

CHANGING NAMES: THE MIRACLE OF IPHIS IN OVID *METAMORPHOSES* 9

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I

WHAT IS IN A NAME? In literature a proper name has the potential to reflect what a character does or suffers, and hence may be a privileged vehicle of meaning. As Gianna Petrone observes, "a name can assume and concentrate in itself a network of metaphoric and symbolic meanings, social connotations, literary allusions, and, above all, references to the text in which it is located."¹ No author is more aware of the signifying power of names than Ovid, whose major poems, the *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*, are well stocked with etymological lore.² In the *Metamorphoses*, Greek proper names frequently prefigure the form into which a character will be changed (Lycaon becomes a wolf, Daphne a laurel tree, Syrinx a shepherd's pipe, etc.). In these instances, Ovid works with the inherited material of aetiologizing myth which explains the origins of things in anthropomorphic terms. Occasionally, however, he gives new names to characters in his sources with the intention of punning and playing on them.³ This is the case in the tale of Iphis' sexual transformation from girl to boy in *Metamorphoses* 9.666–797. Here Ovid apparently draws upon the Hellenistic story of Leucippus, a prose summary of which survives in the collection of transformation tales compiled by Antoninus Liberalis (17).⁴

In Antoninus Liberalis' version, which takes place in the Cretan city of Phaestus, Galataea disguises her newborn daughter as a boy named Leucippus because the father, Lamprus, cannot afford to bring up a girl. All goes well until the girl's beauty threatens to reveal her true gender, whereupon the worried mother supplicates Leto to change the sex of her daughter. Although Ovid's tale

¹Petrone 1988: 33–34. For a basic introduction to the topic of significant names in Greek and Roman literature see McCartney 1918–19: 343–358; O'Hara 1996: 7–111 *passim*. Dimock (1962: 106–121) is an exemplary analysis of how literary names may be significant; cf. also Nagy 1979: 69–83.

²Ovid's etymological wordplay with proper names is discussed by Herescu 1946: 71–73; Herescu 1962: 47–49; Lascu 1961: 305–311; Frécaut 1972: 39–42; André 1975: 191–195; McKeown 1987: 45–62. For examples of such wordplay in the *Fasti* see Porte 1985: 197–264; O'Hara 1992: 47–61. For examples in the *Metamorphoses* see Doblhofer 1968: 98–102; Doblhofer 1975: 508–511; Rosati 1983: 161–163; Ahl 1985; Weber 1990: 209–210; Keith 1992: Index s.v. "Etymological wordplay"; Myers 1992: 63–68; Myers 1994: Index s.v. "Etymology"; Tissol 1997: Index s.v. "wordplay and puns."

³Weber (1990: 209–210) illustrates this point with Ovid's use of the eponym *Dryopeius* (*Met.* 8.751), son of δρύπων ("woodpecker"), for Erysichthon the treekiller. Compare also his renaming of Hippe or Hippo, the prophetess-centaur, as Ocyroe (*Met.* 2.637–638), which alludes etymologically to her birth by a swift river (see further Keith 1992: 64–66, and below, n. 24).

⁴The standard introduction to Antoninus Liberalis is Papathomopoulos 1968: ix–xxiii.

differs in some details, it follows the same basic plot and, perhaps more tellingly, is set in Phaestus too. The parallels between Ovid and Antoninus Liberalis suggest a common source, although it is possible that either is working through an intermediary.⁵ It has been generally assumed by Ovidian scholars that the common source is a tale in the second book of Nicander's lost *Heteroeumena*.⁶ This assumption is based on information given by one of those marginal notations in the manuscript containing Antoninus Liberalis (Palatinus gr. 398) which cites sources for his summaries.⁷ But can we infer that Antoninus preserves the form or details of Nicander's narrative? Admittedly, it is difficult to prove whether, or to what degree, the mythographer reflects the sources cited in the margins of the manuscript. But Forbes Irving has recently made a case from both external and internal evidence that the citations of Nicander are accurate.⁸ While I am inclined to agree, it is not material to my argument that the story of Leucippus be Nicandrian *per se*. What matters is the hypothesis that Antoninus preserves, directly or indirectly, the essential plot and names of a Hellenistic original to which Ovid is also responding, and that the differences between the two tales are mainly a product of Ovid's innovations. This position, of course, does not admit of final proof either, but it does allow the reader to view Ovid's story from an intertextual perspective that may illuminate new features of his art.

