

THE VALUE(S) OF CLOSE READING A CAUCUS – MICHAELMAS 2023

Close reading is right back at the heart of current debates in Classics and the humanities. This seminar series aims contribute to emerging arguments about the value and centrality of close reading. Current ‘method conversations’ (Felski, Kramnick, Kurnick) have problematised close reading as the default way of approaching texts and have argued that we should instead adopt strategies of ‘surface’ reading. Some students of literary history (Moretti, Netz) have in turn advocated ‘distant’ forms of reading reliant on big data rather than close attention to texts themselves. Attempts to (re)affirm the power and necessity of close reading have so far tended to assume that close reading is something done on texts in the critic’s native language (or, at least, a living language in which they are fluent).

Classics, with its focus on the close reading of, and lemmatised commentary on, distant texts in dead languages, can offer a timely contribution to wider discussions about how and why we read ‘closely’ and the ethical implications of doing so. This seminar series brings together scholars working across Classics – from textual critics to reception theorists – to interrogate the importance of close reading and its discontents. A reconsideration or (re)turn to close reading would implicate the whole field. This seminar series therefore offers, we hope, something for everyone, from graduate students to senior scholars.

We invite speakers to present a close reading of any text that they wish in order to get at some much larger questions: What does or should a ‘close’ reading look like? What is the value of close reading? Does close reading offer access to truth (and is that a worthwhile question)? In what ways might the tools of textual criticism, papyrology, and epigraphy contribute to discussions of reading slowly and ‘closely’? What does it mean to ‘edit’ a text (and is that close reading)? What are the methods, assumptions and disciplinary practices that underpin ‘close reading’? Is it possible and worthwhile to write a history of close reading in antiquity? Should we abandon close reading in favour of big data or ‘distant’ reading? Is it time to replace a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ with something else entirely?

ORIENTATIONS

- Brenkman, J. 2021. Critical Response I: A Response to Jonathan Kramnick. *Critical Inquiry* 48 1: 167–71
- Felski, R. 2015. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago and London
- Güthenke, C. 2020. *Feeling and Classical Philology: Knowing Antiquity in German Scholarship, 1770–1920*. Cambridge
- Gurd, S.A. 2005. *Iphigenias at Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology*. Ithaca, NY
- Kramnick, J. 2021a. Criticism and Truth. *Critical Inquiry* 47 2: 218–40
- 2021b. Critical Response II: Reply to John Brenkman. *Critical Inquiry* 48 1: 172–6
- Kurnick, D. 2020. A Few Lies: Queer Theory and Our Method Melodramas. *ELH* 87 2: 349–74
- Levine, C. 2015. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton and Oxford
- Moretti, F. 2005. *Maps, Graphs, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*. London and New York
- Netz, R. 2020. *Scale, Space and Canon in Ancient Literary Culture*. Cambridge

PROGRAMME

Wednesday 11 October: Constanze Güthenke

- Hermes, Close Reader

Wednesday 18 October: Elena Giusti

- Horace's Poetics of Conspiracy

Wednesday 25 October: Bruno Currie

- Close reading and the principle of Ἡσίοδον ἐξ Ἡσιόδου σαφηνίζειν: *Works and Days* 90–105 and 202–12

Wednesday 1 November: Jenny Strauss Clay

- Gods and Men in *Odyssey* 5

Wednesday 8 November: David Butterfield

- Texts and problems

Wednesday 15 November: Ahuvia Kahane

- The Horizons of Close Reading: Repetition and Promiscuous Form in Ancient Epic and the Ancient Novel

Wednesday 22 November: Lyndsay Coe

- Reading tragic fragments, loosely

Wednesday 29 November: Victoria Rimell

- Close Reading and the Hermeneutics of Mourning