# DIVING INTO SALMACIS' POOL OF GENDER AMBIGUITY

An examination of the representation of gender roles in the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus scene in Ovid's Metamorphoses

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11-08-2020

Master Thesis Classics and Ancient Civilizations

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Wordcount (including notes, bibliography and appendix): 14988

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# Introduction

Since the #MeToo-movement, awareness of the dynamics of sexual assault in our modern society has greatly increased. Not only does modern research focus on sexual assault in modern society, since the #MeToo-movement research on classical texts, for instance the works by Ovid, has also brought the occurrence of sexual assault and rape in antiquity in sharper focus. Sexual assault is a frequent occurrence in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Stories about men attacking women are frequent and well known. The work also contains several stories about sexual assault and harassment by female figures against men. The clearest example is the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (*Metamorphoses* 4.285-388). In this scene, the Minyad Alcithoë describes in length how the nymph Salmacis attempts to rape the boy Hermaphroditus. However, when giving it a closer look, the story is complicated by the continuous confusion of gender roles. I will examine the ways in which Ovid plays with gender in this scene, which at first glance appears to be a male-rape story. The central question is:

*How does Ovid represent gender roles in the Salmacis-Hermaphroditus scene?*

In order to give an answer to this question, I will examine the way in which the circumstances of the assault are described, as well as the characters' appearance and behaviour. Moreover, the cultural context of and cultural expectations about gender roles will be taken into account. How does Ovid play with the expectations of his contemporary audience? Part of these expectations are based on earlier literary representations with which Ovid plays a literary game. I will look into several instances of this intertextuality that Ovid uses to play with the (expectations of) gender roles.

Intertextuality is the consciously or unconsciously measuring of a text against previous texts by language-users.[1] A well-known example of intertextuality is allusion, a covert or indirect reference, by an author to a previous text.[2] This form of intertextuality will be touched upon in the first chapter. Ovid uses mythical allusions to other, earlier stories of sexual assault or of dangerous power dynamics in charged encounters between men and women, described in his own poem or by other authors. The speech that Salmacis gives to the boy (4.320-328), before proceeding to violence, however, clearly refers to and follows the first part of Odysseus' speech, but is changed in several aspects. This is, therefore, not a form of allusion but of overt intertextuality. By looking into the similarities and differences between both speeches, while taking into account the different contexts, I will examine in

[1] Hinds (1998), XI.
[2] Hinds (1998), XI, 22.

chapter two how this intertextuality plays with gender and expectations of the audience in Salmacis' speech.

Another instance of intertextuality will be discussed in chapter three. Ovid uses several similes when Salmacis and Hermaphroditus are fighting (4.361-367). These similes are all used by other authors. In the case of such commonplaces, the interpretation of the intertextuality should not be found by looking into the differences and similarities between one model and another text, or in differences and similarities between the individual texts, but in the way in which the author 'plays with stock material'.[3] I will examine how Ovid uses the images to fit his own story and gender play.

Several scholars have approached the Salmacis-Hermaphroditus scene in the light of gender roles. Nugent has been the first to look into 'the literary strategies Ovid employed to problematize gendered characteristics', using feminist theories.[4] According to Salzman-Mitchell, Nugent understands that the story does not 'upset in any fundamental way the axis of masculine and feminine', although it appears to blur and inverse sexual differences.[5] The story has also been approached in the light of queer theory.[6] Robinson explored gender roles and the way in which Ovid played with expectations, in the light of ancient sources about Hermaphroditus and the waters of Salmacis.[7] Keith discussed gender differences in the scene in her article on epic masculinity in the *Metamorphoses*, arguing that Ovid constructed the heroic masculinity through measuring it against the female.[8] Salzman-Mitchell discussed gender issues in this scene in the light of the appropriation of the 'male gaze'.[9] Most recently, James examined 'the ambiguities surrounding the identity of the naiad Salmacis' and argued that 'Salmacis is both behaviourally and physically a fudged gender, a proto-hermaphrodite ultimately punished for her mimicry of masculine traits'.[10] She explored the figurative techniques, which 'transport the reader' to other stories and victims of sexual encounters in ancient literature, Ovid's work, and imagery.[11] She also explored connections to the inscription, found at the Salmacis spring in Halicarnassus.[12]

[3] Hinds (1998), 34.
[4] James (2019), 39. Nugent's article is important to consult in this research. Unfortunately, I was unable to do so in the course of writing this thesis. Nugent, S.G. 1989. 'This sex which is not one: de-constructing Ovid's Hermaphrodite', in D. Konstan & M. Nussbaum (eds.), *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 2, 160-185.
[5] Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 16. Also Marturano (2017), 313.
[6] E.g. Zajko (2009).
[7] Robinson (1999).
[8] Keith (1999).
[9] Salzman-Mitchell (2005), e.g. 34 ff.
[10] James (2019), 35, 36.
[11] James (2019), 36.
[12] James (2019).

In this thesis I will close read the text, paying particular attention to the representation of and play with gender roles and cultural expectations about gender, including the role of intertextuality. I will draw upon the earlier research in addition to my close reading of the text. Moreover, I will add to the debate, by discussing the role of the speech and similes in the gender play more elaborately.

In the first chapter I will provide a running commentary of the story, including, but not limited to the use of several mythical allusions. In the second chapter I will discuss the genderplay in Salmacis' speech, by the intertextuality with Odyssey' speech. In chapter three I will discuss the gender play by the intertextuality of the similes.