What then are Ovid's innovations?⁹ First, the complicating factor that threatens to expose the girl-disguised-as-a-boy is not her feminine beauty. In contrast to the original, she is betrothed to another girl with whom she falls passionately in love.¹⁰ Second, Ovid replaces Leto with Isis in the role of *dea ex machina*, enabling him to bring into play the cult of Isis.¹¹ Perhaps the most obvious change of all is Ovid's alteration to the names of the characters. Commentators explain that such changing of names is a standard Hellenistic technique in the use of sources.¹² But is Ovid's choice of a new set of names just a matter of Hellenistic technique? Are

⁵ Forbes Irving 1990: 21.

⁶ For the *status quo* on this question, see, e.g., Bömer 1977: 469–472.

⁷ On the authenticity and accuracy of the scholia to Antoninus Liberalis, see Papathomopoulos 1968: xi–xix.

⁸ Forbes Irving 1990: 21–24; cf. Gow and Schofield 1953: 205–206.

⁹ This question is discussed in Otis 1970: 417–418; Bömer 1977: 469–470; Graf 1988: 58–61; Forbes Irving 1990: 152.

¹⁰ This innovation furnishes Ovid with the basis for the tale's central soliloquy (9.726–763), which explores the psychology of Iphis' "unnatural" homosexual love, and serves as an important link to neighboring tales in the *Metamorphoses* that similarly dramatize in monologue the deviant sexual passion of heroines: e.g., Byblis (9.487–563) and Myrrha (10.320–355).

¹¹ Graf (1988: 60–61) argues that Ovid abandons Leto because the original cult *action* of Leto Φωτεινή—she who causes male genitals to grow—is no longer relevant to a contemporary Roman audience, and that he introduces Isis instead because she is the protector of women in the Roman pantheon. For other explanations of Ovid's choice of Isis, see Anderson 1972: 465; Ahl 1985: 152.

¹² See Haupt and Ehwald 1966: ad *Met.* 9.666–797, 116; Bömer 1977: 470. Each quotes the following scholion to Parthen. *Narr. Am.* 8: ἰστορεῖ Ἀριστόδημος . . . περὶ τοῦτον, πλὴν ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματα ὑπαλάττει, as an example of the Hellenistic technique of changing names.

we to conclude, as some scholars do, that it is otherwise of little import.¹³ The purpose of this paper is to show, on the contrary, that Ovid's selection of names, and specifically that of Iphis, is integral to the new twists and turns he gives the old story. I will argue that Ovid alludes to the etymological meaning of the name Iphis to reinforce the contradictions of Iphis' ambiguous sexuality; to give point to the paradox of female homosexual love; and to illustrate the proverbial belief that a *nomen* is an *omen*. I will close by suggesting that the etymologizing associations generated by the name of Iphis constitute a mode of discourse that permits the poet to play discreetly with the delicate anatomical details of Iphis' sexual transformation without actually narrating or describing them.

II

That the names of fictional characters in Ovid or any other author should mean something is not a foregone conclusion. In the case of Ovid's adaptation of the story of Leucippus, however, we find ourselves in an intertextual environment in which names are patently motivated. Antoninus Liberalis calls the father Lamprus, the mother Galataea, and the daughter/son Leucippus—names that connote brilliance and whiteness. As commentators note, this illustrious nomenclature contrasts with the poverty of the characters.¹⁴ At the same time, however, it suggests the innate nobility of a family fallen on hard times (cf. Antoninus Liberalis 17.1 ἀνδρὶ τῷ μὲν εἰς γένος εὖ ἔχοντι, βίου δὲ ἐνδεεῖ). In his adaptation of this story, Ovid makes some pointed alterations to his source. He introduces the father in the following way:

*progeniuit tellus ignotum nomine Ligdum,
ingenua de plebe virum; nec census in illo
nobilitate sua maior, sed vita fidesque
inculpata fuit.* (Met. 9.670–673)

One change that Ovid effects has to do with the social status of the father. Ligdus is of humble origin and rank, meaning that his lack of wealth is not due to misfortune, but to lowly birth. Ligdus nonetheless claims the reader's sympathy because of his blameless conduct. Ovid thus appears to be "correcting" the source by making his a tale of humble piety rewarded rather than nobility recognized.

The other change—the name change—reinforces this basic point. First of all, Ligdus, the alliterative and metrical equivalent of Lamprus, would appear to be an allusion to the original name. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the old and new names of the mother are also metrically interchangeable, Telethusa for Galataea. Secondly, Ligdus appears to have been chosen to mark a contrast in status with the well-born Lamprus. To start with, it is a highly unusual name,

¹³ Anderson 1972: 465; Graf 1988: 59.

