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# The Argonauts



## Synopsis

An intrepid voyage out to the frontiers of the latest thinking about love, language, and family Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* is a genre-bending memoir, a work of "autotheory" offering fresh, fierce, and timely thinking about desire, identity, and the limitations and possibilities of love and language. At its center is a romance: the story of the author's relationship with the artist Harry Dodge. This story, which includes Nelson's account of falling in love with Dodge, who is fluidly gendered, as well as her journey to and through a pregnancy, offers a firsthand account of the complexities and joys of (queer) family-making. Writing in the spirit of public intellectuals such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, Nelson binds her personal experience to a rigorous exploration of what iconic theorists have said about sexuality, gender, and the vexed institutions of marriage and child-rearing. Nelson's insistence on radical individual freedom and the value of caretaking becomes the rallying cry of this thoughtful, unabashed, uncompromising book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

\*Winner of the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism\*  
Nelson's articulation of her many selves—the poet who writes prose; the memoirist who considers the truth specious; the essayist whose books amount to a kind of fairy tale, in which the protagonist goes from darkness to light, and then falls in love with a singular knight—that makes her readers feel hopeful.  
Hilton Als, *The New Yorker*  
"Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* exists in its own universe. My first reaction to Nelson's book was awestruck silence, such as one might experience when confronted with some dazzling

supernatural phenomenon. Nelson is so outrageously gifted a writer and thinker that *The Argonauts* seems to operate in some astral dimension where the rules of normal physics have been suspended. Her book is an elegant, powerful, deeply discursive examination of gender, sexuality, queerness, pregnancy and motherhood, all conveyed in language that is intellectually potent and poetically expressive.

—Michael Lindgren, *The Washington Post*— “[Nelson’s] book—part memoir, part critical inquiry touching on desire, love, and family—is a superb exploration of the risk and the excitement of change. Thinking and feeling are, for Nelson, mutually necessary processes; the result is an exceptional portrait both of a romantic partnership and of the collaboration between Nelson’s mind and heart.”

—*The New Yorker*— “Maggie Nelson slays entrenched notions of gender, marriage, and sexuality with lyricism, intellectual brass, and soul-ringing honesty in *The Argonauts*.”

—*Vanity Fair*— “Reading Maggie Nelson is like watching a high-wire act. Her books are inspiring. . . . Because of her dazzling sentences, I will read whatever the daredevil writes. She cozies up to ideas unlike any other American writer.”

—*The Boston Globe*— “Maggie Nelson has proven her brilliance—a special blend of poeticism and philosophy, of theorizing and prose-weaving—in her eight previous nonfiction releases. But in *The Argonauts*, the gifted critic and scholar breaks generic ground with her work of ‘auto theory,’ which offers a glimpse into the writer’s mind, body, and home. . . . *The Argonauts* is a must-read.”

—*Bustle*— “So much writing about motherhood makes the world seem smaller after the child arrives, more circumscribed, as if in tacit fealty to the larger cultural assumptions about moms and domesticity; Nelson’s book does the opposite.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*— “Maggie Nelson is one of the most electrifying writers at work in America today, among the sharpest and most supple thinkers of her generation.”

—Olivia Laing, *The Guardian*— “In *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson turns ‘making the personal public’ into a romantic, intellectual wet dream. A gorgeous book, inventive, fearless, and full of heart.”

—Kim Gordon— “[Nelson’s] is a radicalism that looks like the future of common sense. . . . A singular book.”

—*Vulture*— “A loose yet intricate tapestry of memoir, art criticism and gently polemic. . . . It’s a book about using the writings of smart, even difficult writers to help us find clarity and precision in our intimate lives, and it’s a book about the no less intimate pleasures of the life of the mind. . . . *The Argonauts* is a magnificent achievement of thought, care and art.”

—*Los Angeles Times*— “A daring, intelligent, strange, and beautiful book. . . . [Nelson] has created an essential thing, a guide to the first years of the queer 21st Century, and a hymn to love in all its forms.”