# Chapter 1 – Analysis of the Salmacis & Hermaphroditus-scene (*Met*. 4.285-388)

## 1.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze the Salmacis & Hermaphroditus-scene (*Metamorphoses* 4.285-388), paying particular attention to the representation of and play with gender roles and cultural expectations about gender. To that end, I will provide a running commentary of the story. The story can be divided in several parts, which I will comment on in succession: abstract (4.285-287), orientation (4.288-315), first complication, peak and resolution (4.315-340), second complication, peak and resolution (4.340-386), and coda (4.387-388).[13]

## 1.2. Context

The story is told in a context of gender ambiguity and confusion. The narrator is Alcithoë, one of Minyas' daughters, who are weaving and telling stories. They are refusing to take part in the rites of Bacchus (*Met*. 4.1ff), while the other women obey and leave their usual tasks (4.9-10). Bacchus makes men and women mix together, when they celebrate his rites (*Met*. 3.528-530).[14] Moreover, he has an ambiguous appearance, having features of both a boy (*puer aeternus*, *Met*. 4.18) and a maiden (*virgineum caput est*, *Met*. 4.20).

The sisters display gender ambiguous behaviour: they refuse to act like the other women, but at the same time, they act as women usually should. Weaving was women's work in antiquity and the performance of household duties determined a woman's worth and praise.[15] Additionally, the sisters refuse to participate in the crossing of social boundaries and sexes.[16] They are also speaking, although women were supposed to be silent.[17] After the story, Bacchus turns Alcithoë and her sisters into bats (4.389ff).

## 1.3. Running commentary

### 1.3.1 Abstract (4.285-287)

In the abstract, Alcithoë explains that the story is an aetiology: the story will make clear why the spring of Salmacis is infamous and why it weakens and softens everyone who enters it. The description

[13] The evaluative elements occur throughout the story. See on this structure of narrative Allan, Buijs (2007), 111ff, Labov (1972), 362-370, Fleischman (1990), 135-154.
[14] Keith (1999), 220.
[15] Keith (2009), 367.
[16] Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 160.
[17] Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 161. Sharrock (2002), 100-101.

*infamis* (4.285) is 'a general reference to notoriety of any kind', not necessarily sexual.[18] This abstract focusses on the spring Salmacis (*undis,* 4.285 and *fontis,* 4.287), whereas it will become clear that Salmacis is both a nymph and the spring.

### 1.3.2. Orientation (4.288-315)

*The orientation contains an introduction on Hermaphroditus (4.288-295), the landscape (4.296-301) and the nymph (4.302-315). In this part, several aspects can be found of gender ambiguity and playing with expectations about the roles that the characters will play. The appearance of Hermaphroditus is ambiguous and he is on the verge of becoming an adult. The location is a* locus amoenus*, which prepares the audience for some sexual encounter. The nymph is extremely feminine in appearance but acts ambiguously, most clearly in her use of the gaze. Furthermore, she is a hybrid creature, being both nymph and spring.*

First, a boy, *puer*, is introduced (288ff). He is the son of Mercury and Venus (4.288). Therefore, he is a god, which is not made more explicit than his parentage. The boy has facial characteristics of both his mother and father and his name, which is not mentioned until after the metamorphosis (4.383), derives from their names (4.290-291). He is fifteen years old (*tria quinqennia*, 4.292), a 'special age of adolescents when, to poet and lover, it was hard to decide whether they were male or female'.[19] This recalls the earlier description of Narcissus by Ovid in book 3.350-351 (*ter ad quinos unum* […] *annum* 3.351; *poteratque puer iuvenisque videri*, 3.352). Hermaphroditus' ambiguous appearance foreshadows the eventual metamorphosis through which the masculine and feminine are definitively mixed.[20] However, it is also a first indication of ambiguity of gender and (the expectation of) gender roles.[21] Additionally, the boy is on the age between childhood and manhood. Roman boys were considered men when their fathers decided they 'had reached manhood on the basis of the physical changes to [their] body', which was mostly around the age of fourteen or fifteen.[22] The transition to adulthood was accompanied by rituals. They marked the point after which the young men started their public life and were considered capable of penetrative sex.[23] In our story, the boy, around the age of transition, leaves his native home and starts wandering through unknown areas (4.292-295), so we are clearly dealing with a boy who is on the verge of this transition. Furthermore, his travels resemble

[18] Anderson (1997), 443.
[19] Anderson (1997), 444.
[20] E.g. Anderson (1997), 444, Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 161.
[21] Robinson (1999), 217, n. 36.
[22] Laes (2014), 55.
[23] Laes (2014), 55, 57.

those of the heroes Odysseus and Aeneas, so he is compared here, to a male hero.[24] Therefore, this first description of Hermaphroditus already indicates some aspects of gender ambiguity and expected roles.

We keep following the boy as he arrives at the landscape, which is now introduced (4.296-301). He comes to the Carians, where he sees a spring. Hermaphroditus is the focalizer, here (*videt*, 4.297). The spring has clear water to the bottom (*stagnum lucentis ad imum usque solum lymphae,* 4.297-298, 'a spring with clear water to the deep bottom').[25] It does not have marshy plants, infertile reed or sharp points (4.298-299). On the shore, fertile grass and green herbage grow (*stagni tamen ultima vivo caespite cinguntur semperque virentibus herbis,* 4.300-301, 'but the borders of the spring are surrounded by living grass and always green herbage'). The spring seems to be a '*locus amoenus*-an idyllic yet menacing spot'.[26] In such a clear spring, virginity can be both reflected and threatened.[27] The clear water is a pleasant place to swim, but also 'makes a nude swimmer strikingly lovely'.[28] The landscape reminds the reader of other instances in the *Metamorphoses* in which gods assault girls, such as the rape of Callisto by Jupiter. The nymph is ravished by the god in a forest, on a grassy spot (2.417ff). The *locus amoenus* motif also occurs, for instance, in the story of the rape of Arethusa by the rivergod Alpheius, which takes place after the nymph bathes in a clear spring (*perspicuas ad humum*, 5.588).[29] The landscape also resembles the spring that Narcissus finds (*fons erat inlimis* 3.407; *gramen erat circa* 3.411) and in which he falls in love with his reflection, after Echo tries to win him over. This resemblance could therefore, foreshadow the sexual encounter with a nymph.[30] There is no way to anticipate at this point, however, that Salmacis, by contrast with Echo, will become aggressive. Moreover, the landscape also resembles the spring in which Diana bathes after hunting, when Actaeon accidentally sees her and is turned into a stag (3.155ff).[31] At this point it is not completely clear whether a sexual encounter will take place and if so, who will attack whom.