¹⁴ Papathomopoulos 1968: 106.

attested only here as far as I know.¹⁵ *Argumentum ex silentio* notwithstanding, it seems most probable that Ovid invented it. But would he go to the trouble of finding a name that has no significance? Kroll thinks so ("belangloser Name").¹⁶ Bömer follows suit, asserting that the name's association with the Greek word λίγδος ("mortar") or λυγδός ("white marble") is unlikely.¹⁷ Yet Ovid seems to hint that the *nomen* may be utterly appropriate to this humble character. Ligdus is said to be born of the earth (*progenit tellus*), a proverbial expression for people of no account.¹⁸ But, in the *Metamorphoses*, a poem in which people are quite literally born from the earth, we might pay special attention to the land that produces Ligdus—Crete, which receives special emphasis at the beginning of the tale (cf. 9.666–668). Now *creta* is the common Latin word for clay, and specifically potter's clay (*OLD*, s.v. "creta" 2a). The etymological association between the island Crete and *creta* is, not surprisingly, to be found in Isidore *Orig.* 61.1.6: *creta ab insula Creta vocata, ubi melior est*. But Ovid appears to be already cognizant of the connection when he gives an etymologizing gloss at *Her.* 10.106: *strataque Cretaeam belua pressit humum*. But what does *Creta/creta* have to do with Ligdus? The word λίγδος is the standard word for the clay mold used by the potter (*LSJ* s.v. π). It would therefore appear that Ovid has chosen a name that alludes to the humble occupation of the father: to wit, *cretarius Cretensis qui cretam facit*.¹⁹ Be this speculation as it may be, it is clear that the name Ligdus is a sign of the "plebeian" status of Ovid's character, and one that contradicts the impoverished nobility of Lamprus in Antoninus Liberalis. One last observation. It is also possible that Ovid chose the name Ligdus because of its potential association with the name Lygdus meaning "white marble" (= λυγδός).²⁰ In this way he might still refer glancingly to the qualities of brilliance and whiteness inherent in the original family names Lamprus, Galataea, and Leucippus.²¹ In short, the change

¹⁵ Cf. Pape and Benseler 1959: s.v. "Λίγδος." The name Ligdinus, however, is attested for a freedman in the Julio-Claudian period (*CIL* VI 8035); cf. Solin 1982: 1157, s.v. "Ligdinus."

¹⁶ Kroll 1927: 523.48–53.

¹⁷ Bömer 1977: 474.

¹⁸ See Otto 1962: 344–345, s.v. "Terra" 2.

¹⁹ I owe this insight and formulation to Paul Harvey (*per litteras*).

²⁰ The name Lygdus gains currency in Roman poetry after Ovid in epic, bucolic, and erotic epigram: cf. Stat. *Theb.* 9.764, 766; Sil. 1.438; Mart. 6.39.13, 6.45.3, 11.41.7, 11.73.1, 12.71; Calp. *Ed.* 1.18. It is also historically attested: e.g., the eunuch who belonged to Drusus (Tac. *Ann.* 4.8.1, 4.10.2); cf. also Solin 1982: 1138, s.v. "Lygdus." Dewar (1991: ad Stat. *Theb.* 9.764) comments that the name Lygdus establishes an "association between white marble and the fair skin of *pueri delicati*." Here, one may also compare the name of Propertius' slave Lygdamus (3.6, 4.7, 4.8) which is thought to derive from λυγδός and to allude to beauty (Boucher 1965: 435, n. 2). In the same vein, Sullivan (1976: 79) remarks that the poet of the Tibullan corpus, Lygdamus, appears to be a *nom de plume* that incorporates a Greek allusion to Albius, Tibullus' gentile name.

²¹ Cf. Diod. Sic 2.52: διόπερ οὐτε ἡ Παρία λυγδός οὔτ' ἄλλη θαυμαζομένη πέτρα τοῖς Ἀραβίοις λίθοις ἐξισωθῆναι δύνανται, ὧν λαμπροτάτη μὲν ἡ λευκότης. Mart. 6.13.2 *candida non tacita respondet imagine lygdos*. Chantaine (1968–74: s.v. "λυγδός") accepts the etymological connection of λυγδός with λευκός, which is attested by Hesychius' gloss λυγδῆ· τὸ δένδρον ἢ λευκή.

of Lamprus to Ligdus is not a mechanical one. It functions as a learned allusion to specific formal and semantic features of the original name.

The rest of Ovid's characters have names whose significance refers less to the old names than to the poet's own innovations to his source. For example, Telethusa's name points to Isis and her mystery rites, calling attention to the new divine motivation in the tale. Telethusa derives from the verb τελέθω ("come into being") and is clearly connected with the noun τελετή ("initiation rite").²² The latter association is appropriate because Isis appears to the pregnant Telethusa in a dream and addresses her as an initiate (*"pars o Telethusa mearum,"* 696), instructing her to spare her child regardless of its sex. Later Isis rewards Telethusa for her obedience by effecting Iphis' sex change. If Telethusa's name is indicative of her role as a worshipper of Isis, one may also compare the name of Ianthe's father, Telestes, which means "initiate" or "initiator" and likewise contributes to the air of mystery religion that surrounds the tale.

