

## Essay 1: Close reading of one part of Plato's *Gorgias*

T.Deans | ENGL 249W: The Art of Persuasion

In his discussion of Plato's *Gorgias*, James H. Nichols, Jr. remarks that "The final part of Socrates' discussion with Callicles is thus strongly marked by stark, extreme formulations....These and other similar formulations lead some to believe that the *Gorgias* reveals Plato at his most moralistic and most bitter against Athens in particular or politics in general. Maybe so, but perhaps a distinctively Socratic philosophical rhetoric is involved here. No one formulation is the whole truth. Socrates' extreme formulations are not the whole story but are instead what most needs emphasis in the particular context of the discussion, for instance what the interlocutor most needs to hear in order to correct his own characteristic errors or vices" (148).

Review several instances of sharp conflict in *Gorgias* and select *one* patch of text that you think is particularly ripe for analysis: it could be as short as 20 lines and as long as 3 pages. Don't pick a simple or one-dimensional passage, as this will doom your project from the start; instead, pick a passage where something is at stake, one that seems to be crackling with possibility. Do a close reading of that passage: What is happening? Why is it important? What patterns, ambiguities and tensions does the language reveal? What are some contrasting interpretations of the scene, and among them, which do you find most convincing? Also ask: Does the remark by Nichols in the paragraph above pertain, or not? If so (or not), how and why?

The purpose of this essay is to do a *close reading* or careful listening of the text: slow down your reading, explore multiple interpretations, and help readers see things that they might overlook in a casual reading. For later essays you will need to perform close reading as one part of making a larger argument; this assignment asks you to focus on the more local practice. Given the purpose of this essay, you need not assert a traditional thesis, as you will be examining the texture of a passage that opens itself to many possibilities rather than pushing one claim.

### A Suggested Arrangement

1. Use your title and opening paragraph to *announce* your project and to *forecast* both the content and structure the whole essay. You should also stake out your position in relation to Nichols' claim about possible ways of reading the "stark, extreme formulations" in *Gorgias*--and especially in the passage you have selected.
2. Help readers see how the passage fits into the context of the whole dialogue. Keep plot summary to a minimum; assume that your audience has read *Gorgias*. You should focus on the *significance* of this passage *in relation* to the action, themes and structure of the larger dramatic work. (2 or so paragraphs)
3. For the bulk of the essay, shepherd readers through the passage—either line by line or part by part—and highlight key words, phrases, tensions, turns, patterns, and so on. (You shouldn't discuss every word, as that could get tedious. Discern which words, phrases and moves are most important.) Be sure to weave in direct quotations from Plato's text to support your interpretations. While you can assume that your readers have read the dialogue, you still need to show them the particular places in the text that illustrate and support your interpretations. Use terms from class (for example, those introduced by Wayne Booth) if they help clarify your analysis.
4. Articulate your conclusions. A good conclusion usually does more than summarize; it also discusses the significance and implications of the analysis that leads up to it.

\*Essay should run 4-5 pages, typed, double-spaced, with standard margins and fonts

\*Document your sources using a standard academic format (MLA, APA, etc.), including in-text citations for any quotations from the Plato text (you can cite by page or by the passage number system in the left margin). You are not encouraged to use sources other than the primary text and the Nichols essays, but if you opt to use any (including websites, dictionaries, etc), please document them.

\*Include a Works Cited. (Even if you use no secondary sources, you need to document your primary text).

For another way to approach close reading, see "How to do a close reading," an online document linked to the Writing Center Webpage at Harvard: <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~wricntr/documents/CloseReading.html>

**Full draft (at least 4 pages) due at your conference. | Final draft, with cover letter, due on September 20**

The final draft will be evaluated using the categories (purpose/relevance, development, structure, style, editing & conventions) detailed on the grading rubric that was distributed earlier.