

The Iphis Incident: Ovid's Accidental Discovery of Gender Dysphoria

By Ken Moore*

*This article examines what the author argues is Ovid's accidental discovery of gender dysphoria with recourse to an incident in the *Metamorphoses*. The author argues that Ovid has accidentally discovered gender dysphoria as evidenced through the character of Iphis in Book IX of the *Metamorphoses*. It is unlikely that Ovid could have imagined the ramifications of such a "discovery"; however, the "symptoms" described in his narrative match exceedingly closely with modern, clinical definitions. These are explored in the article along with how Ovid may have, through personal experience, been able to achieve such a penetrating, albeit accidental, insight. The wider, epistemological context of this topic is considered alongside Ovid's personal circumstances which may have contributed to his unique understanding of a condition that modern science has only recently identified.*

There are relatively few examples from ancient Greek and Roman literature that entail individuals having experienced something like the modern condition of transgenderism. One stands out above the others for sheer detail, along with emotional and psychological depth, that resonates quite well with issues faced by modernity. This is to be found in Ovid's brief narrative about Iphis, at the end of book IX of the *Metamorphoses*. The text of this short episode is crucial in order to come to grips with this subject and I have included most of it here, in quotes as well as in appendices, as I deem it relevant to our understanding. Other aspects to be considered will be how previous scholars have treated this subject, Ovid's apparent views on gender and sexuality, along with known and suspected influences on those views as represented in his cultural context. I will also consider modern, clinical definitions that may be applied as well as Ovid's own curious relationship with Iphis' fictional situation. This article, then, questions whether previous interpretations of the tale are correct and aims at a new interpretation along lines suggested in the title.

While Ovid's Iphis narrative will be the subject of this work, other such instances of mis- or re-gendering/mis- or re-sexing bear some mention by contrast, if only in passing, because they indicate that ancient imaginations contemplated such phenomena. There is, of course, the famous case of Tiresias, born a man, changed into a woman and then back again to a man. He was, in effect, mis-gendered, as a consequence of being re-sexed, by an act of the gods and, while a woman, would have (one imagines) experienced a kind of gender dysphoria until the change was reversed. Something similar may be said of Dionysus' misgendering of Pentheus in the Euripides' *Bacchae* except that the

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king was also forcibly placed into an altered mental state and would perish at the hands of his mother or aunt before he could fully contemplate his situation. Even so, we know that he dreaded the prospect of donning female attire (899-90) and therefore we may predict that he would have suffered something like gender dysphoria were he in his right mind when made to dress as a bacchant. The tale of Hermaphroditus who became neither male nor female through the infatuation of a meddling nymph is arguably another example. A case could be made for Attys, the priest of Cybele, who in Catullus' poem expresses confusion about his new status as a eunuch after self-castration. A few other examples might be ferreted out; however, Iphis is unique. Her transformation from female to male was something that she desired and the story also has (somewhat unusually in the *Metamorphoses*) a happy ending.

There are a few additional preliminaries that need to be dispensed with before continuing with this analysis. Firstly, I shall refer to Iphis hereafter with the masculine pronouns. Iphis clearly sees himself as male, albeit within a biologically female body. And he eventually gets re-sexed so that his body matches his gender. Following on from that, "gender" will be used here to refer to one's internally perceived gender identity (male, female or intersexed etc.). "Sex" will refer to the anatomical state of being biologically male, female or intersexed etc. and sometimes to the act of sexual intercourse; although, I normally use "sexual relations" or "intercourse" for that. "Sexuality" will be employed in the sense of broader phenomena such as sexual orientation but also at times inclusive of gender and sex. The ancients did not have expressions such as "homosexual" and "heterosexual", and so "same-sex" or "mixed-sex" are the most clinically accurate terms. I will, however, be using the designation "heterosexual" at times for reasons that should become fairly apparent. These terms can cause confusion and, when used improperly, can be offensive. Therefore I aim for clarity of expression in laying them out here in an explicit way.

Ovid's tale of Iphis, and his beloved Ianthe, is fleeting but highly provocative. It is about a girl, raised as a boy, who loves another girl and, by a miracle of the gods, is transformed into a biological male in time for his appointed nuptials. There has been relatively little written about this curious episode; although, in recent years it has garnered increasing attention. In the past, it has been variously approached from the angle of lesbianism, performative sexuality and sexual constructivism, along with being considered within Foucault's zero-sum model. Some of those positions will be considered below as relevant.¹ It is a fact that the tale represents the sole mythological example of female same-sex desire of which we are aware. But I believe it to be significantly more than that.

1. In this, I am particularly indebted to the fine work of D. Kamen, "Naturalized Desires and the Metamorphosis of Iphis", in *Helios* 39.1 (2012). While her interpretation took a different tack on this subject, her excellent research was an illuminating guide for my own in writing this article.

Much of the scholarship has inclined toward discussing Iphis' desire for his beloved, Ianthe, in terms of some kind of lesbianism—inasmuch as Iphis, while still female, is clearly in love with Ianthe, who is also female. A different interpretation is needed. The case of Iphis appears to be the first recorded instance, entailing true psychological depth, albeit fictitious, of gender dysphoria. It also, consequently, illustrates a kind of “therapeutic” approach to this condition, namely female-to-male transformative treatment, in this instance, by divine intervention.² In framing this tale, and quite possibly by serendipitous coincidence as well as factors unique to himself, Ovid seems to have acquired a kind of understanding of gender dysphoria two millennia before it was officially classified by modern medical science. And that requires some further investigation and explication.

Firstly, let us consider the episode itself, in detail. The setting is on the borders of Knossos, in the Cretan land of Phaestus. There Telethusa, the wife of a free-born man named Ligdus', became pregnant. Her husband was not wealthy and he tells her, as Ovid wrote, that:

I am praying for two things: that the delivery should be as easy for you as possible, and that you may have a boy. A girl is more of a burden, and fortune has not given me the means to support one. So, though I pray that it should not happen, if a girl is born, then she must be put to death. It is not that I want to command this: I know what is due to family affection and pray to be forgiven³

According to the Code of Gortyn, ancient Cretan dowries could be as high as a hundred staters and the expectation to pay that sum, or a proportionally comparable one, could have been financially crippling for a poor family.⁴ Exposure of female infants due to economic constraints was a real issue in the ancient world. This is not to say that the parents would not have felt some conflicting emotions about it.⁵ Indeed, both husband and wife break into tears at

2. Although, Iphis ponders whether the “arts of Daedalus” might not re-sex him, see below.

3. *Quae voveam, duo sunt; minimo ut relevere dolore, utque marem parias; onerosior altera sors est, et vires fortuna negat. Quod abominor, ergo edita forte tuo fuerit si femina partu, (invitus mando: pietas, ignosce!) necetur* (675-79).