In the case of Ianthe, a character most likely invented by Ovid, the name underscores his other main change to the story of Leucippus: the plot complication of betrothal and marriage. Ianthe means "bloom of a violet." As such, it reflects the maiden's outstanding beauty and nubile virginity (*laudatissima formae / dote fuit virgo*, 716–717). The floral association also helps distinguish Ianthe from Iphis as the maiden who is properly to be deflowered (despite Iphis' doubts at 744). Finally, Ianthe's *nomen* is an *omen* of the social and sexual role she is supposed to play, for the comparison of the bride to a flower is a well-known convention of epithalamial song.²³

Finally, we come to the name of Iphis. Here Ovid "corrects" his source by choosing a name that is more fitting for a girl-disguised-as-a-boy. Whereas Leucippus is a masculine name, Ovid selects a name of common gender to reflect the ambiguous sex of its bearer. The etymology of the name is also important, for it calls attention to what Iphis lacks as a female. Iphis is derived from the Greek ἰφι ("by force"), the instrumental of ἵς, a form found in Homer and in his epic imitators. Given the prevalence of bilingual etymologizing in the *Metamorphoses*, it is probable that Ovid's learned audience would equate Iphis with the Latin *vis*, which is the same in meaning, gender, and declination as ἵς.²⁴ That the Romans recognized the etymological identity of these words is attested by the frequent Roman use of *vis* in imitation of Homeric ἵς.²⁵ Like its Greek counterpart, *vis*

²² Cf. Ahl 1985: 149.

²³ On the epithalamial *topos* of the bride as flower, cf. Sappho fr. 105 (c) Lobel-Page; Catullus 62.39–47.

²⁴ For discussion of bilingual etymologizing wordplay in the *Metamorphoses*, see, e.g., André 1975: 191–195. Some familiar examples are 2.637–638: *fluminis in rapidi ripis enixa vocavit / Ocyroen*; 2.706: [Battus] *qui nunc quoque dicitur index*; 3.214–215: *pecudesque secuta / Poemenis*; 4.537–538: [Aphrodite] *in medio quondam concreta profundo / spuma fui Graiumque manet mihi nomen ab illa*; 15.542–543: [Hippolytus] *nomenque simul, quod possit equorum / admonuisse*.

²⁵ For examples of the *emploi homérique* of *vis*, see Ernout 1957: 117–118, 137–139.

means "force," but it also has the sense of "force directed against someone," i.e., "violence."²⁶ It is for this reason that Romans often etymologize *vir* with reference to *vis*, since it is the male who characteristically initiates violence.²⁷ An early example of an etymologizing association between *vis* and *vir* may be found in the alliterative verse of Ennius, *Ann.* 229 Skutsch: *Marsa manus, Paeligna cohors, Vestina virum vis* (cf. Lucr. 1.728, 2.326; Vergil *Aen.* 6.553). Another well-known locus for such wordplay is the mock-epic speech of Sosia in Plautus' *Amphitruo*, in which he narrates the Theban victory over the Teleboians (cf. 191 *vi et vir tute militum*; 219 *summa vi virisque*). Equally important in Roman etymologizing discourse is the connection between *vir* and *vires*, the plural of *vis*, which means "strength" or the "physical powers to exercise *vis*."²⁸ Cassiodorus may attest to a long-standing association in Latin when he writes "*vir*" . . . *vocatur a viribus* (*In Psalm.* 1.1.1). In Roman poetry, etymologizing is never as explicit as this, but there appears to be more than alliteration at work in Ennius *Ann.* 298 Skutsch: *viri . . . validis viribus luctant*, and Plautus *Amph.* 212: *magnanimi viri freti virtute et viribus*. While the cases of *vir-vis-vires* quoted above occur in the military sphere, the "violence" or the "strength" of the *vir* is operative in the sexual sphere too. We have the explicit etymology of Isid. *Orig.* 11.2.17: *vir nuncupatus . . . sive quod vi agat feminam*. This etymology seems to be at work in Lucretius 5.964: *violenta viri vis*, where he explains one of the causes for sexual coupling (*Venus*) among primitives. More important, Ovid juxtaposes *vir* and *vires* in a passage of the *Ars Amatoria* that reflects a situation very much parallel to that of Iphis. Achilles is disguised as a maiden but reveals himself to be a *vir* when he overcomes Deidamia with his (sexual) strength: *haec illum stupro comperit esse virum. / viribus illa quidem victa est* (*Ars* 1.698–699). Ovid thus uses the etymologizing nexus of *vir-vires-vinco* to reinforce the theme of Achilles' entrance into manhood.

