

First & Last Name

Dr. Martin

ENGL. 2332

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Text: *Metamorphoses*

Passage: “There’s nothing execrable when a heifer is mounted by her father; stallions, too mate with their daughters; and a goat can choose to couple with his child; the female bird conceives from that same seed which fathered her. Blessed are those who have that privilege. It’s human scruples that have stifled us with jealous edicts; law is envious — what nature would permit, the law forbids” (10.126ff).

Question: How does this moral dilemma expressed by Myrrha translate into a political stand by the writer, Ovid?

Issue: Issue of historical and cultural context. Ovid was banished from Rome by Augustus before he began writing *Metamorphoses*. Ovid’s poems were in opposition of the moral reform Augustus was attempting to put in place. This passage has moral undertones, but viewed with this historical information the passage takes on a political meaning.

Critical Approach: The Deconstruction approach works best on this passage because it allows us to recognize how Ovid is creating binary opposites with his epic. This passage clearly places nature and human ideology at opposite ends of the morality spectrum.

Answer: During Ovid’s time, Augustus was working to create a new social structure by reviving the old Roman morality standards. Ovid’s epic, *Metamorphoses*, did not merge with this new

ideology. Ovid reminds his audience of the Gods unending lust. Rape is repeatedly associated with virginity, which almost indorses promiscuity. After all, losing your virginity to some one of your choice is always preferred to having it taken by force. Then we see this passage were Myrrha wants to consummate a relationship with her own father. Most of the Roman Gods were married to there sisters. While this story is about two humans, it parallels the incestuous relationships of the Gods. And it is interesting to note that Myrrha was not turned into a tree by the Gods as punishment, it was the answer to her own prayer. Ovid's point is clear; the Gods do not find fault in these incestuous relationships, they are in fact a part of nature. It is the ideology of man has created such collations between sexuality and morality. This begs the question, how can a man decree that something our Gods partake in is immoral? After all the Gods rule men, not the other way around.