4. See R. F. Willetts, ed. *The Law Code of Gortyn*. Walter de Gruyter & Co.: Berlin, 1967, Col. X.14–20. We do not know if Ovid ever studied the ancient Cretan legal system but he did take preliminary studies in Roman law (*Fasti* IV.383-4, *Tristia* IV.10.27 and 34; and see the Elder Seneca *Controversiae* II.1-12 for confirmation of this), and they also had dowries, so he would have been keenly aware of the financial costs incurred by marrying off daughters. Ovid was also personally familiar with arranged marriages, having had one himself (*Tristia* IV.10.69-70), which in his case did not end well.

5. See C. Patterson, “‘Not Worth the Rearing’: The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece” in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974-2014), 115 (1985), 103-123.

these fateful words, Telethusa first and then Ligdus. She begs him to change his mind but he will not relent. Later, when the birth is fast approaching, Telethusa has a dream in which the goddess Isis/Io appears to her, accompanied by a host of other deities.⁶ Those with her are Egyptian, appropriate to Isis and the proximity of Crete to Egypt, and they include Anubis, Bubastis, Apis, “the god who never speaks but, finger to his lips, advises silence”, Osiris and the “foreign serpent” (presumably Apophis). Isis/Io informs Telethusa not to despair and, “do not hesitate to rear your child, when Lucina has delivered you, whatever it may be”. Isis/Io offers some vague assurances of support for those who are faithful to her and then departs.⁷ Telethusa then awakens and praises the gods, hoping that the dream was a true vision.

A child is born, without Ligdus’ knowledge of its biological sex, childbirth being a typically all-female business. The child is female and, with the collusion of the midwife, Telethusa pretends it is a boy. He is to be called Iphis, which we are told is a name appropriate for a boy or a girl, and he is raised as if he were biologically male.⁸ The deception is never discovered and, at the age of thirteen, Iphis is betrothed by his father to a beautiful young girl, of the same age, named Ianthe. We are told that “as a result, love touched their innocent hearts and wounded both alike” but, while Ianthe, unawares of Iphis’ true sex, was looking forward to their union, Iphis loved a girl whom he despaired of ever being able “to enjoy”.⁹ This singular frustration increased his ardour, as is made explicit in the poem. Iphis could scarcely hold back his tears (although, rather “manfully” he does). He no less bewails his fate and the “unnaturalness” of it, clearly in a state of emotional distress.¹⁰

6. On the conflation of these deities in ancient Greek and Roman thinking, see J. G. Griffiths, “Lycophron on Io and Isis” in *The Classical Quarterly* 36.2 (1986), 472-477.

7. *Iamque ferendo vix erat illa gravem maturo pondere ventrem, cum medio noctis spatio sub imagine somni Inachis ante torum, pompa comitata sacrorum, aut stetit aut visa est. Inerant lunaria fronti cornua cum spicis nitido flaventibus auro et regale decus. Cum qua latrator Anubis sanctaque Bubastis variisque coloribus Apis, quique premit vocem digitoque silentia suadet, sinistraque erant numquamque satis quaesitus Osiris plenaque somniferis serpens peregrina venenis. Tum velut excussam somno et manifesta videntem sic adfata dea est: “Pars o Telethusa mearum, pone graves curas mandataque falle mariti. Nec dubita, cum te partu Lucina levarit, tollere quidquid erit. Dea sum auxiliaris opemque exorata fero, nec te coluisse quereris ingratum numen.” Monuit thalamoque recessit (684-702).*

8. See Appendix A

9. *Hinc amor ambarum tetigit rude pectus et aequum vulnus utrique dedit. Sed erat fiducia dispar:*

coniugium pactaeque exspectat tempora taedae quamque virum putat esse, virum fore credit Ianthe;

Iphis amat, qua posse frui desperat, et auget hoc ipsum flammis, ardetque in virgine virgo (720-725).

10. See Appendix B

Iphis' mother, aware that the ruse is soon to be discovered, tries to delay the ceremony with a range of excuses from concocted illnesses to bad omens. But inevitably her tricks are exhausted and, on the day before the appointed ceremony, Iphis and his mother enter the Temple of Isis/Io to pray before her altar. Telethusa tears the ribbons from her and from Iphis' hair in her extreme state of anxiety and prays to the goddess. The ribbons seem curious. Apparently she had decked Iphis out in some female ornamentation. Assuming that Ovid was describing Roman nuptial ceremonies, though, ribbons were not a traditional part of a bride's apparel. Greek bridal costumes were somewhat more elaborate but ribbons do not appear to have been part of their attire either.¹¹ Apart from the veil, the white wedding dress, and the "Herculean Knot" (to be undone by her husband after marriage), bridal etiquette at ancient Roman weddings dictated that the bride wore no adornments apart from her engagement ring.¹² We assume that Iphis would have been dressed as a bridegroom, though we are not told, and all they were required to wear was their best toga (or, we presume, the Greek equivalent here, a formal *chiton* with *himation* cloak).¹³ Interestingly, perhaps Ovid imagined that the bridegroom would be mostly nude at the wedding, as males often are in Minoan art, in which case the gig would have been truly up. Otherwise, his secret would only have been discovered by Ianthe during their expected consummation. However, this scene in the temple occurs on the day before the wedding. And ribbons were worn (by women) in their hair for religious purification ceremonies, in both Greece and Rome, that could take place prior to the wedding, which is probably why Iphis was wearing them in the temple.¹⁴ Apparently, in the sacred confines of the holy space, Telethusa had adorned Iphis with appropriately sexed religious ornaments, which she then tore off in frustration. Yet Isis/Io hears her prayer. The altars shift about and the temple door trembles; the horns on the goddess' statue burn with a shining light

11. See Hesiod, *Theogony* 573-578, *Works and Days* 72-7; and Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* II.11.

12. See K. K. Hersh, "Introduction to the Roman Wedding: Two Case Studies" in *The Classical Journal*, 109.2 (December 2013-January 2014), 223-232 and <https://www.explore-italian-culture.com/ancient-roman-fashion.html> (accessed 16/07/19).