To return to Iphis, it seems likely that a reader accustomed to such etymologizing wordplay would observe the name's association with both *vis* and *vir*. This linkage is of obvious relevance to a tale which concerns ambiguous sexuality and the eventual transformation of a *virgo* into a *vir*. Furthermore, if the name of Iphis is to be associated with sexual force (*vis*) and sexual potency (*vires*), it ironically calls attention to the "virility" that the maiden lacks to consummate her marriage with Ianthe.²⁹ Unlike Achilles in the *Ars Amatoria*, this girl cannot

²⁶ Ernout 1957: 117. He also quotes the alliterative and etymologizing verse of an unknown tragedian: *virginem me quondam invitam per vim violat Iuppiter* (*Inc. Inc. Trag.* 131 Ribbeck³ = 135 Warmington, ap. Cic. *Fam.* 9.22.1).

²⁷ For ancient grammarians' etymologies of *vir* from *vis*, see Maltby 1991: s.v. "vir." Ahl (1985: 38–40) illustrates the "Varronian" etymology of *vir* from *vis* with examples from Plautus, Ennius, and Ovid. It is notable that Roman etymologizing agrees with modern theories about the etymology of *vir* from *vis* (cf., e.g., Pokorny 1989: 1177); a recent discussion of this etymology may be found in Bader 1976: 206–212.

²⁸ Ernout 1957: 119–120.

²⁹ We have already seen that ironic naming is a feature of narrative that Ovid may inherit from his Hellenistic source. But a close parallel for Ovid's Iphis is Homer's Irus in the *Odyssey*. The beggar's

prove she is a man. In the following section, I will make the case that Ovid not only plays on the bilingual etymologizing link between Iphis and *vis-vires-vir*, but that he also glosses the meaning of the name with other semantically related words. In so doing, he develops an etymologizing subtext that calls attention to the missing element of male sexual potency.

III

Ovid anticipates the name and meaning of Iphis from the start of the tale. The father Ligdus explains that he wants a son and not a daughter because the latter is more burdensome to raise: *oneriosior altera sors est, / et vires fortuna negat* (9.676–677). The second part of the explanation, *vires fortuna negat*, gives rise to an unintentional but nonetheless significant ambiguity. On the one hand, it is clear from the context of his poverty that Ligdus means: “fortune denies *me* the resources,” viz. to bring up and dower a girl. In this case, the term *vires* is a synonym for *opes* (OLD, s.v. “vis” B26). On the other hand, the reader may also interpret the words *oneriosior altera sors est* in reference to the burden of being a girl and translate *vires fortuna negat* as “fortune has denied *them* the strength.”³⁰ The question is what this would mean. Ahl is hardly persuasive when he writes: “It was through contempt for women’s lack of violent strength that the child’s father had threatened to kill the baby if it were a girl.”³¹ This emphasis upon Ligdus’ hostility toward the female sex does not square with his moral goodness (*vita fidesque / inculcata fuit*, 672–673) or his pious and tearful regret upon ordering the female child to be killed: “(*invitus mando: pietas, ignosce*) *necetur*.” / *dixerat, et lacrimis vultum lavere profusis / tam qui mandabat, quam cui mandata dabantur* (679–681). Bömer, by contrast, argues that the translation “fortune has denied a girl the strength” cannot be correct if it means killing a girl because she lacks the strength to survive in life; for this is an attitude alien to the thinking of Ovid’s time.³² True enough, but this impossibility does not rule out the ambiguity of the statement in question. It rules out one interpretation of the ambiguity. Clearly, Ligdus means to say that fortune denies him the resources to raise a girl, poverty being one of the principal reasons for child-exposure in antiquity. Yet his words also escape

real name is Arnaeus but the suitors dub him Irus after the messenger Iris (*Od.* 18.5–6); however, the name also means “he who has force = *vis” and is apparently cognate with *vir*. Of course, Irus does not live up to his name in his showdown with the brawnier Odysseus, and so one of the suitors calls him Ἰρος Αἰπος (*Od.* 18.73). For discussion of the etymology of this name and its connection with the Indo-European root for *vir* see Bader 1976: 206–212, and Nagy 1979: 229–230, section 9, n. 4.

³⁰ Thus the Loeb translation of Miller 1984: 51.

³¹ Ahl 1985: 153.

³² Bömer 1977: 476, *ad* 9.677. It should be pointed out that Bömer may underestimate physical weakness as one of many reasons for child-exposure in the Roman empire, on which see Harris 1994: esp. 11–15.

their intended bounds and bear a second, ominous meaning.³³ That is, Ligdus unwittingly says that destiny denies a girl *vires*—the physical strength and “sexual powers” proper to a *vir* (*OLD*, s.v. “vis” B20a).³⁴ At first glance, this statement would seem pointlessly tautologous. But it also portends the sexual crisis of Iphis who, as a woman, will indeed lack the *vires* to consummate her love for Ianthe.

