

Eng 225: Imperial Fictions in Eighteenth-Century British Literature
Gettysburg College ✖ Spring 2021

Close Reading Paper

Close reading is the heart of literary analysis. It consists of careful attention to the *form* of texts – to their diction, their imagery, their plotting, characterization, point of view, or how they handle details of setting and chronology. A close reading builds on attention to such details in order to make a larger claim about a text as a whole.

Your close reading should:

- Make a clear argument about the *formal* qualities of one of our course texts;
- Develop that argument with direct support from the text;
- Link the close reading of a formal detail or set of related formal details to an interpretation of the text overall; and
- Spell out the stakes of this argument – how does it matter to our overall understanding to notice what you are saying about the text?

For example, you might choose to analyze the point of view in *Oroonoko*, or the settings in that text or *Robinson Crusoe*; or you might consider the role of a specific character or the frame narrative in Defoe's novel. You could also pick out a specific motif in one text.

- Don't: treat thematic issues, except in and through form; and
- Don't: treat the text as a way to figure out 'what people thought about x' in the eighteenth century – focus on how formal elements make meaning *within* a text.

One way to get started writing the paper is to pose the same question you have been urged to ask in several weekly exercises: "What is the function of ... ?" In the blank, fill in some formal feature. If you brainstorm a list of such questions, you should eventually hit on something that sparks your curiosity and that you'd like to explore further. The answer to the question you have posed will be the thesis or claim of your paper.

Nitty-Gritty: ~1200 words

Due ~~Wednesday, 10 March~~ Friday, 12 March

Use MLA formatting (a standard heading, a header with the author's last name and page numbers, parenthetical references, etc.). Include a properly formatted Work(s) Cited page.

Honor Code Considerations. You are free to use your class notes on our discussions of these texts and to discuss the texts with your colleagues. The substance of your argument, however, should be your own. You may find yourself consulting secondary sources to clarify factual or basic interpretive questions about a text, but you should not borrow your claim or thesis, in whole or in part, from such sources.

