

This paper begins from the idea that Ovid's focus on the movement of girls such as Byblis, Iphis and Myrrha into their adult roles as wives and mothers suits the *Metamorphoses'* theme of transformation. Coming of age has its precedent as a theme in Latin epic: the *Aeneid* lingers on the failures of Euryalus, Pallas and Lausus to make the transition to heroic status, and thereby manhood, on the battlefield (Petrini 1995). I argue that in the story of Myrrha, Ovid uses marriage much as Vergil uses the battlefield, as a dangerous site where an impulsive young person ends up overmatched. Incest is a powerful vehicle for exploring a girl's failure to achieve adulthood because it represents the deformation of *pietas*, the parent-child bond that ordinarily facilitated the transition to marriage. The incestuous feelings of Myrrha confuse the meaning of language (Tissol 1997) as well as the dynamics of the marriage process: in a monologue that represents a failed *controversia*, Myrrha first attempts to justify her passion as *pietas* (321, 324-34), then argues against it by pointing to the overturning of family roles that would result (335-47), only to end by yielding again to her passion as *furor* (355). Ovid's choice of the *controversia* as the mode for expressing Myrrha's conflict is pointed, given the prevalence of household strife as a theme in the genre and its role in Roman cultural mythmaking (Kaster 2001, Beard 1993). While Myrrha's behavior at first seems to place her among Ovid's other female sexual aggressors in the *Metamorphoses* (Pintabone 2002), within the incestuous sexual encounter itself Myrrha is not aggressive. Her passive behavior conforms, oddly, to the standards of youthful femininity, as she takes on the role of bride in a perverse wedding ceremony (O'Bryhim 2008). Moreover, Cinyras addresses her as *filia, aetatis nomine* (467); she calls him *pater* (468). The significance of this verbal exchange goes beyond the confusion of labels, as consideration of the legal institution of *manus* marriage and its cultural implications reveals. *Manus* marriage had lapsed by the Augustan age, but the expectation that a girl would enter the house of an older husband *filiae loco* remained strong. Later imperial writers, too, confirm the cultural value placed on this type of connubial relationship. Pliny the Younger describes his marriage to Calpurnia in terms that emphasize her *pietas*, passivity and inexperience, and his role in educating her (*Ep.* 4.19, 8.11); these features, he asserts, promise to enhance *concordia*. I argue that this idealization of husband and young wife as in a quasi-paternal relationship lies behind Ovid's presentation of the Myrrha episode, and informs a reading of Myrrha's failed transition to adulthood: for the audience, the shock of her failure lies not in her rejection of marriage, but in her violation of a taboo at whose heart lies a father-daughter relationship that was in fact quite similar to the type she was expected to enter within legitimate marriage. Father-daughter incest thus exposes tensions inherent in the marriage process for girls. At the same time, that Ovid makes incest and suffering, rather than marriage and happiness, the end of Myrrha's childhood aligns both with his epic's larger concerns with order and disorder in divine and human affairs, and with a literary tradition that treated coming of age as chaotic and dangerous, rather than as orderly and safe.