13. We are told by Ulpian, A.D. c. 170-223, (*Digesta seu Pandectae* XXIII.2.5) that the groom need not even attend the wedding so long as he should send an official notification indicating his assent: "It is settled that a woman can be married to a man who is absent either by means of a letter, or through a messenger, if she is afterwards conducted to his house." If this custom was practiced in Ovid's era, he has perhaps omitted it here as it would have hindered his plot progression.

14. R. L. Wildfang. *Rome's Vestal Virgins: A Study of Rome's Vestal Priestesses in the Late Republic and Early Empire*, Routledge: London and New York, 2006, 54. And, on the Greek *tainia*, see Plato *Symp.* 212d.e, 213d; Xenophon *Symp.* 5.9; Pausanias I.8.4; VIII.31.8; X.35.10; Theocritus XVIII.44.

and the sound of tumbrels can be heard, though Telethusa remains unconvinced. The prayers are nevertheless miraculously answered and, we are told:

Iphis accompanied her as she walked along, and moved with a longer stride than usual. Her face lost its fair complexion; her hair seemed shorter, plain and simple in style, her features sharpened and her strength increased. She revealed more energy than a female has—for she who had lately been a maiden had become a man!

Mother and son then carry offerings to the other temples of the gods and set up the following inscription:

*The tributes promised, as a maid,
Iphis, a boy, has duly paid.*¹⁵

As indicated, much of the existing, modern scholarship on this story has grappled with the sexual psychology of Iphis and his ostensibly same-sex desire for Ianthe. Pintabone, for example, argues that it represents both a positive and negative image of “woman for woman” passion, temporarily questioning normative sexuality and gender roles.¹⁶ Walker has characterised it as some type of “deformulated lesbianism”, albeit one that reverts to normative sexuality with Iphis’ divinely imposed morphology.¹⁷ Others are more critical. Lilja summarises her brief reflection on this tale, stating: “The story of Iphis, then, is to be regarded as another negative comment on lesbianism”.¹⁸ Makowski, perhaps informed by a particular agenda, writes that it is “Ovid’s most damning denunciation of homosexuality.”¹⁹ And Hallett adds that “Ovid’s narrative displays immense sympathy with Iphis’ plight, a sympathy contrasting to Iphis’ own self-condemnation and negative view of female homoeroticism”.²⁰ The last point is, I think, quite apt. But Roman (or Ovid’s) attitudes toward female homoeroticism

15. Sequitur comes Iphis euntem, quam solita est, maiore gradu, nec candor in ore permanet, et vires augentur, et acrior ipse est vultus, et incomptis brevior mensura capillis, plusque vigoris adest, habuit quam femina. Nam quae femina nuper eras, puer es. Date munera templis nec timida gaudete fide! Dant munera templis, addunt et titulum; titulus breve carmen habebat: DONA·PUER·SOLVIT·QUAE·FEMINA. VOVERAT. IPHIS (786-794).

16. D. Pintabone, “Ovid’s Iphis and Ianthe: When Girls Won’t be Girls”, in Rabinowitz and Auanger, 2002, 256-85.

17. J. Walker, “Before the Name: Ovid’s Deformulated Lesbianism” in *Comparative Literature*, 58.3 (Summer 2006), 205-222.

18. S. Lilja, *Homosexuality in Republican and Augustan Rome*. Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1983, 80.

19. J. F. Makowski, “Bisexual Orpheus: Pederasty and Parody in Ovid” in *The Classical Journal* 92.1 (1996), 30.

20. J. P. Hallett, “Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature” in *Yale Journal of Criticism* 3 (1989), 217

represent only a secondary concern, if a significant one, in the unique case of Iphis. The story reveals anxieties stemming from the “acquisition of gendered identity”, as Sharrock states, adding that “the difficulties in the interaction of nature and nurture in sexual identity are exposed as well as fudged.”²¹ While, she goes no further in her analysis of this specific tale, on a website devoted to scholarship and thought concerning transgenderism, Scott expands on this theme of gender identity and alludes to an alternative interpretation:

Ovid’s story of Iphis and Ianthe became one of the iconic lesbian/transgender plots well into the modern era. Whether one views the story as lesbian or transgender depends on how one interprets Iphis’s difficulty in integrating female anatomy with sexual desire for a woman.²²

While this assessment, I think, best approaches the truth, most of the discussions in the scholarship and in popular culture, as indicated, has striven to interpret Iphis and Ianthe as portraying some type of lesbianism. What type precisely remains a subject of much debate. Although, some, such as Scott above, have sought to include the possibility that the tale also represents a version of transgenderism. And it seems quite correct that how one regards this episode does depend much on Iphis’ psychology, as presented in Ovid’s narrative.

The poet’s “immense sympathy with Iphis’ plight”, in Hallet’s words, is not insignificant.

And I shall return to that, along with more on Iphis’ psychology, in a moment. It is important to bear in mind that Ianthe does not know that Iphis is female and so she cannot be included in any formulation of being a female who desires same-sex relations with other females, at least not as a conscious participant, which would seem to preclude her from that designation. I suppose that someone could argue that Ianthe really did know about Iphis and did not care because she too was a lesbian. But that is reading far too much into a narrative that never explicitly says such things. In fact we are told that “Ianthe awaits the ceremonial as agreed upon, in confidence and hope, and is quite certain she will wed a man.”²³ Apart from expressing her expectations, Ovid never really gives Ianthe a voice. She is merely the object of (male) sexual desire and a “normal”, probably heterosexual girl who expects to marry a male. It is all down to Iphis and how he processes his own sexuality and gender. But another theme running through the scholarship concerns the performative nature of

21. A. Sharrock, “Gender and Sexuality” in P. Hardie ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 96.

22. Scott, “Queer Fantasy Roots: Gender Transformations In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*” in *Queer Sci-Fi*, September 17, 2016 <https://queerscifi.com/queer-fantasy-roots-gender-transformations-in-ovids-metamorphoses/?cn-reloaded=1> (accessed 22/01/19).

23. 722-3, *coniugium pactaeque expectat tempora taedae quamque virum putat esse, virum fore credit Ianthe.*

Iphis' sexuality: namely, that he has somehow "adopted" heterosexual, masculine desires because he has been reared as a male. Does Ovid imagine that a female child reared in such a manner would take on male characteristics, including the desire to sexually penetrate a female, as in normative heterosexuality (or dominantly heterosexual behaviour)? Based on his earlier poems (the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Amores* in particular), mixed-sex desire is something with which Ovid was fervently familiar and he projects this very successfully onto his fictional characters. Indeed, Habinek has argued that Ovid effectively invented the category of the "heterosexual male", whose primary object of sexual desire and attraction is women.²⁴ But why might he have regarded gender roles and sexuality as having been, in some major sense, constructed through environmental influences and performative internalisation through *mimesis*?

