

How to Close Read a Monument

Adopted from Aspects of Formalist Criticism

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 monument, one should ask some fundamental questions about those parts in order to gain an understanding of the object.

Consider the following as when viewing a monument:

- What is my initial reaction? What is the title? Is there one? Can I tell who is the artist? Why would the artist not put their name on it? 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 or being depicted)? Is there a particular **style** deployed? **Color**—what mood do the colors evoke? **Line**—are the lines soft or hard? **Light/Placement**—is the monument 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—components –that construct the monument? What’s around it? Does the monument play with space/depth, medium/genre, scale?
- How do you read the monument—top to bottom, left to right, another way?
- What story does the monument 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 as when viewing the text of a monument:

Point of View: *1st person narration* can be more personal *2nd person or 3rd person* –omniscient.

Setting: the general local, historical time, and social circumstances of the text.

Tone: the *diction* (words, phrases, sentence structure, and figurative language)

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