

RHET 1000

Young

Writing Exercise

Rhetorical Performance: 300-word Encomium Editorial

Gorgias wrote his Encomium of Helen as “a diversion to myself.” His great rhetorical challenge was to adopt a position upon which none of his popular audience would agree—in other words, a hostile audience. He would praise and defend Helen, who had the reputation of being the “woman who launched a thousand ships,” through his invention of individual arguments, his arrangement of points and his elaborate style (to say nothing of what his delivery must have been like) all while making the overarching meta-argument that “speech is a powerful lord” during the speech itself. In other words, he champions the power of speech during and through the speech itself with flair and elan.

Assignment: In the spirit of Gorgias, compose a 300-word encomium in praise of a person with a bad reputation and to whom the audience will react with hostility towards your persuasion. In other words, compose a defense of a villain.

You may derive or draw or select your “antagonist” from the annals of pop culture, the contemporary political scene, or from a local or personal source or history. If you need to explain why/how this figure became a so-called villain, provide the relevant context in a note to provide audience with the necessary information. Please be considerate of any attendant feelings involved (this is not an opportunity to settle any personal scores or vendettas or to call out your nemesis).

Consider the following questions:

How can you establish common ground between you as the speaker and your audience?

Which are the most effective arguments to put forth?

How should you arrange your composition, and what kind of style would you adopt?