Aristotle, of course, had famously asserted that (male) same-sex relations were an abnormality that could result from both child-abuse and habituation; though he also included "nature" as a possibility.²⁵ We do not know whether Ovid ever studied Aristotle; although his sixth book of the *Metamorphoses* does appear to challenge Aristotle's anthropocentric view of society in the *History of Animals* by asserting, contrary to the philosopher's position, that the ownership of human physical characteristics does not necessarily amount to any innate worth.²⁶ The notion of habituation being a factor in sexual development, derived from Aristotle, might have been a commonplace belief in Ovid's world. However, there is at least one example of a performative gender model on which Ovid may have more directly drawn. This is significant because we do not have others writing about this so explicitly, whatever most people may have believed, but we can perhaps see in this an epistemological transmission of ideas from Classical Greece to Augustan Rome. It occurs in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai* with the fictionalised tragedian Agathon who seems to be illustrating a process that is not unrelated to certain implicit assumptions about gender that informed Ovid in composing his tale of Iphis. In the opening scenes of the play, Agathon is attired and styled as a woman, and is apparently very skilled at playing the feminine role, which is why the character of Euripides wants him to infiltrate the female-only festival as a spy. Agathon declares to the surprised and slightly aroused kinsman of Euripides that:

24. T. Habinek, "The Invention of Sexuality in the World-City of Rome" in T. Habinek and A. Schiesaro eds., *The Roman Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997, 23-43. And see too D. Kamen, "Naturalized Desires", 29.

25. Nicomachean Ethics VII.5.1148a-b.

26. A. Dong & R. Block, "Ovid vs. Aristotle" 2013, <https://alicedong.weebly.com/ovid-vs-aristotle.html> (accessed 16/07/19).

I coordinate my clothing with my thoughts. To be a poet, a man must adopt the nature of his characters. If, let us say, he is writing plays about women, then he must take on all of their characteristics into his own persona.²⁷

The fictionalised Agathon seems to be saying that dressing and acting like a (traditional) woman—through *mimesis*—is helpful in coming to a deeper understanding of that uniquely gendered, psychological condition, approximating femininity, even if perhaps temporarily. This may well be the first articulation of a performative model of gender, albeit used here for comedic purposes by Aristophanes, along with a process akin to what is today in drama termed the Method, or Method Acting. We certainly know that Ovid too thought a great deal about women. His earlier works focused heavily upon female qualities, including one on the correct application of cosmetics, which suggests an almost transcendental obsession with them and their characteristics, both physical and psychological. Like Aristophanes' Agathon, albeit in a different manner, Ovid seems to have been able to temporarily put himself into the mind-set of his characters, especially female ones, approximating an understanding of their inner workings. And he might also have agreed with this performative model of gender or something very similar to it.

We do not know for certain whether Ovid was familiar with this play but it seems unlikely that he would not have been—far more likely than with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. That he had read or viewed some of Aristophanes' other works may be evidenced by his Philomela, Procne and Tereus in the *Metamorphoses* (VI.491-674), a narrative which appear to draw upon that which is also detailed in Aristophanes' own adaptation of the myth in *Birds* (115-135, 660 ff. *et passim*). Also, the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone (*Met.* XI.410-748) recollects elements from *Frogs* (186) in descriptions of the river Lethe and the Underworld.²⁸ Ovid may have had some additional familiarity with Agathon, if only by way of Plato. His characterisation of Amor in the *Ars Amatoria* recollects the Platonic formulation of Eros in the *Symposium*, and specifically that from Agathon's speech.²⁹ If Ovid read Plato at all, the *Symposium* would seem one of the likeliest candidates. Furthermore, if Agathon's now lost plays were still available in the 1st century B.C., then it is likely that Ovid had encountered them. We do not, of course, know how much Aristophanes' satire of Agathon might have been reflected in that tragedian's actual works; but, there is every indication that he

27. Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousai* 147-52; ὦ πρόεσβυ πρόεσβυ, τοῦ φθόνου μὲν τὸν ψόγον ἤκουσα, τὴν δ' ἄλγησιν οὐ παρεσχόμην: ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἄμα γνώμη φορῶ. χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα ἅ δεῖ ποιεῖν πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν. αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ ἦν ποιῆ τις δράματα, μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν.

28. Y. E. Kim, A Commentary on Ovid's Ceyx and Alcyone Narrative (*Met.* XI.410-748). MA Dissertation, Duke University 2015.

29. A. Park, "Two Types of Ovidian Personification", in *The Classical Journal*, 104.3 (Feb. - Mar., 2009), 231.

was an individual who was notable for his innovation and unorthodoxy.³⁰ Although Ovid's apparent embracing of a performative model of sexuality with regard to Iphis almost certainly amounts to a synthesis of many such influences produced by his own unique experiences and imaginings, it clearly has some rather specific precursors in the Classical Greek world. What it means for Ovid and his audience seems to be that, by raising a child of one sex as another, that child would then take on the gendered characteristics associated with the sex with he/she has been raised.

Iphis' obsession with the "unnatural" state of his condition is also illuminating. And one can see why such critics as Lilja and Makowski above have regarded this story as a negative comment on female same-sex relations, which, to an extent, it is. And while there is much to credit in that interpretation, there are several additional factors here that bear further scrutiny. Firstly, in keeping with the performative model of gender identity, there is a recurring phenomenon amongst ancient writers of a supposed time before which same-sex relations did not occur because no one was apparently aware of them to imitate. We do not know precisely the era in which Iphis was meant to have lived; but, it seems safe to assume that he existed in the mytho-historical past, long before even the Archaic Age, and was therefore not aware of the proclivities of the famous Lesbian poetess. Suffice it to say that Ovid was familiar with Sappho.³¹ My point here is that a number of references external to Ovid, but likely known to him, maintained a clear sense of "before and after", a time in which same-sex relations did not occur and a time after which they did, usually due to the extraordinary acts of certain noteworthy individuals and their lack of control over their sexual appetites. Herodotus, of course, had famously declared that the Persians learned about sex with boys from the Greeks (I.135) and he apparently presumes (or his audience does, at any rate) that they must not have engaged in such activities before that custom was exported and imitated. Aristotle thought that the Cretans themselves first introduced the practice to the other Greeks.³² Plato, too, in his *Laws*, had written that same-sex relations between males came about as a result of Laius' rape of the handsome youth Chryssippus from the court of King Pelops (836b8-c7). Athenaeus (XIII.602f8-603a3) gives essentially the same description and whether he obtained it from Plato or not is uncertain; although, it was also the subject of a now lost play by Euripides (the *Chryssippus*).³³ Athenaeus also reports an alternative version, echoing Aristotle, saying that Timaeus claimed that

30. Aristotle (*Poetics* 1456a) indicated that the characters and plot of his play, the *Anthos*, were original and did not follow Athenian dramatic orthodoxy by borrowing from mythological or historical subjects.