Ligdus’ speech continues to be unintentionally ominous when he names his child. Following the Greek custom, he gives his “son” the *nomen avitum* of Iphis, which marks the child’s masculine, patrilineal identity.³⁵ At the same time, however, Ligdus unknowingly gives his “son” a name that is common to both sexes and so appropriate for a daughter. Telethusa rejoices in the appellation because she would not deceive anyone when using it (*nec quemquam falleret illo*, 710). The common gendered name is a perfect token of Iphis’ ambiguous sexuality. It is also an omen of her eventual transformation into a boy.³⁶

The disguise of Iphis works not only because she dresses like a boy (*cultus erat pueri*, 712), but because her pretty girlish face *could* be a boy’s (*facies, quam sive puellae / sive dares puero, fieret formosus uterque*, 712–713). Indeed, the feminine beauty of Iphis is not a threat to her disguise (as in Antoninus Liberalis), but reflects the culturally constructed femininity of boys who have not yet entered manhood.³⁷ In the thirteenth year, however, Iphis is betrothed to marry Ianthe, and the two girls fall in love, precipitating the main crisis of the tale. Ianthe believes that Iphis is a “man” and that “he” will be her “husband”: *quamque virum*

³³ This reading of an unintentionally prophetic utterance is related to kledonomanicy, a form of divination interpreting chance words or names in a sense other than that intended by the speaker; cf. Cic. *De Div.* 1.102–104 and Pease 1979: *ad loc.*; Meiss 1942: 373.66–378.27. For “divinatory wordplay” in Ovid see Tissol 1997: Index s.v. “puns, divinatory.” See also brief discussions of kledonomanicy in O’Hara 1996: 8, 13, 46, 105.

³⁴ There is no discussion of the well-attested sexual senses of *vires* by Adams 1982. In the context of castration, *vires* may also be used concretely of the testicles, both human and animal, on which see Lewis and Short, s.v. “vis” I.B.3—a more comprehensive entry than *OLD* s.v. “vis” B20c which only cites examples for the *taurobolium*.

³⁵ At the moment of the naming, Ovid appears to make the connection between Iphis and *vis* through syllabic wordplay: *vota pater solvit nomenque inponit avitum: / Iphis avus fuerat. gavisus est nomine mater* (708–709). There may be a similar association of sound and sense when Ovid modifies *vires* with the adjective *avitas* at *Met.* 13.886: *fecimus, ut vires adsumeret avitas*, suggesting that *vires* are patrilineal. In a similar vein, the name of Ianthe calls to mind *viola*, which is redolent of *vis*. Isidore’s etymology for *viola* (*propter vim odoris*, Isid. *Orig.* 17.9.19) is not necessarily relevant; more important may be the etymological link between the names of Iphis and Ianthe, through which Ovid emblemizes the young couple’s compatibility. Ahl 1985: 153–154, associates the name Ianthe (Viola) with the verb *violare*. While there is no evidence in the tale that Ianthe is sexually violated, the idea that Ianthe will be the recipient of Iphis’ *vis* seems relevant.

³⁶ On names as omens see McCartney 1918–19: 355–358; Pease 1979: 283–285; Meiss 1942: 376–378. Cf. also the scene in Plautus’ *Persa*, where Saturio’s daughter tells Dordalus the pimp that her name is Lucris, and Toxilus says *nomen atque omen quantivis est preti* (625). For the proverbial association of *nomen* and *omen*, cf. Otto 1962: s.v. “nomen” 2.

³⁷ See Konstan 1994: 185; Leitaio 1995: 162.

putat esse, virum fore credit Ianthe (723). The semantic wordplay on the different senses of *vir* and its implicit etymological connection with the name Iphis imply that Iphis should be a *vir* in every sense.³⁸ Yet Iphis has “virility” in name only. In fact, this *vir* is really a *virgo*, as Ovid makes clear in the twist of a conventional erotic phrase, *ardetque in virgine virgo* (725), whose surprise is that the part of the *vir* (or *puer*) is played by a *virgo*.³⁹ At this stage we might wonder whether Ovid is making an implicit etymological connection between the terms *vir* and *virgo*, a connection that has ample precedent in the grammarians and poets.⁴⁰ If so, the name Iphis is to be connected not only with *vis/vir*, but also with *virgo*. The latter case would constitute an etymology from the opposite: Iphis is a *virgo* because she lacks the *vis* to be a *vir*. This is the sort of etymologizing linkage that one finds, for example, in Augustine’s report of one ancient derivation for the name Venus: *Venus . . . ab hoc . . . dicitur nuncupata, quod sine vi femina virgo esse non desinat* (*De Civ.* 6.9).

