

## Short Writing Assignment

Sample 1:

### Short Writing Assignment #4

*In Books 6-10, there are several stories in which a god takes revenge on a mortal for an act of hubris. Choose either "Niobe and Latona" or "Erysichthon" and take a stance on the following prompt: Does Ovid suggest that the gods in your chosen story are justified in their revenge? Does the punishment fit the crime, or is the degree of the punishment too severe?*

Erysichthon is justly punished for his acts of hubris towards Ceres. In the prelude to the tale, Ovid initially indicates that Ceres' punishment of Erysichthon is justified, writing that Theseus "wanted to hear more about the gods' miracles" (*Metamorphoses* 8.820). Ceres' punishment is an example of the gods' miracles. Ovid reinforces this justification through Lelex, who shares the tale, stating "Erysichthon scorned the gods and burnt no sacrifices on their altars" (*Metamorphoses* 8.33-5). This line begins the tale by evoking disdain towards Erysichthon. The rest of the tale details some of Erysichthon's specific crimes towards Ceres, laying bare the evidence that justifies his resulting punishment.

Erysichthon displays explicit hubris towards Ceres by cutting down ancient trees in her sacred grove (*Metamorphoses* 8.836-7) and killing the "oak of Deo" (*Metamorphoses* 8.856-74). Disregarding the sensibilities of his slaves, he takes an axe from one of them to cut the tree himself and states "Whether this be the goddess' tree, or even the goddess herself, it's coming to the ground" (*Metamorphoses* 8.848-52). To make matters worse, Erysichthon even beheads a slave that tries to stop him when the oak of Deo begins to bleed like a mammal (*Metamorphoses* 8.57-66). Erysichthon holds nothing above himself and lets nothing stand in his way. He brazenly murders anyone who defies him, and boasts that he would not hesitate to kill a goddess.

To match Erysichthon's insatiable desire for material items, Ceres decides to "torture the man with dreadful Famine" (*Metamorphoses* 8.883). Since he cannot be satisfied with material possessions, he is cursed with eternal hunger, always wanting more, until "he began to take bites out of his own limbs, and in his misery fed himself by consuming his body" (*Metamorphoses* 8.988-90). This punishment is fitting, because Erysichthon previously held no appreciation for the things that were precious to others, such as their places of worship and even their mortality. Through this cautionary tale, Ovid justifies Ceres' punishment of Erysichthon's hubris.

### Reference

*Ovid Metamorphoses*, S. Lombardo, trans., Hackett Publishing (2010).

Grade: 10/10

Comments:

Well done! This would be a good choice to expand in to your final paper (assignment forthcoming). Divine punishment for hubris is a common theme woven into many of the works we have read this semester. Another direction you could

take this, too, is to expand in to a discussion of how the gods seem in the Met. not to always be justified in their punishments. That is to say, their punishments seem at times rash, or too severe. How does one reconcile these disparate examples of "justice" from above? What could Ovid be saying about the gods? About justice? Is Zeus justified in destroying all of mankind, for example? What about Diana's punishment for Actaeon's error? This could be a fruitful paper topic.