The story continues with the introduction of a nymph, living in this landscape (4.302). At this point the reader may still expect various scenarios. Hermaphroditus could become the attacker of the nymph, considering that most nymphs that occur earlier in the *Metamorphoses* were virgin huntresses, whose virginity was threatened: Daphne was attacked by Phoebus (1.472ff), Io by Jupiter (1.588ff) Syrinx by satyrs and Pan (1.689ff) and Callisto by Jupiter (2.409ff).[32] The nymph might think

[24] Keith (1999), 217.
[25] All translations are my own.
[26] Liveley (2011), 58.
[27] Anderson (1997), 444.
[28] Anderson (1997), 444.
[29] Bömer (1976), 110, Anderson (1997), 444.
[30] See also Liveley (2011), 58.
[31] Marturano (2017), 310.
[32] Robinson (1999), 217.

Hermaphroditus is a woman and, like Callisto, not see an attacker for what he really is.[33] Echo, unlike the other nymphs, loves and approaches Narcissus (3.370ff), so in this scenario, Hermaphroditus may be pursued by the nymph.[34] An Actaeon-scenario is, that Hermaphroditus will accidentally see a nymph bathing and may suffer for it.

The switch of the gaze and focalization may give an indication. In most scenes discussed before, the god is said to see the nymph and then to pursue her.[35] In Echo's case the female nymph appropriates the male gaze, when looking at her victim Narcissus (*Narcissum […] vidit,* 3.370-371). Even the mortal Actaeon is the one who accidentally gazes at Diana (*viso […] viro*, 3.178-179, *visae [...] Dianae,* 3.185). In the current scene, Hermaphroditus sees the spring (*videt hic stagnum, 4.297*). He is the subject of the gaze. As will become clear hereafter, the nymph is the spring. The boy therefore is looking at a nymph, although he does not know that yet. Hermaphroditus is also the focalizer. However, when the nymph is introduced, she becomes the focalizer (4.302ff, *vidit* 4.316), which 'disrupts the normative sexual hierarchy of epic'.[36] This foreshadows a different course of events from the male gods gazing at and attacking the female characters.

Indeed, the nymph straightaway turns out to be quite different from the usual virgin huntresses. She is described at length (4.302-314) and '- unlike the male sexual abusers before her - she faces intense objectification of her body [from line 4.310ff] from the narrator' .[37] She is not used to bend the bow, does not compete in running and is unknown to Diana (4.302-304). She is criticized by the other nymphs and encouraged to take up her quiver and mix her *otia* with hunting (4.305-307), in other words, to behave like a nymph should. Still, she rather bathes in her own pool (4.310), combs her hair (4.311), looks in the reflecting water to see if she looks nice (4.312), or lays on the soft grass or soft herbage, dressed in transparent garments (4.313-314). This description of the nymph is part of the gendered context and the play with gender roles in several ways.

First, several characteristics of the nymph resemble the characteristics of the spring: the spring lacks accessories customary to an Ovidian pool, such as 'reeds, sedge, and rushes with sharp points'.[38] The nymph lacks characteristics customary to nymphs in Ovid's work: she does not hunt and lacks sharp hunting equipment.[39] Moreover, the spring is transparent (*perspicuus liquor*, 4.300), as is the nymph's clothing (*perlucenti* […] *amictu*, 4.313).[40] Additionally, the adjective *mollibus* is used to

[33] Robinson (1999), 217.
[34] Robinson (1999), 217, n. 38.
[35] Phoebus loves Daphne at sight and gazes upon her (1.490ff), Jupiter sees Io returning from her father's stream (1.588), Pan sees Syrinx returning from Mount Lycaeus (1.698-699), Jupiter sees Callisto resting (2.422). See also Anderson (1997), 446.
[36] Keith (1999), 218.
[37] Marturano (2017), 306.
[38] Keith (1999), 218.
[39] Keith (1999), 218.
[40] Keith (1999), 217, 218.

describe the grass on which the nymphs lays down (*mollibus aut foliis aut mollibus incubat herbis 4.314*), but also 'defines the soft, sensuous interests of Salmacis that contrast sharply with the hard [*duris venatibus*, 4.309], chaste athleticism of the hunt'.[41] The landscape therefore, can be seen as 'feminized'.[42] This is stressed by the nymph's feminine focus on appearance and indolence. Her occupations resemble that of 'elegiac courtesans, ready for a lover'.[43] She 'exhibits the leisure-time behaviour of a young Roman lady in Ovid's day'.[44] Thus, both the nymph and the landscape are described as very feminine.

Second, these similarities stress that Salmacis is a hybrid creature: she is both a nymph and a spring, although this is not made explicit. This also foreshadows her hybrid behaviour throughout the story. She already shows some hybrid behaviour, for she does what other nymphs do not: paying (much) attention to her looks and rejecting the hunt. The adjective *formosos* (4.310) moreover, 'common in the descriptions of elegiac beauties, alerts us for (sic) erotic events'.[45] Anderson states that Salmacis' behaviour indicates that 'she does not avoid the haunts of men, does not fanatically dedicate herself to virginity', but she is 'entirely open to love, sex and marriage'.[46] According to Robinson '[h]er polar opposition to the life of hunting suggests a similar opposition to the life of virginity'.[47] The fact that she does not act like the usual nymphs, however, does not necessarily mean that she is open to an encounter with just any man. She only wants Hermaphroditus, as will become clear at the end (4.371-372). Moreover, she seems to be self- absorbed and living isolated.[48] She may not be like her fellow nymphs, but is neither actively searching for a man. Her unusual way of living does make the audience wonder however, what role she will play.