If Ovid etymologizes Iphis in terms of *vis*, it should come as no surprise that he also plays on the irony of the name with reference to other semantically related words. For instance, Iphis despairs of being able to enjoy her partner sexually: *qua posse frui desperat* (724).⁴¹ By bringing up the theme of sexual potency, Ovid draws attention to the discrepancy between the meaning of Iphis’ name and her true nature. Subsequently, Iphis asks herself why she cannot be strong in the resistance of love, *quin animum firmas, teque ipsa reconligis, Iphi* (745), as though she were searching for a different way to realize the meaning of her name. Later, however, she recognizes that she cannot fulfill the “potential” of her name: *nec tamen est potiunda tibi, nec, ut omnia fiant, / esse potes felix* (753–754). The semantic cluster of *potior* and *possum* alludes again to the etymology of Iphis. The verb *potior*, in particular, is significant because it is a euphemism for the act of intercourse and so hints at the sphere in which Iphis should properly achieve the meaning of her name.⁴² Yet Iphis expresses horror at the unnaturalness of a sexual union between two maidens (726–730), listing examples from the animal world that illustrate the *adynaton* of female homosexuality (731–734).⁴³ Despite her name and the apparent empowerment of her desire by the gods (*dique mihi faciles, quicquid valere, dederunt*, 756), Iphis recognizes that she is opposed by the greater power of nature: *at non vult natura, potentior omnibus istis, / quae mihi sola nocet* (758–759).

³⁸ On the type of wordplay where a word is repeated in two different senses, see Schwaller 1987: 208–209.

³⁹ Cf. Call. *Aet.* fr. 67.2 Pfeiffer: ἦθεο Κυδίστη παῖς ἐπὶ παρθενικῇ.

⁴⁰ Cf. Festus 261: *feminas antiqui . . . viras appellabant; unde adhuc permanent virgines et viragines*. Isid. *Diff.* 1.590: *virgo est quae virum nescit*. For these and more examples see Maltby 1991: s.v. “virgo”; Ahl 1985: 39–40. Poetic examples include: Vergil *Aen.* 1.493: *audetque viris concurrere virgo*; Ovid *Met.* 4.681–682: *primo silet illa nec audet / appellare virum virgo*.

⁴¹ On the sexual euphemism *frui* see Adams 1982: 198.

⁴² Adams 1982: 188.

⁴³ On Roman disgust for female homosexuality see Cantarella 1992: 164–171, esp. 167.

If the name of Iphis is the basis for etymologizing wordplay which defines the obstacle that prevents the marriage of Iphis and Ianthe, it should come as little surprise that the etymologizing wordplay recurs in the story's denouement. On the eve of the wedding day, Telethusa and Iphis visit the temple of Isis and pray for salvation. Isis responds with omens, and as Iphis leaves the temple, she undergoes her transformation. Among the signs of change, Ovid relates that Iphis' strength increases, *vires augentur* (788), recalling and reversing Ligdus' fateful words *vires fortuna negat* (677). The theme is repeated and varied with the etymologically related word *vigor*: *plusque vigoris adest, habuit quam femina* (790). Iphis thus gains those qualities that are inherent to her name. The tale ends happily with the consummation of the marriage: *potitur sua puer Iphis Ianthe* (9.797). Here Ovid glosses the meaning of Iphis with the verb *potior*, underscoring the resolution of Iphis' identity crisis and the fulfillment of her seemingly impossible desire for sexual potency (cf. 753–754: *nec tamen est potiunda tibi, nec, ut omnia fiant, / esse potes felix*). A satisfying sense of closure is thus achieved as the ambiguous name of Iphis proves in the end to be an omen of sexual transformation and divine reward.

IV

If we return to our point of departure—that names are privileged vehicles of meaning, the name Iphis aptly reflects the changing fortunes of its bearer. Because the name is of common gender, it represents well the different aspects of Iphis' ambiguous sexual identity: the actual girl, the girl believed to be a boy, and the boy who was once a girl. Ovid draws attention again to the versatility of the name in the dedicatory epigram toward the end of the tale: *DONA PUER SOLVIT QUAE FEMINA VOVERAT IPHIS* (794). We have also seen that Ovid generates a web of etymological wordplay around the name of Iphis. The examples of etymologizing examined thus far constitute, in fact, a mode of discourse that helps structure the main narrative and specifically the role of Iphis.⁴⁴

This mode of discourse comes to the fore especially when Ovid describes Iphis' sexual transformation. One reason for this may be that etymological wordplay allows the poet to refer indirectly to delicate anatomical details whose explicit mention the decorum of Latin epic apparently forbids.⁴⁵ On the one hand, there are the outward, immediately visible signs of changes: Iphis' stride grows bigger,

⁴⁴ For the idea of etymologizing as a mode of discourse I am indebted to Stephen Hinds, who made available a draft of his paper "Word Play and Roman Poetry: Exploring the Limits of Etymologizing Interpretation."