31. *Ars Amatoria* 3. 329-348; *Remedia Amoris* 757-770; *Tristia* II.361-442. III.7 and *Heroides* 15.

32. Aristotle, *Politics* II.1272a 22-24

33. See K.R. Moore, *Sex and the Second-Best City*, London & New York: Routledge 2005, 181-3.

the Cretans introduced the custom to the Greeks.³⁴ These along with all of the mythical and mytho-historical accounts, such as that of Zeus and Ganymede or Apollo and Hyacinthus or Herakles and Iolaus etc. etc., tend to deal exclusively with male-to-male same-sex relations of one type or another rather than female ones. But Ovid here seems to be operating under the assumption that, perhaps prior to Sappho, female same-sex relations were largely unknown. This is not stated and can only be inferred at best. The truth could be completely otherwise. Certainly Ovid's mentions of Sappho in his other works are mostly positive and probably intended to titillate both himself and the reader, even if they flew in the face of typically Roman sensibilities on the subject. Yet, the notion that same-sex relations may have been introduced and then imitated strongly implies a performative and mimetic dimension to what we would call sexual orientation and Ovid, as I have been arguing, appears to have believed in just such a thing *vis-à-vis* Iphis.

Looking closer at the poet's own historical and cultural context, although the evidence certainly points to a more negative view on the whole, attitudes about female same-sex relations are somewhat difficult to assess. This is not helped when we consider that Ovid's tale of Iphis and Ianthe also happens to be the first and one of the only Augustan-era texts to address the subject. Poetic works contemporary with Ovid tend exclusively to illustrate only male same-sex relations and to reinforce the penetrated role of women. The anonymous and racy *Carmina Priapea*, some of which Seneca the Elder attributed appropriately enough to Ovid himself, repeatedly reinforce the hetero-normative, position with regard to the male penetrator. Accepted sexual relations indicated in the *Priapea* are anal and oral sex with men and boys and vaginal, penetrative sex only with women by men.³⁵ No earlier Roman source, of which we are aware, and very few Greek ones prior to Ovid, dared touch the theme of female same-sex relations. Those that do tend to be fairly negative. The Hellenistic epigrammist Asclepiades of Samos (fl. 3rd century B.C.), for example, is very unsympathetic toward female, same-sex relations:

The Samian girls Bitto and Nannion are not minded to meet with Aphrodite on her own terms but desert to other practices and not good ones. Oh Lady of Cyprus, abhor these fugitives from thy bed.³⁶

Compare that with Iphis' own ironic tone which expresses similar disdain for just such a prospect:

34. XVIII.602f7-8 (Timaeus *FGrH* 566 F144).

35. *Priapea* 3, 5, 13, 22, 25, 28 and 30. There is some question as to the dating of these poems but in his *Excerpta Controversiae*, I.2.22, Seneca the Elder refers to them as embodying *Ovidianum illud* ("that Ovidian phrase").

36. (AP 5.201), qtd. in T. K. Hubbard, *Homosexuality in Greece and Rome: A Sourcebook of Basic Documents*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 272.

Why do you, oh Juno, matron of honour, and you, oh Hymen, come to this ceremony at which there is no bridegroom, where two brides are being wed?³⁷

By way of contrast, we also have the poetry of Nossis of Locris (also fl. 3rd century BC), perhaps a contemporary of Asclepiades, who claimed Sappho as her inspiration, and wrote mostly “homosocial” poetry about erotic attraction between women along similar lines as her exemplar.³⁸ She and Sappho, however, represent virtually the only positive proponents of female same-sex relations.

Ovid, as mentioned earlier, did write favourably of Sappho and may have been sympathetic to that sort of activity; but, if so, then he keeps it to himself in the tale of Iphis and reveals more traditional attitudes. Cunnilingus is certainly implied here but not explicitly stated and this is perhaps because of the social taboos surrounding it. Oral sex of any type was regarded negatively; although, it was acceptable for a man to receive it from a social inferior. That performed on women, by either men or women, was regarded as particularly disgusting due to attitudes about pollution and “because of a misogynistic revulsion at menstrual blood”.³⁹ Somewhat after Ovid’s time, we have the late-Greek work of Artemodorus’ (2nd century A.D.). His *Oneirocritica* was a handbook of dream interpretations that also distinguished between different types of sexual acts. Some are defined as “natural and conventional”, including sexual penetration of social inferiors, penetration by other men and masturbation. Considered “unconventional” are incest and oral sex while “unnatural” ones expressly include female same-sex relations.⁴⁰ Winkler has expanded on this, arguing that ancient sexual relations were “articulated in the significant terms of the system”, with the emphasis on penetration, such that “woman-woman intercourse is ‘unnatural’ only and exactly insofar as it lies outside that determinate field of meaning”.⁴¹ He is specifically dealing with Greek sexual relations, and I take some exception to his interpretation being broadly applied to multiple cultural contexts; it does, however, seem to work very well for the 1st-century Romans. And it is safe to say that female same-sex relations were regarded in a negative light in Ovid’s era, as Iphis himself demonstrates:

37. 764-5. Pronuba quid Iuno, quid ad haec, Hymenaeae, venitis sacra, quibus qui ducat abest, ubi nubimus ambae?

38. Nosis AP 5.170 (1 GP), AP 9.605 (6 GP), AP 7.718 (11 GP); see Hubbard, *Homosexuality*, 269-71.

39. M. B. Skinner. *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*. Blackwell Publishing: London, 2004, 1968. See too A. Richlin. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992, 26-7 and C. A. Williams. *Roman Homosexuality*, 2nd edition. Oxford University Press, USA: New York, 2010, 223.