Third, it is striking that she looks at herself in her pool (*quid se deceat, spectatas consulit undas, 4.*312, 'she consults the watched waters what suits her'). She becomes the object and the subject of her own gaze. In this way, she exhibits both male and female roles.[49]

It is clear, that this part of the story shows various aspects of the ambiguities and play with gender roles. Not only is Salmacis a hybrid in form, she also does not adhere to the role a nymph should have and she shows some male and female characteristics and behaviour.

The complex features of Salmacis are enhanced when she is said to pick flowers frequently (4.315). This is an epic motif of nymphs and girls, raped in a meadow.[50] This motif enhances Salmacis'

[41] Anderson (1997), 446.
[42] Keith (1999), 218.
[43] Anderson (1997), 446. See also Keith (2009), 362.
[44] Anderson (1997), 445.
[45] Anderson (1997), 445. See also Keith (2009), 362.
[46] Anderson (1997), 445.
[47] Robinson (1999), 218.
[48] James (2019), 40, 41.
[49] Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 161.
[50] Keith (2009), 362.

ambiguity: is she a vulnerable girl after all?[51] Will she be attacked by the male god? James seems to imply that at this point the audience knows that Salmacis will soon 'mimic the predatory sexuality of male gods'.[52] As I have shown however, we are not sure of this yet.

### 1.3.3. First complication, peak and resolution (4.315-340): First meeting

*The first complication, the building up of tension, starts, with the* cum-*inversum structure that brings both characters together for the first time.[53] Thereafter, the tension builds up from the approach and speech by the nymph, to the first peak (the boy's affronted reaction to the speech, 4.336) and first resolution (Salmacis pretends to go away, 4.337-340 ).[54] In this part both the nymph and Hermaphroditus show features and behaviours, that switch from male to female several times.*

Instantly after the nymph's introduction, she is said to pick flowers when she sees the boy and wants to have him (*et tum quoque forte legebat, cum puerum vidit visumque optavit habere*, 4.315-316, 'and then, by chance, she was also picking flowers, when she saw the boy and wished to have what she saw'). She has become the focalizer (*vidit*, 4.316), instead of the boy (*videt* 4.297). The boy is no longer the subject of the gaze, the nymph is now the subject of the gaze (*vidit*) and the boy has become the object of her gaze (*visumque*).[55] The repetition of the verb *videre* as past participle accusative (4.316) (the rhetorical device *anadiplosis*) stresses the switch in the subject and object of the gaze.[56] Salmacis' role becomes clear now: she will be the predator, like Echo. Her role as attacker is also stressed by the love at first sight she shows, which only triggered rapist males (e.g. Phoebus 1.490) and Echo (3.371), so far.[57] She now becomes the huntress, starting her hunt with a speech, not with violence. Salmacis' desire will be excessive, which 'marks its abnormality'.[58]

Before she approaches the boy, Salmacis contains and prepares herself. She wants to appear beautiful (4.317-319). This is not merely a feminine thing to do. Mercury, for instance, Hermaphroditus' father, displayed similar behaviour when approaching Herse (*Met*. 2.732 ff.).[59] This behaviour evokes 'the courtly world of Augustan Rome'.[60] It is notable though, that Salmacis prepares

[51] E.g. Anderson (1997), 446, Robinson (1999), 218.
[52] James (2019), 43.
[53] On the cum-inversum structure, e.g. Anderson (1997), 446.
[54] On complication, peak and resolution, Allan, Buijs (2007), 111.
[55] Keith (1999), 218. See also Marturano (2017), 308.
[56] Anderson (1997), 156, 446.
[57] Anderson (1997), 446.
[58] Richlin, (1992), 165.
[59] Robinson (1999), 218, Anderson (1997), 446.
[60] Anderson (1997), 446. Cf. Bömer (1976), who refers to this theme as part of the erotic poetry of the Augustan age, 114.

to 'offer herself' to the gaze of the boy (*meruit formosa videri, 4.319)*.[61] This would make her a passive object, instead of the active perpetrator. Nonetheless, her sexual intentions are clear. The adjective *formosa* stresses this, for instance, for it is especially used for elegiac heroines and therefore 'indicates the amatory purposes of Salmacis'.[62] The phrase *finxit vultum* (4.319) is also striking. It can have a negative meaning of *falsum formare* and *simulare,* but Bömer states that it is here positively used, and does not have parallels.[63] I rather argue, that it has a negative connotation here: Salmacis becomes an aggressor in disguise and maliciously plays the lovable, innocent and virginal nymph. Eventually, she will not be completely able to persist in this role of the perpetrator.[64]

After preparing herself, Salmacis does not attack the boy, but first gives a speech to him (4.320-328). The speech is reminiscent of Odysseus' speech to Nausicaa, which is a clear example of the gender play. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

When she completes her speech, the boy blushes (*pueri rubor ora notavit, 4.329)*, for he does not know what love is (*nescit enim quid amor, 4.*330), which marks his innocence. The play with gender roles proceeds: the girl declares her love, the boy blushes.[65] The boy is portrayed as a virginal, passive creature, while the nymph is active.[66] His blush makes him even more attractive (*erubuisse decebat*, 4.330).[67] The blush is emphasized by comparisons with the colour of apples hanging in the sun, painted ivory, and the eclipse of the moon (4.331-334).[68] Both the ivory and moon similes are rare.[69] It seems, therefore, that not only the blush is stressed, as Anderson suggests, but also the unusualness and novelty of the situation.[70]

Now, Salmacis begs for at least sisterly kisses (*poscenti* […] *sororia saltem oscula 4.334-335*) and tries to wrap her arms around Hermaphroditus' neck (4.334-335). The phrase *sororia saltem/oscula* is a literary novelty.[71] This stresses the novelty of the nymphs' behaviour. Moreover, the phrase emphasizes ambiguity in roles: *poscenti* […] *sororia oscula* can mean begging for kisses *for* a sister or kisses *from* a sister, making it unclear whether Salmacis wants to kiss the boy or wants to be kissed by him. Furthermore, according to Anderson, the phrase must have been 'a common topos in

[61] Keith (1999), 219.
[62] Anderson (1997), 446.
[63] E.g. Cicero, *Pro Cluentio*, 72, *recordamini faciem atque illos eius fictos simulatosque vultus, '*you remember his face and those false and feigned expressions'. Bömer (1976), 114.
[64] See also Keith (1999), 219.
[65] Bömer (1976), 117, Marturano (2017), 309, 310.
[66] James (2019), 43.
[67] Anderson (1997), 448.
[68] Anderson (1997), 448.
[69] Bömer (1976), 117, 118.
[70] Anderson (1997), 448.
[71] Anderson (1997), 448. Bömer (1976), 118.

