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Exam 1

Gorgias used paradoxical words (*paradoxologia*) to demonstrate the idea that all speech is persuasive. In his *Encomium of Helen,* in which he defends the actions of Helen of Troy. In the speech, he juxtaposed two words, persuasion and deception. As Wardy pointed out, if Helen was deceived, tricked into leaving her husband, that would be forgivable; but if she had been merely persuaded, without resisting the persuader, she would have been blamable for her actions. But Gorgias “collapses the polarity” between innocence and guilt by using the word “persuasion” in a way that equates its meaning to that of “deception,” and argues that she is also blameless in the event of persuasion. Gorgias argues, through a kind of deception himself, that persuasion is the same as deception: "The persuader, like a constrainer, does the wrong and the persuaded, like the constrained, in speech is wrongly charged" (Gorgias 45). By arguing this way, Gorgias has essentially changed the meaning of, or at least attributed a different meaning to, the word “persuasion.” He is able to do this through the idea of *paradoxologia,* which involves searching for meaning in between two opposing words, like innocence and guilt. It means that we cannot find one definable “truth,” and if we think we can, as Wardy says, “Helen’s joke is on us” (475). The purpose of Gorgias’ speech was so demonstrate the persuasive power of rhetoric; Through his own argument, he could be considered "a constrainer," and could have wrong attributed toward him. He (presumably) convinced his audience to pity Helen and, by doing so, has convinced the audience that persuasion is deception, all the while manipulating and persuading the audience himself. The knowledge gained here was not that of Helen’s innocence or guilt. It was not about Helen’s “truth” at all. Gorgias managed to demonstrate to his audience, in real time, the power of rhetoric, of the meaning constructed through persuasive speech; the product of discourse is not “truth” but of opinion.

It is important to mention that this knowledge is not produced by the orator alone. Although Gorgias was the only one speaking when he was giving his Encomium of Helen, his speech was given in response to a field of discourse which debated the nature of rhetoric and the nature of Helen’s actions. While giving his speech, Gorgias was producing knowledge seemingly on his own, but knowledge was produced prior to his speech and as a result of his speech. So, ultimately, knowledge was constructed by both the orator and the audience. To be a better orator and persuader, Wardy writes that “Gorgias strives to fuse all aspects of logos, irrational as well as logical, into a single overwhelming force” (463). We must not only use words to appeal to the audience logically, and try to find a conclusion that is only founded in logic, we must also utilize emotional appeals when crafting our arguments. When developing the argument (and therefore producing knowledge), we must include all aspects of language that we can. Meaning is not only produced through the impartial analysis of language, but also through the irrational emotional reaction that words sometimes invoke.

Like *paradoxogolia,* the idea of *differance* also described the instability of language systems, which made it impossible for anyone to attain the “truth.” The meaning lies between two words in binary opposition (like paradoxical words). According to Berlin, we are never able to reflect the truth (the signified): “Language is instead a pluralistic and complex system of signification that constructs realities rather than simply presenting or reflecting them” (Berlin 61). Berlin later wrote that Derrida’s idea of *differeance* acknowledged that it is the opposition between words, like between innocence and guilt, that “gives a term its significance within a larger system of meanings…the term is detached from its signified, indeed, so much so that it is always and evermore different from what it represents” (Berlin 63). This means that the words that we use can never truly be linked to the ideas we intend them to represent. As a result, words do not always mean the same things in different social, cultural, or temporal contexts. These words, or “signifiers,” are never even close to being related to the “truth” or the “signified.” This concept, which leads into the concept of “to scatter,” is why Gorgias was able to use “persuasion” to mean “deception” so effectively. Berlin writes that “Meaning is never found in the presence of a single term but in its relation to a term not present, an absent term” (64). The meaning, therefore, cannot inherently be found in any one word, but *between* words in opposition. This also means, however, that the meaning is forever “deferred.” Berlin wrote that because the meaning of a word (signifier) cannot be complete since it always refers to other words to “establish its claim” (64). “The signifier,” he wrote, “is thus always deferring, putting off meaning…Signs, therefore, are always traces of other signs, never offering the presence of the signified” (Berlin 64). The words that we use, this theory suggests, are not connected to the “signified,” or, in another word, the truth. No one, therefore, knows the truth. The way that we construct knowledge is only through conversation with peers, such as was demonstrated in Gorgias’ speech. Gorgias used Helen’s example because we can never know the “truth” of her situation; we can only try to persuade each other to believe one thing or the other through discourse. No one argument is inherently correct or true; the knowledge that our communities of peers accept is completely dependent on the context in that particular moment and space. We do not reflect reality, we construct it.

Bruffee argued that “What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit or, least of all, read proof. What they do is converse” (91a). The concept of “to scatter” means that we are required, as a community of peers, to construct meaning through language rather than trying to reflect the truth, which cannot be obtained. It is necessary to find the most compelling idea presented in discourse with peers and construct meaning in collaboration. People do not write alone in a vacuum; even Gorgias, like I mentioned earlier, was writing in response to prior discourse about the nature of rhetoric. Knowledge is produced through conversation with peers. Bruffee wrote that “Writing may seem to be displaced in time and space from the rest of a writers community of readers and other writers, but in every instance writing is an act, however much displaced, of conversational exchange” (89a). Collaborative learning allows us to reach conclusions and construct meanings that are artifacts of those particular cultures, times, and spaces. What we do in collaborative learning is part of a conversation that produces knowledge, not objective truth.

Works Cited

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**Part I. Formatting requirements**

1. Is the exam around 3-5 pages in length (excluding Works Cited page), double-spaced, and in font #12?
   1. Yes
2. Is the page number showing at the upper right margin and is your last name inserted before the page number?
   1. Yes
3. Is the Works Cited page **typed** (as opposed to copied/pasted) and is this page following but separated from the body of the exam?
   1. Yes
4. Is this checklist section single-spaced? Is this checklist section page-broken from the exam (so the page-limit requirement is seen clearly)?
   1. Yes
5. Is the rest of the exam double-spaced [including the Works Cited page]? [to ensure your command of “double” space works, be sure the value of “Before” and “After” under “Paragraph” is set at 0]
   1. Yes