40. See B. J. Broton. *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996. 184-6 and Kamen, “Naturalized Desires”, 22

41. J. J. Winkler. *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*. New York: Routledge, 1990, 38-9.

O what will be the awful, dreaded end, with such a monstrous love compelling me? If the Gods should wish to save me, certainly they should have saved me; but, if their desire was my ruin, still they should have given to me some suffering that is natural to humanity.⁴²

Female same-sex relations were perhaps especially confounding since they did not fit into the accepted, penetrative model. While such attitudes certainly impact upon this tale, I argue that it is less about them and more about Iphis' implicitly phallogentric heterosexuality which struggles to find expression while he is in a female form.

When we consider such evidence as this, it is clear that female same-sex relations were conceived by the Romans of Ovid's era along normative lines in terms of what we would call heterosexual, male-female relations, with sexually dominant and sexually receptive pairings.⁴³ But, vitally, it is impossible for two females to engage in normative, penetrative and potentially reproductive sex; therefore, according to this formulation, it is "unnatural". The "unnaturalness" of his state, underscored by Iphis' frequent recourse to perceived, if erroneous, animal behaviour is clearly along the lines of the normative male/female sex act and reproduction. That, achieved through penetrative sex, was seen in the ancient Roman world as the prime imperative of a (mixed-sex) marriage. Iphis says:

The passion for a cow does not inflame a cow, no mare has ever sought another mare. The ram inflames the ewe, and every doe follows her chosen stag; so also birds are mated, and in all the animal world no female ever feels loving passion for another female—why is it in me?⁴⁴

He goes onto discuss "monstrosities" (*monstra*) born in Crete such as the Minotaur, complaining that Pasiphae's passion was at least for a male, if a male bull, lamenting "but my desire is far madder than hers, in strict regard of truth, for she had hope of love's fulfilment".⁴⁵ The latter phrase, "love's fulfilment", is clearly a reference to penetrative sexual intercourse between male and female. Iphis cannot impregnate Ianthe, though he longs to do so, to penetrate her with a penis rather than a prosthesis, however obliquely expressed through animal analogies as it emerges in his diatribe of self-loathing. This formulation, as Kamen

42. 727-31, *cognita quam nulli, quam prodigiosa novaeque cura tenet Veneris? Si di mihi parcere vellent, parcere debuerant; si non, et perdere vellent, naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent.*

43. Hubbard, *Homosexuality*, 346.

44. 731-36, *Nec vaccam vaccae, nec equas amor urit equarum: urit oves aries, sequitur sua femina cervum. Sic et aves coeunt, interque animalia cuncta femina femineo conrepta cupidine nulla est. Vellem nulla forem!*

45. 737-8, *meus est furiosior illo, si verum profitemur, amor!*

indicates, is a uniquely "Roman conception of *sexual acts*".⁴⁶ Therefore his passionate desire for Ianthe, and the whole concocted charade of masculinity and impending marriage, are "unnatural" as they can never result in penetration or the production of offspring and, most crucially, Iphis can never actualise his sexual identity and desire for his beloved as a biological man would do with a biological woman. And that may account in no small part for the poet's rather emphatic compassion for Iphis. Ovid's works partook of an immersive "dialogue with the most powerful contemporary signifiers of the masculine order: Augustus, *arma* (war and epic), and political life".⁴⁷ There is then an implicitly masculine ideal which Iphis can never achieve in female form. Whatever negativity the Romans may have felt about female same-sex relations, and the female sex more broadly, Iphis' burning desire to join the masculine order, so to speak, would probably have elicited a sympathetic response from its membership. But, from a modern perspective, his condition also strikes me as being an almost textbook example of gender dysphoria.

According to the NHS (UK) guidelines, gender dysphoria may be defined as: "...a condition where a person experiences discomfort or distress because there's a mismatch between their biological sex and gender identity... sometimes known as gender incongruence."⁴⁸ As we have seen, Iphis has wished that he had never been born. This is more than discomfort; it is clearly a state of distress. Individuals with this condition can feel trapped inside a body that does not correspond with their true gender identity. They may feel so severely depressed about "conforming to societal expectations" that they choose to live as if they were their anatomical sex, rather than outwardly expressing the gender that they ardently feel themselves to be; but, that course of action only makes matters worse, which Iphis amply illustrates:

Compose yourself, Iphis; be firm and shake off this foolish, useless emotion. Consider what you were born, unless you are deceiving yourself along with everyone else; seek what is permitted to you and fasten your affections on what a woman should love... But Nature is unwilling. She alone bars the way, but she is more powerful than all the rest. See, the time for which I prayed has come! My wedding day is at hand, and now Ianthe will be mine; yet she will not be. I shall thirst in the midst of the waters (745-63).

46. Kamen, "Naturalized Desires", 22, emphasis in original.

47. Sharrock, "Gender", 102.

48. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gender-dysphoria/> (accessed 24/01/19). N.B. I am using the NHS UK guidelines here but I am also including a link to the American Psychiatric Association's information page on gender dysphoria as well (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria--accessed-12/07/19>) which gives a virtually identical description.

Ovid appears to project onto Iphis an awareness that “the Roman male was often defined by his relationships with the women in his life”, that to actualise his role as a man, Iphis must have a penetrative relationship with Ianthe.⁴⁹ It is Ovid’s fundamentally heterosexual outlook that has been mapped onto Iphis, almost in a kind of hypothetical thought-experiment. And while it is Ovid projecting his own experiences onto his subject, it no less suffices remarkably well to produce a fictional individual with gender dysphoria. What he intended, what was going through his mind, we may never know. What he has produced for us to interpret is another matter. The NHS guidelines also indicate that “Gender dysphoria isn’t the same as transvestism or cross-dressing and isn’t related to sexual orientation. People with the condition may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or asexual, and this may change with treatment.”⁵⁰ It seems clear that Iphis has been born as a biological female who identifies psychologically as what we would call a heterosexual male, thus eliciting the poet’s genuine pity and enhancing Iphis’ verisimilitude as a fictional character. We would say today that the performative element, being raised as male, had little or nothing to do with Iphis’ self-identified gender and sexuality; although, Ovid and his contemporary readers probably thought otherwise.