Rome, as it is in the modern world, for chaste affection'.[72] So, Salmacis tries to reach her erotic goals by deception.[73]

The boy takes matters into his own hand and threatens to go away if she does not stop (*"desinis, an fugio tecumque" ait "ista relinquo?", 4.*336, "do you stop, or do I flee" he said "and leave you and this place?"). This threat contains a reference to the hybrid form of Salmacis (*tecumque* and *ista*), which the boy still does not know.[74] Hermaphroditus resembles the goddess Diana in several ways, here: he is a virgin and here, he 'plays the role of the affronted deity', feeling 'violated by the unexpected gaze', like Diana (*Met*. 3.185ff).[75] Although earlier he showed features of the male figure Actaeon, we now see resemblances to the female goddess. On the other hand, he may think he controls the situation: Salmacis is frightened by the threat and says she will leave him (4.337). She now calls the boy *hospes* (4.338) instead of addressing him as Cupid (4.321) or a brother.[76] However, she pretends to go away (*simulatque gradu discedere verso*, 4.337). She keeps looking back at him and she is still the subject of the gaze (*tum quoque respiciens,* 4.339). Then, she hides in the bushes (*delituit*, 4.340).

### 1.3.4. Second complication, peak and resolution: the attack and metamorphosis (4.340-386)

*The second complication (4.340-355) starts with a focus shift to the boy (*at ille*, 4.340). The peak consists of the attack and fight (4.356-372), the resolution of the metamorphosis and Hermaphroditus' last wish (4.372-386). In this part, a play between the water, Salmacis' other form, and the boy unfolds. Furthermore, Salmacis again has a male role, gazing at the boy. The boy is the object of the gaze and the description of his body plays with the gender ambiguity of his age, future and his role in the attack. In the peak, Salmacis turns out not to be able to maintain her male role. The play with the boy's adulthood continues. Both characters become one male and female body.*

The focus suddenly goes to the boy (*at ille*, 4.340). While Salmacis hides in the bushes (and is still looking at him (considering *respiciens*, 4.339), the boy thinks he is not looked at (*ut inobservatus, 4.*341). A play with the water, the other form of the nymph, starts. Although the playing of water (*adludentibus undis, 4.342*), was not uncommon in Latin poetry, here, a seductive play unfolds.[77] The boy first puts his toes in the water and then his feet (*in adludentibus undis summa pedum taloque tenus vestigia tingit*, 4.342-343, 'he dips his toes and his feet up to his ankle in the playing waters'). He

[72] Anderson (1997), 448.
[73] Anderson (1997), 448.
[74] Anderson (1997), 448.
[75] James (2015), 45.
[76] Anderson (1997), 449.
[77] Anderson (1997), 449.

is captivated by the temperature of the pleasant water (*temperie blandarum captus aquarum,* 4.344). The water is to Hermaphroditus, what the nymph would like to be to him: pleasant.[78] The watery part of Salmacis has now won the boy over. He rejected the nymph, but is at the same time attracted to her in her watery form.[79] This is stressed by the structure of line 4.344: the word *captus* is surrounded by the pleasant water *blandarum […] aquarum*. Importantly, it is mentioned that he acts like a boy, when playing with the water (*ut puer*, 4.341), perhaps indicating that he acts male at the start of the seductive play, before he becomes captured.

The boy then takes off his clothes without further delay (*nec mora* […] *mollia de tenero velamina corpore ponit*, 4.344-345, 'without delay […] he lays down the soft garments from his youthful body'). The adjective *mollis,* used to describe his clothes, refers to softness. Softness was a female characteristic. When a man was called *mollis*, this referred to effeminacy, which could involve many features, such as body, voice and luxury.[80] The word *tener* is used in a similar way.[81] The use of the words, and other words referring to effeminacy, was also used to refer to sexual practices, such as a passive sexual role.[82] A passive sexual role was associated with women, an active one with men.[83] Seneca the Younger, for instance, mentioned that women were born to be penetrated (*pati natae*, *Epistles* 95.21).[84] However, whereas for men an effeminate look was negative, for youth is could be considered charming.[85] It is clear that a play with the boy's appearance is going on. His appearance is feminine due to his age, but it also foreshadows his appearance after the metamorphosis and his passive role in the attack.[86]

At the moment the boy takes off his clothes, he is even more pleasing to Salmacis (*tum vero placuit*, 4.346). The nymph burns with desire (*Salmacis exarsit, 4.347)* and her eyes shine like the sun, reflected in a mirror (*flagrant quoque lumina nymphae*, 4.347-349). Her reaction is emphasized by the two synonymous verbs *exarsit* and *flagrant*.[87] The sun-simile to describe the shining of Salmacis' eyes, is reminiscent of the reflecting water in which the nymph looked at her appearance (*spectatas consulit undas,* 4.312)[88] It refers again to Salmacis' hybrid being: her eyes (as a nymph) are reflecting like her water (as a spring). The image of fire also signifies the nymphs' sexual desire.[89] Salmacis can now barely

