Book Review: Novella Carpenter, *Farm City: The Education of an Urban Farmer*

A book review is not a book report, but an exercise in critical thinking and writing skills. It tells not only what a book is about, but also how successful it is at what it is trying to do. In writing a review, you combine the skills of describing what is on the page, analyzing how the book tried to achieve its purpose, and expressing your own reactions.

Consider the following questions as you read. Keep a notebook handy to take note of important details, key passages, and personal observations/reactions.

- What are the author’s viewpoint and purpose? (Sometimes these things are implied rather than stated, requiring some inferences on the part of the reader.)
- What are the author's main points (these will often be developed or compounded throughout the book), and what conclusions are drawn?
- What kind of evidence does the author use to prove his or her points? Is the evidence convincing? Why or why not? Does the author support her or his points/conclusions adequately? Explain.
- How successful do you think the author was in carrying out the overall purposes of the book?
- What group of readers would find this book most useful and/or interesting?

**Writing the Review**

A book review should consist of three components: (a) an overview of the book, (b) a critical evaluation of the book and (c) a recommendation. When you are writing a book review for class, it is important that you incorporate course themes and concepts into the body of the review.

(A) Overview: The overview should briefly describe the purpose of the book, the author’s perspective, and the book’s general content.

Like most pieces of writing, the review itself usually begins with an introduction that lets your readers know what the review will say. The first paragraph usually includes the author and title again, so your readers don't have to look up to find it. You should also include a very brief overview of the contents of the book, the purpose or audience for the book, and your reaction and evaluation. Don't elaborate on these details—a sentence or less for each point is fine. Your introduction should be one average-length paragraph (approx. 5 sentences).

Reviews then generally move into a section of background information that helps place the book in context (social, cultural, historical). Context is key in grounding the thesis of the book, enhancing your reader’s ability to accurately interpret and understand the book’s contents. A review should also indicate the author's professional background and expertise, if available.

Next, the review gives a summary of the main points of the book, paraphrasing and perhaps quoting key phrases from the author. What are the contents? This should not be a list of chapters or sections, but rather summarize the main themes of the text; more details of the material can emerge in the body of the review. *This section of the book review should be kept to a minimum.* Your goal is simply to give the reader some idea of the author's thesis and how he or she develops it.

(B) Evaluation: This section should be the focal point of the review. The reviewer should consider the following in evaluating the book:

- How successful is the author in accomplishing the purpose or goals of the book?
- Are the major themes or arguments in the book well-articulated, fully developed, and
adequately supported?
- How does the book fit into the current thinking or trends on the subject?
- Is the book well organized and clearly written?
- Is the book written in an appropriate style of its intended audience?
- What, if anything, has the book has left out?
- What specific points, if any, are unclear or unconvincing?
- What possibilities are suggested by the book?
- What personal experiences have you had related to this subject?
- Are there any serious problems with the form of the book such as repeated typos or other errors in the material?

NOTE: It is important to carefully distinguish your views from the author's, so that you don't confuse your reader.

(C) Recommendations: Like other essays, book reviews usually end with a conclusion which ties together issues raised in the review and provides a concise comment on the book.

The following issues should be addressed in this component: What is your overall assessment of the book? What are its best and worst features? Would you buy it, recommend it, use it, treasure it? Who might wish to read this book and why? What value might the book have for the recommended audience? What contribution does the book make to the study of foodways?

Organization and Structure
The reviewer can determine the actual organization of the book review. For example, the book’s content, evaluation, and review recommendations might be treated separately or they might be interwoven throughout the narrative. However, it is essential that each of the above areas be addressed in the review. Further, it is inappropriate to use the review as a forum solely for the personal biases or interests of the reviewer. It is also inappropriate to focus on extraneous or peripheral concerns, minor points in the text, or inconsequential technical printing errors.

- Suggested length: 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, 10-12 pt Times New Roman (or similar) font, standard (1”) margins.
- Voice: The review should be in the first person; avoid the passive voice.
- Format: The review should begin with the following items, in this order:
  - Bibliographic heading. This should include, in this order: (a) book title, (b) name of author or editor, (c) publisher, (d) year of publication, and (e) number of pages.
  - Name of the reviewer. This should be placed on the first line below the bibliographic heading as follows: Reviewed by [Name]

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. If you make use of someone’s ideas besides your own, you must give a full citation of the source (in-text citation and works cited page). Format citations according to the Chicago Manual of Style Author-Date system. (Note: link opens automatically to “notes and bibliography” style. Click tab for “author-date” style.)

Because this is a book review, not a research paper, you will probably not need many outside references, if any. If you quote from the book itself, use quotation marks and page numbers in parentheses. Example: "It is theater at its most intricate -- improvisational, spiritual jazz" (166).

There are a number of reviews of this book on the internet. Do not be tempted. I have read most of them. Plagiarized papers, either in whole or in part, will receive a zero. You may also receive a failing grade for the course.
This assignment is worth **75 points**.

See course schedule for due date.

These guidelines adapted and modified by Barry Kaufkins from Indiana University's "Writing Book Reviews" at: [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/bookreview.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/bookreview.html), ACM Computing Reviews, Dr. Erika Brady, Western Kentucky University, and The Journal of Functional Programming: Book Review Guidelines.