—*The Gay & Lesbian Review*— “Nelson’s writing

is fluid-to read her story is to drift dreamily among her thoughts. . . . She masterfully analyzes the way we talk about sex and gender. [Huffington Post](#) “Nelson’s vibrant, probing and, most of all, outstanding book is also a philosophical look at motherhood, transitioning, partnership, parenting, and family-an examination of the restrictive way we’ve approached these terms in the past and the ongoing struggle to arrive at more inclusive and expansive definitions for them. [NPR](#) “Brilliant like nothing else you’ve ever read, Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* is as hard to pin down as it is stunning. In sharp, intense bursts of language, Nelson melds critical theory with her most personal musings, as she navigates falling in lust and love, explores gender, sexuality, and motherhood, and builds a family with artist Harry Dodge. Although slim, *The Argonauts* contains worlds of thought and feeling, challenging our assumptions and moving our hearts. This book is the first must-read of the summer. [BuzzFeed](#) “In a culture still too quick to ask people to pick a side-to be male or female, to be an assimilationist or a revolutionary, to be totally straight or totally gay, totally hetero- or totally homo-normative-Nelson’s book is a beautiful, passionate and shatteringly intelligent meditation on what it means not to accept binaries but to improvise an individual life that says, without fear, yes, and. [Chicago Tribune](#) “Reading Nelson is like sweeping the leaves out of your mental driveway: by the end of one of her books, you have a better understanding of how the world works...The result is one of the most intelligent, generous, and moving books of the year. [Publishers Weekly](#), “Best Summer Books 2015” “The *Argonauts* finds Nelson at her most vulnerable, arguing for a radical rethinking of the terms in which we express love. [The Paris Review](#), “Staff Picks” “What a dazzlingly generous, gloriously unpredictable book! Maggie Nelson shows us what it means to be real, offering a way of thinking that is as challenging as it is liberating. She invites us to ‘pay homage to the transitive’ and enjoy ‘a becoming in which one never becomes.’ Reading *The Argonauts* made me happier and freer. [Eula Biss](#) “Maggie Nelson cuts through our culture’s prefabricated structures of thought and feeling with an intelligence whose ferocity is ultimately in the service of love. No piety is safe, no orthodoxy, no easy irony. The scare quotes burn off like fog. [Ben Lerner](#) “There isn’t another critic alive like Maggie Nelson-who writes with such passion, clarity, explicitness, fluidity, playfulness, and generosity that she redefines what thinking can do today. [Wayne Koestenbaum](#) “Once again, Maggie Nelson has created awe-inspiring work, one that smartly calls bullshit on the places culture--radical subcultures included--stigmatize and misunderstand both maternity and queer family-making. With a fiercely vulnerable intelligence, Nelson leaves no area

un-investigated, including her own heart. I know of no other book like this, and I know how crucially the culture needs it. —Michelle Tea—“One of the greatest books I’ve ever read.” —Annie Sprinkle—“Reading Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* helped me to feel some things I’ve long thought about but hardly been able to express regarding the socialization of the maternal function, which is the dispersed, dispersive essence of the futurity we present to one another until one is not another anymore. There’s the violence I commit in making a claim for that futurity, and the violence I endure when that claim is granted. There’s the exhaustive sharing that takes form as writing. There’s the ‘orgy of specificity’ when the inexpressible is held and released in each expression ‘cause I just want to sing your name even when I don’t want to sing your name. There’s the love story buried in every ‘I love you,’ and in every ‘I love you’ there’s a contract for destruction and rebuilding. There’s *The Argonauts*, which is one of the greatest books I’ve ever read.” —Fred Moten—“In the 17th century a book like Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* might have been called an anatomy, by which I mean it’s a learned, quirky, open-hearted, often beautiful naming-of-parts. The anatomy never forgets the fragile embodied world-its carnality or its finitude. And such is *The Argonauts*: a memoir (debriefing, really) at once raw, pensive, exhilarating, sad, funny, and embodied in the same profound way.” —Terry Castle

Maggie Nelson is a poet, critic, and nonfiction author of books such as *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning*, *Bluets*, and *Jane: A Murder*. She teaches in the School of Critical Studies at CalArts and lives in Los Angeles, California.

Best thing I've read in months, in fact years. Defies categorisation, which is apt, because it's partly about the unhelpfulness of categories, and the imperative of freedom, creativity, self-expression, and acceptance. I unhesitatingly recommend this book to anyone with a brain and a heart. It is also - incidentally - beautifully, lyrically, mind-expansdngly, heart-openingly written. Upon finishing it, I promptly logged on to buy more Maggie Nelson.

LOVE THIS BOOK. a must read for queer folks.

This book. My heart. \*swoons\* Really though, Maggie Nelson is one of the sharpest minds on the literary circuit right now, and the way she blends critical, queer theory, and philosophy with personal memoir is both staggering and beautiful. A must read for anyone with a critical mind and an open

heart.

Brilliant, thought provoking. I run to grab my journal after reading certain passages, and others just read over and over. And over. Her musings on motherhood in particular are sublime, as is the way she weaves Feminist Theory and criticism into a prose that is readable. A breath of fresh, engaging air for a thinking reader. I look forward to exploring her entire body of work now.

i had heard a lot of recommendations for this book, but it isnt written in a style i necessarily enjoy, but i think its an important story to be told

Amazing novel -- the audiobook too I strongly recommend, as it's given by Maggie Nelson herself. Her voice is clear and the way she reads her writing is beautiful, it truly brought an already brilliant novel to life.

Speechless at the audacity, skill, depth, pathos and humor. This will always be in my heart. It defies description, and is just simply a stunning achievement.

EVERYONE should read this.

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