[78] Anderson (1997), 449.
[79] See also Salzman-Mitchell (2005), 32.
[80] Edwards (1993), 63ff, 78, 81, 82. See e.g. Seneca the Elder, *Controversiae* 1. Praef.8-9.
[81] Edwards (1993), 83. E.g. Juvenal, *Satire* 6.365.24.
[82] Robinson (1999), 213. Manwell (2007), 114, Richlin (1993), 531.
[83] Edwards (1993), 70ff.
[84] Richlin (1993), 531, Edwards (1993), 87, 88.
[85] Williams (2010), 203. E.g. Tibullus, *Elegies* 1.4.9-14 (*at illi virgineus teneras stat pudor ante genas*, 1.4.13-14, 'and to him, maidenly modesty marks his soft cheeks').
[86] See on *mollis* as prediction of the boy's future state also, Marturano (2017), 312, 313.
[87] Anderson (1997), 449.
[88] Keith (1999), 218.
[89] Anderson (1997), 449.

endure any delay (*vixque moram patitur*, 4.350) and wants to hold the boy (4.350-351). The word *amens* (4.351) shows that she has lost her *mens*, because of her lust.[90] The boy dives into the spring and starts swimming, which makes him shine in the water (4.353-354). With two similes, the covering of ivory or lilies with glass, the desirability of the boy is emphasized (4.353-355).[91] In the light of the active and passive sexual roles, we could say the boy is now penetrating the watery form of Salmacis, although unknowingly, hence playing the active role. The word *patitur* (4.350) makes us aware of this.

Salmacis can now not hold herself back anymore and jumps in the water (4.356-357). A battle starts (4.358-360). This struggle is amplified with three similes, a snake entangling an eagle, that grasped it, ivy entwining a tree, and an octopus holding on to its prey (4.361-367). They enhance the genderplay and power struggle that is going on. The attack, fight and the similes will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

When the boy keeps resisting (*perstat,* 4.368), the nymph entangles him even more, as if she is attached to him (*sicut inhaerebat*, 4.370), and threatens he will never flee from her (*pugnes licet* […] *non tamen effugies*, 4.370-371). Moreover, she calls him *improbe* (4.370). By doing so, she says what a victim would normally be expected to say to an attacker, again a reversal of roles.[92] In this way Salmacis acts like a victim again, but she also threatens her victim, like an attacker would do. It further shows that she may not be able to continue her position as attacker and may start losing the power struggle. She therefore asks the gods for help and wishes never to be separated from Hermaphroditus (*istum nulla dies a me nec me diducat ab isto,* 4.371-372, 'may no day separate him from me or separate me from him').

The gods grant her this wish and the metamorphosis takes place: their bodies are mixed together, with one face for both (4.373-375). With this metamorphosis, the play with gender ambiguity continues: two bodies are now one and it is not a feminine body, nor a boy's body (*nec femina dici nec puer ut possit,* 4.378-379). Both figures, who showed ambiguity in their appearance and behaviour, have now become one gender ambiguous body. The nymph Salmacis disappears from the story now.

A simile illustrates this merging of the bodies. The bodies mix like two branches when they are put together and grow together (4.375-376). The word that is used for their growing is *adolescere* (4.376). This simile is placed in the middle of the metamorphosis. This is striking when remembering that Hermaphroditus is still a boy who at the start of the story seems to go through a rite of passage. He turns out not to grow into a man, but into a mixed being. Some sort of rite of passage takes place, but it is not in the way it could be expected. This is stressed by the fact that the boy has been called *puer* since the beginning of the story, even until after the metamorphosis (*nec puer,* 4.379). When the

[90] Anderson (1997), 450.
[91] Anderson (1997), 450.
[92] Bömer (1976), 128, Anderson (1997), 452.

boy realizes he has changed into a half-man (*semimarem, 4.*381), then, the word *vir* occurs for the first time and it is used twice:

> *ergo ubi se liquidas, quo vir descenderat, undas*
> *semimarem fecisse videt mollitaque in illis*
> *membra, manus tendens, sed iam non voce virili*
> *Hermaphroditus ait […]* – Ovid*, Metamorphoses* 4.380-382
>
> When thus, he sees that the flowing waters, in which he descended a man,
> Have made him a half-man and his limbs have become soft in them,
> Hermaphroditus, raising his hands, said, but no longer with a manly voice […]

The boy is now described as having been a man, not just a boy, at the point he lost his masculinity irrevocably.[93] The boy's name, Hermaphroditus, is also mentioned for the first time. Hermaphroditus wishes (4.384-386) that any man that enters the spring will become a half-man (*semivir,* 4.386) and effeminate (*mollescat*, 4.386).

### 1.3.5. Coda (4.387-388)

The boy's parents are moved by the plea of their two-formed son (*nati* […] *biformis*, 4.387) and impregnate the spring with the defiled power (*incesto* […] *medicamine*, 4.388). With this, the aetiology is explained and Alicthoë's story ends.

Several scholars have raised questions concerning the connection between the aetiology (the water making men weak or effeminized (*mollis*)) and the metamorphosis (which made Hermaphroditus and the nymph one androgynous being), and concerning the interpretation of the nymph's disappearance.[94] Concerning the terminology, questions rise about the meaning (androgynous or effeminate) of the adjectives, *semimas* (4.381), *semivir* (4.386) and *biformis* (4.387). They may refer to the androgynous being Hermaphroditus and Salmacis become. The words *semivir* and *semimas*, may have the same connotation as *mollitia*, but it remains unclear.[95] *Biformis* may refer

[93] Keith (1999), 220.
[94] Anderson (1997), 454-455, Bömer (1976), 103, 104, 131, 132, Robinson (1999), 220, 221.
[95] In Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 31.12.8 the word *semimas* seems to have the meaning androgynous. In Ovid it does not mean androgynous, but often seems to mean castrated (e.g. Ovid, *Fasti* 1.588) and effeminate (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12.506). *Semivir*, seems to mean the same as *semimas*, considering the repetition of the adjective *mollis* in 4.381 and 4.386. It is used in Ovid to describe creatures that are half human/half animal, but it does not refer to androgyny, e.g. Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 2.24). See Bömer (1976), 130-132 and Robinson (1999), 213, 220.