It is, of course, impossible for Iphis to actualise his masculinity in any accepted, Roman manner while he has a female body. And he reproves himself with forced *bravura* for daring even to hope to do so. Note, as alluded to above, that he speaks in a way that Ovid’s audience might expect from a male elegiac lover, actually recollecting some of the poetry of Catullus, with a voice that is “gendered male”.⁵¹ It is ironic that he uses masculine language to try and talk himself into accepting his lot as a cis-female. The line quoted above, “Compose yourself, Iphis; be firm and shake off this foolish, useless emotion”, compares quite well with one from the neoteric poet of Verona:

Why don’t you make firm your heart and lead yourself out of this?⁵²

49. A. N. Petersen, “Ovid’s Wife in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*: Transforming Erotic Elegy into Conjugal Elegy”, A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, Athens, Georgia, 2005, 6. See too: Tom Hillard, “On the Stage, Behind the Curtain: Images of Politically Active Women in the Late Roman Republic,” in B. Garlick, S. Dixon and P. Allen, eds. *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992, 37-64.

50. Ibid.

51. K. Ormand, “Impossible Lesbians in Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*”, in R. Ancona and E. Greene eds., *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, 96. Interestingly, Ovid has chosen to use another Iphis later on (*Met.* XIV.698 ff.) to portray the misery of unrequited love.

52. Catullus 76.11, *quin tu animo affirmas atque istinc teque reducis*.

This seems to indicate that Ovid thought of Iphis in masculine terms. And we, the readers/audience are evidently invited to regard him as having intrinsically male qualities, as defined by Ovid's cultural context. It is not unlike Aristophanes putting courtroom and assembly speeches into the mouths of his female characters such as Lysistrata and Praxagora in order to paint them in a more dominant, traditionally masculine role. I argue that it goes further and deeper in the case of Iphis.

But the beleaguered character's language not only recalls Catullus, probably self-consciously, it is also consistent with Ovid's own, later work in exile. Such a comparison is useful here, despite his *relegatio* having occurred after the composition of the *Metamorphoses*, partly to illustrate Ovid's own emotional range and partly because the similarities between the exiled poet and his earlier subject, Iphis, are more than minor.⁵³ Indeed, the whole of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* painfully illustrate the theme of yearning for what is eventually perceived to be an impossible, if intensely desired, ambition that is out of reach: to return to his beloved life and dearest ones in the City.⁵⁴ Ovid, as an outcast, had himself undergone a kind of change of gender, becoming an "*exclusus amator* [excluded lover] of elegy and an abandoned heroine of the *Heroides*", denied what he most desired since he had roused a god's wrath.⁵⁵ The very essence of his masculinity having been metaphorically raped, the only power left to him is to evince the anguish of his state through his poetry so that he might receive some salutary compassion from his readership, though clemency from the divine Augustus would ever be lacking. A leitmotif (from *Tr.* III.3.35 ff. onwards) that seems to arise from his darker moments in exile is that Ovid has wished for his own death, not unlike Iphis wishing never to have been born, rather than to have to face the

53. There is a vanishingly small possibility that Ovid revised some of the *Metamorphoses* in exile. We know that he brought some of his books with him to Tomis. While he claims to have burnt one manuscript when he found out about his punishment (*Tristia* I.7.19-24), he was aware that several copies had survived. And one has to wonder whether the final transformation in book XV, that of Julius Caesar into a god and on the destiny of Augustus (alluded to at *Tristia* II.1.61-5) might not have been added later. He mentions the fifteen books of the *Metamorphoses*, "lately saved from my exequies" (*Tristia* I.1.117-18) and mourns his own recent and unpleasant "transformation". He repeats this again at *Tristia* III.14, also indicating that the *Metamorphoses* had had gone out to the public "uncorrected" (19-24). If he did correct that manuscript in exile, then it is a tantalising prospect that could impact quite profoundly on the tale of Iphis; but, without further evidence, I must sadly relegate it only to a footnote.

54. There are many examples of this, too numerous to recount here, but I list a few by way of illustration: *Tr.* II.340, where he laments the fate brought on by his own poetry and error; *Tr.* III.3 where he urges his wife to take heart (much as Iphis has done for himself); *Ep.* I.1, where he laments his "index of sorrows" and *Ep.* II.1, one of many where he longs for the sights and sounds of his perpetually denied homeland.

55. Petersen, "Ovid's Wife", 7.

impossibility of return.⁵⁶ When his frequent entreaties ultimately fell on deaf ears, though they had made up the bulk of that work, a recurring theme in his final poems (especially *Epistles* IV.16) is that Ovid considers himself to be effectively deceased. It is clear that he can commiserate, that he would have intimate acquaintance, with intense yearning contravened by *force majeure*. In many ways, Iphis' fictional tale, amongst others, demonstrates that Ovid was well prepared to comprehend his altered circumstances, if not to accept them.

It is worth noting too that Iphis meets yet another significant criterion of gender dysphoria. People with that condition may also “have a strong desire to change or get rid of physical signs of their biological sex, such as facial hair or breasts.”⁵⁷ Painfully contemplating the seemingly impossible prospect of just such a change, Iphis declares: “though all the world's talent were concentrated here, though Daedalus himself were to fly back on waxen wings, what could he do? Could all of his magical arts change me from girl to boy? Or could he change Ianthe?”⁵⁸ The last thought about changing Ianthe seems the manifestation of sheer desperation, which is evidenced by the lines that follow it, quoted above, where Iphis tells himself to abandon such nonsense and be firm in his heart. But Iphis clearly and explicitly desires to change his physical form from female to male, even to the point of contemplating impossible solutions to that problem.

Here too is an additional parallel with Ovid's exilic work. In *Tristia* III.8.5-12, he longs to borrow Daedalus' wings to escape his *relegatio*; but then scolds himself, not unlike Iphis, for being such a “fool” as to “pray in vain like a child for these yearnings”.⁵⁹ One wonders whether he was contemplating Iphis' pre-transition conundrum as he languished in that Black Sea outpost, brooding over his own misfortunes. In many ways, the tale of Iphis was prescient with regard to Ovid's fate. The *émigré* poet was in effect un-manned in his exile, deprived of his dear wife and his other beloved, Rome—which also defined his masculinity in no small part—and relegated to yearn perpetually for that which he could never obtain. Even though some hope for reprieve clearly endured until near the end, no god intervened on the poet's behalf. In that respect, Iphis was the more fortunate one.

Ovid may or may not have believed in a performative model of gender identity and sexuality. It seems likely that he did at least to some extent, as likely also did his audience. And he has certainly embedded his culture's sense of negativity toward female same-sex relations, alongside a heteronormative,

56. He even claims to have attempted suicide, *Epistulae Ex Ponto* I.6.40 ff. and composed his own epitaph, *Tristia* III.3.72-76: “...may Ovid's bones lie soft.”

