

Name

Professor Martin

Eng 2332

20 July 2008

Text: *Metamorphoses*

Passage: “Your value rests in your body, mine in my mind. As much as the one who directs the ship is greater than the one who rows it and as much as the general excels the common soldier, I am greater than you. For in our bodies the mind is of more value than the body, and our real strength is our mind.” **No citation**

Question: How does the contest between Ajax and Ulysses for Achilles’ battle of arms reinforce Ovid’s motif of the importance and power of speech?

Issue: Issue of Theme. The question deals with the view that speech allows one to thrive, as it allows one to hold power over others. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid reinforces the point that rhetoric is clearly important both in strength and survival. Ulysses skilled speech overpowers Ajax easily, who is left speechless and suicidal. Without speech, Ajax is in the dark, feeling useless and powerless.

Critical Approach: The Marxist criticism approach works best for the question since the social value of speech is used to keep Ajax in his place. With Ulysses’ skilled speech, he is clearly seen as a smarter, more intellectual character. The structure of society is enforced by the skill of speech. Because Ulysses is a more eloquent speaker, he is seen as

higher up on the social ladder compared to Ajax. Even though Ajax is a skilled fighter and general, he seems small and insignificant.

Answer: In Ulysses' contest with Ajax, Ovid continuously demonstrates the importance of speech. As a skilled speaker with clever rhetoric, Ulysses gains victory over the inarticulate, but eloquent Ajax, and the idea of brains over strength is enforced. While Ajax is transformed into someone who is clearly powerless without speech, causing him to lose his identity and face death, Ulysses is depicted as a character who vividly lives. Ulysses' victory results in Ajax suicide which stresses how important and powerful rhetoric is. Without communication, one has no hope of existing or surviving in the world.