⁴⁵ Adams (1980: 52) writes: "In describing a metamorphosis he [Ovid] usually lists some of the body parts which underwent transformation, but leaves the sexual organs unmentioned." Adams observes that Ovid shows much the same reserve as Vergil, whose "men are anatomically shadowy . . . They are without genitals and buttocks, and largely without internal organs. The nose is unmentionable, as is the hip and the skin. In some cases the technical term for the part seems to have

her complexion darkens, features sharpen, hair shortens, and her strength and vigor increase. In this regard, Wilkinson's response to the transformation may be justified: "With what modest restraint Ovid, so often referred to in tones that suggest he was salacious, describes the changing of Iphis from a girl into a boy!"⁴⁶ On the other hand, I have already suggested that the increase in "strength" and "vigor" (*vires augentur* [788]; *plusque vigoris adest, habuit quam femina* [790]) is a euphemism for Iphis' change in sexual anatomy. The reader attentive to the tissue of etymologizing in this tale may recognize in the words *vires* and *vigor* a semantic connection with the name of Iphis that signals the fulfillment of what the maiden had been missing to consummate her marriage with Ianthe. Thus, although Ovid maintains a "modest restraint" in his narration and description of the transformation, the medium of etymologizing wordplay enables him simultaneously to disclose and conceal the unmentionable.

The significance of Ovid's treatment may, once again, be highlighted by comparison with Antoninus' version of the same story. While it is unlikely that Antoninus' alleged source, Nicander, provided a detail description of the transformation comparable to Ovid's, the growth of Leucippus' genitals is the focus of his tale's terminal aetiology.⁴⁷ Antoninus' summary reads: "In memory of this change the citizens of Phaestus still sacrifice to Leto Φωτίη because she made male genitals grow for the girl (ἐφύσεν μῆδεα)" (17.6). The metamorphosis also explains two other rituals of Phaestus. One was called the *Ecdysia*, which apparently involved the stripping of the feminine peplus by boys entering adulthood.⁴⁸ And the other was a prenuptial rite in which the bride lay with the statue of Leucippus, suggesting a male figure of great fertility.⁴⁹ Scholars have accordingly interpreted this story of sexual transformation to be a metaphor for the growth of boys into men. While Ovid abandons the tale's original function of explaining the cult name of Leto, the *Ecdysia*, and the statue of Leucippus, he nevertheless maintains the tale's original concern with the feminine sexuality of boys and the growth of their virility upon entering adulthood. It is this context that explains the meaning of the name of Iphis. Throughout the tale, Ovid links the name of Iphis with language that has to do with power and how it defines sexual roles (*possum*, *potior*, *vigor*, *vir*, *vires*, *virgo*, *vis*). In particular, we have seen that Iphis' ambiguous sexuality is marked by the lack of virility advertised by her name. Equally important, Ovid returns to this etymological mode at the moment of transformation to mediate the ineffable. As the last line of the tale amply testifies, the miracle of sexual transformation is also a miracle of language. In the embrace of Ianthe—neatly mirrored by Ovid's enclosing word order (*potitur sua puer Iphis Ianthe*, 797)—Iphis

been unpoetic (*coxus*, *nasus*). Certain areas, whatever the terminology available, were not considered fit to mention" (59).

⁴⁶ Wilkinson 1955: 161.

⁴⁷ On Nicander's probable lack of interest in the process of metamorphosis itself see Lafaye 1904: 30–31; Forbes Irving 1990: 27; Myers 1994: 31–34.

⁴⁸ For details see Leitaio 1995.

⁴⁹ Forbes Irving 1990: 154.

finally realizes the true meaning of her name, showing that the word may indeed become flesh.⁵⁰

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⁵⁰ On iconic word-order simulating spatial arrangement see Lateiner 1990: 204–207, 218–220.

An earlier version of this paper was presented for a panel on "Ovidian Wordplay" at the 1994 meeting of the American Philological Association in Atlanta, Georgia. I am grateful to my fellow panelists Garth Tissol, James J. O'Hara, J. C. McKeown, Shelley Kaufhold, and Stephen Hinds for comments and suggestions, as well as for the opportunity to learn from their papers. At later stages, I received valuable advice from Archibald Allen, Philip Baldi, Paul Harvey, and the readers of *Phoenix*. None should be held responsible for errors on my part.

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