57. Kamen, “Naturalized Desires”, 22.

58. 741-4, Huc licet e toto sollertia confluat orbe, ipse licet revolet ceratis Daedalus alis, quid faciet? Num me puerum de virgine doctis artibus efficiet? num te mutabit, Ianthe? These lines come just prior to the ones quoted above where Iphis, like Catullus, urges himself to be brave in the face of his seemingly impossible situation.

59. Stulte, quid haec frustra votis puerilibus optas, quae non ulla tibi.

masculine ideal, within his narrative. But, regardless of this, he has managed to produce a fictional case of an individual who conforms remarkably closely to modern definitions of gender dysphoria. As this article has sought to demonstrate, he has done this through a combination of an imperfect understanding of how gender and sexuality work (as, indeed, our current understanding of these things is also imperfect) and by projecting onto his subject much from the depths of his own experiences with sexuality, perhaps imagining what it would be like if he himself could never physically actualise his innermost sexual desires. It is a testament to his boundless imagination and particular sensibilities. But the end result is no less a biological female who loves women and who identifies as male. Iphis is not a lesbian; he is a heterosexual male in an anatomically female body who, by the grace of the gods, is changed to his true sex. The story of Iphis has been, and continues to be, a beacon for those with gender dysphoria since antiquity. And, prior to the modern age, his example must have offered some hope, if slim, to those in the same condition. So too does Ovid, however limited his comprehension of gender identity may have been, deserve no small credit for his extraordinary, if perhaps accidental, illustration of, and empathy for, those who suffer at least one type of gender dysphoria. In the poet's own words, as if there was ever any doubt, Ovid has produced a work that is truly "worthy to be read".⁶⁰

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60. *Epistulae Ex Ponto* IV.16.45-46, ...dicere si fas est, claro mea nomine Musa atque inter tantos quae legeretur erat.

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Appendix A

As her pains increased, and the burden that she carried forced itself of its own accord into life, a female child was born, without its father's knowledge. The mother pretended it was a boy, and ordered it to be reared. Her order was not doubted and no one but the nurse knew of her deception. The child's father made good on his vows and named the baby Iphis, after its grandfather. The mother was pleased with the name as it was used for both boys and girls, and in this regard, at least, she was not deceiving anyone. From this time forward, the pretence that she had practiced was kept secret by various ruses, well-justified in the sight of heaven: the child was dressed as a boy and its features, whether those of a male or female, would have been accounted handsome in either.

Ut dolor increvit, seque ipsum pondus in auras expulit et nata est ignaro femina patre, iussit ali mater puerum mentita: fidemque res habuit, neque erat ficti nisi conscia nutrix. Vota pater solvit nomenque inponit avitum: Iphis avus fuerat. Gavisata est nomine mater, quod commune foret nec quemquam falleret illo. Inde incepta pia mendacia fraude latebant: cultus erat pueri, facies, quam sive puellae, sive dares puero, fuerat formosus uterque (704-713).

Appendix B

What is to be the end of this for me, caught as I am in the snare of a strange and unnatural kind of love which none has known before...cows do not burn with love for cows, nor mares for mares. It is the ram which excites the ewe, the hind follows the stag, birds too mate in the same way, and never amongst all the animals does one female fall in love with another. How I wish I had never been born! That no monstrosity might be lacking in Crete, the daughter of the sun fell in love with a bull—but at least she was a woman, and he a male! If the truth be told, my love is more madness than hers, for she at least pursued a desire that offered some hope of fulfilment...but, though all the world's talent were concentrated here, though Daedalus himself were to fly back on waxen wings, what could he do? Could all of his magical arts change me from girl to boy? Could he change you, Ianthe? No! Compose yourself, Iphis; be firm and shake off this foolish, useless emotion. Consider what you were born, unless you are deceiving yourself along with everyone else; seek what is permitted to you and fasten your affections on what a woman should love. It is hope that conceives and nourishes desire: and your own case denies you any hope...the one you love does not refuse you her favours when you ask. Still, she cannot be yours, nor can you be happy, whatever happens, though gods and men should strive for you. Even now, none of my prayers go unanswered: the gods are kind and have given me all they could. My father, my sweetheart too, and her father, all wish the same as

I. But Nature is unwilling. She alone bars the way, but she is more powerful than all the rest. See, the time for which I prayed has come! My wedding day is at hand, and now Ianthe will be mine; yet she will not be. I shall thirst in the midst of the waters. Why do you, oh Juno, matron of honour, and you, oh Hymen, come to this ceremony at which there is no bridegroom, where two brides are being wed?' After that Iphis fell silent.

Vixque tenens lacrimas "quis me manet exitus" inquit, "cognita quam nulli, quam prodigiosa novaeque cura tenet Veneris? Si di mihi parcere vellent, parcere debuerant; si non, et perdere vellent, naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent. Nec vaccam vaccae, nec equas amor urit equarum: urit oves aries, sequitur sua femina cervum. Sic et aves coeunt, interque animalia cuncta femina femineo conrepta cupidine nulla est. Vellem nulla forem! Ne non tamen omnia Crete monstra ferat, taurum dilexit filia Solis, femina nempe marem: meus est furiosior illo, si verum profitemur, amor! Tamen illa secuta est spem Veneris, tamen illa dolis et imagine vaccae passa bovem est, et erat, qui deciperetur adulter! Huc licet e toto sollertia confluat orbe, ipse licet revolet ceratis Daedalus alis, quid faciet? Num me puerum de virgine doctis artibus efficiet? num te mutabit, Ianthe? Quin animum firmas, teque ipsa reconligis, Iphi, consiliique inopes et stultos excutis ignes? Quid sis nata, vide, nisi te quoque decipis ipsa, et pete quod fas est, et ama quod femina debes! Spes est, quae capiat, spes est, quae pascit amorem: hanc tibi res adimit. Non te custodia caro arcet ab amplexu nec cauti cura mariti, non patris asperitas, non se negat ipsa roganti: nec tamen est potienda tibi, nec, ut omnia fiant, esse potes felix, ut dique hominesque laborent. Nunc quoque votorum nulla est pars vana meorum, dique mihi faciles, quidquid valere, dederunt; quodque ego, vult genitor, vult ipsa socerque futurus. At non vult natura, potentior omnibus istis, quae mihi sola nocet. Venit ecce optabile tempus, luxque iugalis adest, et iam mea fiet Ianthe—nec mihi continget: mediis sitiemus in undis. Pronuba quid Iuno, quid ad haec, Hymenaeae, venitis sacra, quibus qui ducat abest, ubi nubimus ambae?" Pressit ab his vocem. (726-765)