to androgynous bodies (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.64), but it was also used to describe creatures that were half animal/half human (*Met*. 2.664).[96]

The abovementioned difficulties are not easily solved. We may for now suffice with the following. The boy and the nymph are mixed to one gender ambiguous body. The boy's age and his possible transition to manhood are significant. He was effeminate, being a young boy, but never became a man, he became a half-man. His ambiguous, effeminate features become eternal. The boys' plea for the curse, is connected to his misfortune: he was not able to enter adult manhood, so those who have become adult men, should become less male. We should also keep in mind the nymph's hybrid form. Her nymph part mixes with the boy. She is 'unable to sustain the role of masculine subject', just as Hermaphroditus is unable to achieve 'full masculine subjectivity'.[97] Although she tried, she is not able to become the active male attacker. Her punishment for transgressing the lines of gender is the loss of her body and voice, the loss of subjectivity: the attacker 'ends up violated and certainly silenced', like female figures such as Philomela, Callisto and Io.[98] Her watery form remains. The only part of the nymph that was able to affect and attract the boy, will now affect other men.

## 1.4. Conclusion

We have seen how Ovid represents and plays with gender roles in this story. From the beginning to the end, we see confusions of gender roles in both characters. Main points are the gender ambiguous features of the boy and the hybrid form and behaviour of Salmacis. The nymph is portrayed as extremely feminine, but she tries to act male. Her watery form is able to seduce the boy, whereas her nymph form is not. The boy shows male and female behaviour in the ecounters with the nymph and the water. In combination with references to other stories in the *Metamorphoses* and novelties in his language use, Ovid continuously plays with the expectations of the audience.

[96] Bömer (1976), 131.
[97] Keith (1999), 220.
[98] James (2019), 57.

# Chapter 2 – Salmacis' speech (*Met.* 4.320-328)

## 2.1. Introduction

We have seen how Ovid plays with (expectations of) gender roles and gender ambiguity. Salmacis' speech to Hermaphroditus (4.320-328) is a clear example of this play. An important aspect is the intertextual, literary play with Odysseus' famous speech to Nausicaa in Homer's Odyssey (6.149ff), which will be discussed in this chapter. First, I will shortly describe the context of Odysseus' speech. Second, I will compare the speeches. Third, I will discuss the speeches in the light of the play with gender roles and expectations about gender roles.

## 2.2. Context of Odysseus' speech

Odysseus has landed on Phaeacia. He is shipwrecked and lies naked in the bushes. Athena plans a way to get Odysseus help, to get him home. She appears, disguised as a friend, in a dream of Nausicaa, the daughter of the Phaeacian king Alkinoös. Athena tells Nausicaa to wash her clothes in the river and prepare for marriage. When the princess has washed the clothes, she plays with a ball with her servants, waking Odysseus. Odysseus realizes he came to a strange land and goes to the princess, hoping to get help. At this point, he gives his speech.

## 2.3. Comparison of the speeches

Salmacis starts her speech as follows:[99]

> *'Tum sic orsa loqui: "puer o dignissime credi*
> *esse deus, seu tu deus est, potes esse Cupido,* – Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.320-321

> Then she spoke like this: 'boy, most worthy of being thought to be a god,
> if you are a god, you could be Cupid,

This start is quite similar, although less elaborate, to that of Odysseus's speech:

> "Γουνοῦμαί σε, ἄνασσα· θεός νύ τις, ἦ βροτός ἐσσι;
> εἰ μέν τις θεός ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,
> Ἀρτέμιδί σε ἐγώ γε, Διὸς κούρῃ μεγάλοιο,
> εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε φυήν τ᾽ ἄγχιστα ἐΐσκω· – Homer, *Odyssey* 6. 149-152

[99] In the appendix both speeches are printed next to each other.

I beg you, queen, are you some goddess, or are you mortal?
If you are a goddess, those who hold the wide heaven,
I consider you most alike Artemis, the daughter of mighty Zeus,
With respect to form and greatness and stature:

Odysseus starts his speech by making clear that he is a supplicant (Γουνοῦμαί) and addresses Nausicaa, using a word applied to goddesses, in Homer (ἄνασσα), and thus showing respect.[100] Salmacis is straightforward and addresses the boy as *puer*. Both Salmacis and Odysseus compare the person they address to a divine creature. Odysseus shows that he does not know whether he is speaking to a goddess or a human. He first mentions the option that the girl is a goddess and could be Artemis with respect to three qualities. Salmacis does not ask the question but instantly states that the boy could be a god, namely Cupid. She does not make explicit why, in opposition to Odysseus.

Salmacis then proposes the option, that her addressee is human:

*sive es mortalis, qui te genuere, beati*
*et frater felix et fortunata profecto*
*si qua tibi soror est, et quae dedit ubera nutrix;* – Ovid*, Metamorphoses* 4.322-324

if you are mortal, those who have given birth to you, are blessed,
and your brother is lucky and your sister is truly fortunate,
if you have a sister, and the nurse who gave you her breast;

This is again reminiscent of Odysseus speech:

εἰ δέ τίς ἐσσι βροτῶν, τοὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσι,
τρισμάκαρες μὲν σοί γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
τρισμάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι· μάλα πού σφισι θυμὸς
αἰὲν ἐϋφροσύνῃσιν ἰαίνεται εἵνεκα σεῖο,
λευσσόντων τοιόνδε θάλος χορὸν εἰσοιχνεῦσαν. – Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.153-157.

If you are one of the mortals, those who dwell on the earth,
most fortunate are your father and your honorable mother,

[100] Garvie (1994), 120. Heubeck, West, Hainsworth (1988), 303.

most fortunate are your brothers: doubtless, their heart
is always warmed with joy because of you,
when they are looking at you, such a child, entering the dance.

