

Name

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ENGL-2332-3W1

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Text: Metamorphoses

Passage: “And Paphos’ son was Cinyras...she knows she’s a criminal” (1167 - 70). – The beginning lines (86-189) of the account of Myrrha and Cinyras in Book X **Not correct citation**

Question: Although incest is established as a socially forbidden love, how does Ovid portray Myrrha’s love of her father to be a psychological ordeal?

Issues: The issues of theme and definition are taken into consideration. One of Ovid’s main objectives in the Metamorphoses is to track the trials and tribulations of attaining love and the consequences thereafter. Ovid observes “love” from several differing perspectives – rape, heterosexual, homosexual – and through the account of Myrrha and Cinyras, Ovid explores “love” in the context of daughter-father incest. Although incest is quite different from the aforementioned kinds of “love,” Ovid continues to enforce his definition of love as a painful process that will never attain perfection.

Critical Approaches: The psychoanalytic approach is most suitable for a topic concerning incestuous love. The approach is concerned with examining how the repressed thoughts conflict with social expectations. Thus, the key to answering the question lies in examining Myrrha’s split psyche - between the repressed, unconscious longing for her father’s love (Freud’s id) and the exterior façade of maintaining an ordinary daughter-father relationship (Freud’s superego).

Answer: By intently tracing Myrrha’s unconscious thought processes and observing how she grimly degrades her own integrity, Ovid reveals Myrrha’s internal conflict as an overwhelming ordeal. The beginning lines of the passage firmly establish the societal condemnation of incest. Ovid introduces incest in the darkest terms, questioning whether or not it is possible for “nature [to] permit so foul a sin to see the light” (95-96). His statement aptly coincides with Myrrha’s troubling situation, whose sinful thoughts must remain hidden from light, or society. Ovid further accentuates how sinful incest is, claiming that “to hate a father is a crime, but love like [Myrrha’s] is worse than hate” (110-11). Ironically, a harmless act of love is more shameful than one of nature’s most egregious crimes, suggesting in short that incest is the worst crime imaginable. Such a paradox plays a large role in Myrrha’s internal confusion and reluctance to act according to her subdued sexual desires. Myrrha’s first thoughts, such as “she strives; she tries; she would subdue her obscene love” (117-18), immediately reveals internal conflict. Because her mind is a wild flurry of contradictory thoughts, Myrrha is paralyzed in action. Ovid further contributes to Myrrha’s confused state by having her painfully consider self-humiliation

as a possible course of action. When Myrrha asserts that “there’s nothing execrable when a heifer is mounted on by her father” (126-27), she is essentially degrading herself, as well as her father, to be on the level of savage beasts. Her hate for societal restrictions is exemplified by her thought, “what nature would permit, the law forbids” (134). Although Cinyras is “pious in his ways, a man of virtue” (170-171), his daughter is willing to sacrifice his integrity, her own integrity, and human superiority over beasts for incestuous lust. Yet after such solid affirmations, Myrrha falls back into a state of repression, stating that she “must dismiss such thoughts: blot out [her] lust” (143-144). Despite a series of contradictory thoughts, Myrrha does manage to come to one sensible conclusion. By admitting “that [the] close link [between father and daughter] dictates [her] loss” (147-148), she is acknowledging that she must choose for her relationship with her father to be exclusively filial or incestuous. Myrrha’s mind is essentially a tortuous roller coaster of incestuous thoughts intertwined with repressed resignations.