Has Hollywood Lost Touch with American Values”; Kenneth Turan, “Blame the Movies”; Jeffrey Fleishman, “Realistic or Cliché?”; Meredith Blake, “No ‘Middle’ Ground”; Marc Bernardin, “Still Angry”; Carolina Miranda, “Standing Rock Legacy”; Carolyn Kellogg, “The Provocateur”

Art I

M Jan 30 Clement Greenberg, “The Case for Abstract Art”; Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood”; Peter Schjeldahl, “Art All Over,” “Ordinary People,” “The Seething Hell”

W Feb 1 Carolina Miranda, “Art’s Red Pill: An Appreciation of John Berger”
Watch in class: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Episode 1; Hennessey Youngman, “ART THOUGHTZ: How to Make an Art” & “ART THOUGHTZ: How to Make an Art. Addendum (Part 2ish)”

Art II

M Feb 6 John Updike, “Serra’s Triumph”; Geoff Dyer, “Poles Apart”
W Feb 8 Twitter & tumblr art criticism: @artfcity, @TylerGreenDC, @EscapeIntoLife, @museumnerd, hyperallergic.tumblr.com, hydeordie.com
Due: 2000 words art writing

Film I

M Feb 13 Pauline Kael, “Bonnie and Clyde”; Louis Menand, “The Popist: Pauline Kael”; Anthony Lane, “Doing Battle”
Due: art writing, revised

W Feb 15 Manohla Dargis, “‘La La Land’ Makes Musicals Matter Again” ; Scott Timberg, “The ‘La La Land’ Backlash: Will It Last Until the Oscars?”; Anna Sillman, “‘La La Land: A Musical Ode to Men Who Love Loving Jazz’”; Ira Madison III, “*La La Land*’s White Jazz Narrative”

Film II

M Feb 20 Jonathan Lethem, “13, 1977, 21”; Lydia Millet, “Becoming Darth Vader”; Peter Coviello, “My Thoughts Are Murder”

W Feb 22 Due: 2000 words film writing

Food I

M Feb 27 Pete Wells, “Making Way for the Tried and True at Cut by Wolfgang Puck” & “As Not Seen on TV”; Ian Parker, “Pete Wells Has His Knives Out”
Due: film writing, revised

W Mar 1 Marcia Vanderlip, “The Life of Pie: Pizza Tree Aims to Heighten the Art of Pizza-Making”; Marcia Vanderlip, “Local Chef Brings His Down-Home Style to the Growing Food-Truck Scene”; Tina Nguyen, “Trump Grill Could Be the Worst Restaurant In America”

Food II

- Mar 6 Calvin Trillin, "Hometown Boy" & "Have They Run Out of Provinces Yet?"; Rich Smith, "Calvin Trillin's *Ironic* Nostalgia for a White Planet"; Austin Ramzy, "Calvin Trillin's Poem on Chinese Food Proves Unpalatable for Some"
Mar 8 Due: 2000 words food writing

Books I

- Mar 13 Amy Hungerford, "On Not Reading"; Tom LeClair, "Making Literature Now – Amy Hungerford"; Miguel Tamen, "Eric Hayot *On Literary Worlds*"
Due: food writing, revised
Mar 15 Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"; James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel"; Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect"

Books II

- Mar 20 John Leonard, "Welcome to New Dork"; Michiko Kakutani, "A Country Dying of Laughter. In 1,079 Pages."; Rebecca Solnit, "Men explain *Lolita* to Me"
Mar 22 Due: 2000 words literature writing

Music I

- Apr 3 Robert Christgau, "Trying to Understand the Eagles" & "A History of Rock Criticism"; Lester Bangs, "James Taylor: One Man Dog" & "Sham 69 Is Innocent!"; *Punk* Number 1
Due: Literature writing, revised
Apr 5 Ellen Willis, "Beginning to See the Light"; Greil Marcus, "Prologue," *Mystery Train*; Jonathan Lethem, "Prelude I: Talking Heads Have a New Album, It's Called *Fear of Music*" & "Cities"

Music II

- Apr 10 Camden Joy, "The Almost Revolution, "The Greatest Record Album Ever Told" "The Launch of the MJ-97"; Chuck Klosterman, "Chinese Democracy"; Amanda Petrusich, "Three Songs That Pushed Me Forward in 2016"
Apr 12 Due: 2000 words music writing

Photography

- Apr 17 Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave"
Due: music writing, revised
Apr 19 Rosalind Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral"; Rebecca Carroll, "We Are Bearing Witness to a Profound Moment in Black Culture, *Aperture* Shows"

Final Paper

- Apr 24 Workshop
Apr 26 Workshop
May 1 Workshop
May 3 Final essay due