

Reading, Listening, and Viewing

Consider the *Aspects of Formalist Criticism* as you read:

- **Character:** *flat* – usually presents one idea or quality; *round or dynamic* characters are complex with subtle variations in personality.
- **Point of View:** *1st person narrators* can be (a) self-conscious – aware that s/he is telling a story or (b) unreliable – what the narrator relates might be at odds with other characters or the ‘reality’ of the text; or (c) innocent (one who doesn’t fully comprehend the implications of the events s/he is relating); *2nd person or 3rd person –omniscient* – access to the thoughts and actions of all characters or limited omniscient – access to the thoughts and actions of some characters.
- **Setting:** the general local, historical time, and social circumstances of the narrative
- **Tone:** the *diction* (words, phrases, sentence structure, and figurative language) and *irony* (verbal – the difference between what a character says and what s/he intends; and structural – duplicity of meaning throughout the work – the author and audience have insights the characters do not).
- **Symbol:** a word, phrase, situation, action or object that has meaning beyond itself.
- **Theme:** general claim, sometimes implicit sometimes overt, with which a text persuades its readers

(from MH Abrams’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1988).

For CLOSE READINGS

In writing about literature or any specific text, you will strengthen your discussion if you offer specific passages from the text as evidence. Rather than simply dropping in quotations and expecting their significance and relevance to your argument to be self-evident, you need to provide sufficient analysis of the passage. Remember that your over-riding goal in analytic writing is to demonstrate some new understanding of the text.

In reading your passages:

1. Read it again.
2. Circle key words (words that you don’t understand – look them up, words that are repeated, words that appeal to your senses).
3. Underline phrases that relate to the theme of the passage.
4. Double underline punctuation or sentence variation that strikes you. (None may strike you).
5. Ask questions of the passage: what might the writer mean calling your attention to “x”? Try to answer your question explaining why words, phrases, or

punctuation drew your attention. Connect your responses to the theme you've identified.

6. Note connections between this passage and the rest of the text. Link it to a similar passage (one with the same theme) and a dissimilar one (one on another theme). What do you notice from this juxtaposition?
7. Make connections between this text and other texts, issues, or concepts that we've covered in this class.
8. Focus on WHY. Why is this important to note and share with your reader?

Consider the following when listening to music and other spoken-word pieces:

- What is the message of this piece?
- What is indicative of women's [or the persona's] experience?
- Characterize the speaker?
- What images (metaphors) are used in this piece?
- How is the voice (and/or instrumentation) used to convey the message of this piece?

Viewing

Analysis is the act of separating the whole into parts in order to better understand the whole. When analyzing a work of art, in this case a painting, one should ask some fundamental questions about those parts in order to gain an understanding of the piece.

Consider the following as when viewing an image:

- What is my initial reaction to the piece? What is the title? Who is the artist? When and where was the work made? What purpose did it serve?
- Also think about the follow: what is or who is the **subject** (what is happening)? Is there a particular **style** deployed? **Color** – what mood do the colors evoke? **Line** – are the lines soft or hard? **Light** – is the painting in shadow or full of light? **Angle** – where is the artist asking you to look – what is the object of the gaze?
- What are items – lines, colors, components – that construct the image? What's in the frame? Does the image play with space/depth, medium/genre, scale?
- How do you read the image – top to bottom, left to right, another way?
- What story does the image tell? Who is the audience/intended viewer? How do you know?
- How does prior knowledge of an historical period, other images, phrases, words and symbols impact your reading of this text?

Consider the following when viewing films (Corrigan):

1. What does the title mean in relation to the story?
2. Why does the movie start the way it does?
3. When was the film made?
4. Why are the opening credits presented in such a manner against this particular background?
5. Why does the film conclude on this image?
6. How is this movie similar to or different from the Hollywood movies I have seen recently or from those of an older generation?
7. Does this film resemble any (other) foreign films I know?
8. Is there a **PATTERN** of striking camera movement, perhaps long shots or dissolves or abrupt transitions?
9. Which three or four sequences are most important? Why?