This part of Odysseus' speech is more elaborate than the resembling part of Salmacis' speech. Odysseus states that Nausicaa's family must be fortunate, because of her entering the dance. Furthermore, the people that Odysseus and Salmacis mention, differ: Odysseus mentions father, mother and brothers, whereas Salmacis adds a sister and a nurse. Salmacis does not explain why the family is fortunate, but does imply a reason in her elaboration on the *nutrix*, being the one who gave Hermaphroditus her breast (4.324).

Thereafter, Salmacis describes the most fortunate of all, the boy's (future) wife:

*sed longe cunctis longeque beatior illis,*
*si qua tibi sponsa est, si quam dignabere taeda.* – Ovid*, Metamorphoses* 4.325-326

but most of all and far more blessed than them, is she,
if you have a wife, if you will deem someone worthy of the torch.

This also resembles the next part in Odysseus's speech:

κεῖνος δ᾽ αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
ὅς κέ σ᾽ ἐέδνοισι βρίσας οἶκόνδ᾽ ἀγάγηται. – Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.158-159

He again, is most blessed in his heart, outstanding all,
Who will lead you to his house, having prevailed with dowries.

The first verse closely follows the speech of Odysseus. The second verse of Salmacis' speech differs: not only is the gender of the spouse changed, but also does she mention both a future wife (*si quam dignabere taeda*) and the possibility of a current wife (*si qua tibi sponsa est*).

Salmacis then ends her speech with a straightforward proposal:

*haec tibi sive aliqua est, mea sit furtiva voluptas,*

*seu nulla est, ego sim, thalamumque ineamus eundem.''* – Ovid*, Metamorphoses* 4.327-328

If there is someone like this for you, let my pleasure be hidden,
if there is none, let me be your wife, let us go into the same marriage bed.

At this point, Salmacis' speech does not follow Odysseus' speech anymore. After mentioning the fortunate husband of Nausicaa, Odysseus stresses her beauty again:

οὐ γάρ πω τοιοῦτον ἐγὼ ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
οὔτ᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ οὔτε γυναῖκα· σέβας μ᾽ ἔχει εἰσορόωντα. – Homer, *Odyssey* 6. 160-161

For until now, I have never seen with my eyes,
Such a man or woman: admiration holds me, looking at you.

Odysseus' speech then proceeds with a simile to describe her beauty (6.162-169). Thereafter, he describes his troubles, which is followed by his plea to show him the city and give him clothes and by his wish for Nausicaa to receive her desires, a husband and a home (6.169-185).

## 2.4. Analysis of the speeches

### 2.4.1. Context Nausicaa

There are several differences and similarities between Nausicaa and Hermaphroditus and Nausicaa and Salmacis. These play an important role in the eventual intertextual play and genderplay in Salmacis' speech and show that the intertextual play is not limited to the speeches.

When Nausicaa is introduced, she is described as a beautiful girl alike to the goddess Athena (6.16). Her chastity and dignity are stressed by the two servants that are present in her room (6.18).[101] Nausicaa's virginity is further stressed when she is playing with a ball at the river, by a comparison with Artemis (6.102-109).[102] Nausicaa is approached by Athena, disguised as a friend of the princess, in a dream:

"Ναυσικάα, τί νύ σ᾽ ὧδε μεθήμονα γείνατο μήτηρ;
εἵματα μέν τοι κεῖται ἀκηδέα σιγαλόεντα,
σοὶ δὲ γάμος σχεδόν ἐστιν, ἵνα χρὴ καλὰ μὲν αὐτὴν
ἔννυσθαι, τὰ δὲ τοῖσι παρασχεῖν οἵ κέ σ᾽ ἄγωνται.

[101] Jong (2001), 153, Garvie (1994), 86.
[102] Jong (2001), 156.

ἐκ γάρ τοι τούτων φάτις ἀνθρώπους ἀναβαίνει
ἐσθλή, χαίρουσιν δὲ πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ.
ἀλλ᾽ ἴομεν πλυνέουσαι ἅμ᾽ ἠοῖ φαινομένηφι·
καί τοι ἐγὼ συνέριθος ἅμ᾽ ἕψομαι, ὄφρα τάχιστα
ἐντύνεαι, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι ἔτι δὴν παρθένος ἔσσεαι· – Homer, *Odyssey* 6.25-33

Nausicaa, how did your mother give birth to you, careless?
Your shining clothes lay uncared for,
A wedding is near for you, where you must dress with beautiful clothes, and provide clothes for them, who will lead you.
For because of these things, good glory comes to people,
And father and worthy mother rejoice.
But, let us go wash them as soon as dawn occurs:
And I will follow as a helper, in order that you will be ready
most quickly, since you will not be a maiden for long anymore:

The girl is at an age to get married and she is beautiful and chaste. This reminds us of the age and description of Hermaphroditus. An important difference between Nausicaa and Hermaphroditus is the expectation that Nausicaa's marriage is near, whereas Hermaphroditus does not know what love is (*Met*. 4.330). Nausicaa may reasonably think of marriage when Odysseus speaks to her, due to the message of Athena in her dream and later, because of the wish of Odysseus that she may have a happy marriage. She does indeed express the hope that she may have a husband like Odysseus, and that Odysseus would stay at Phaeacia (*Od.* 6.244-245). This expresses her hope that Odysseus will be her husband.[103] Thus, Odysseus' speech does have an amatory effect on Nausicaa.[104] At this point it is unclear for the audience how this love will develop.[105]

The way in which the girl is told to behave as she should, may remind us of the way in which Salmacis was urged by her sisters to act as a nymph should (*Met*. 4.305-306). Salmacis however does not follow the instructions of her sisters, whereas Nausicaa does listen and behaves as she should. This is also stressed by her further appropriate behaviour, such as not going to the river alone, but accompanied by her servants (6.84). After washing the clothes, bathing and eating, the girls throw off their headgear (κρήδεμνα βαλοῦσαι, 6.100), which is, according to Karakantza, a 'symbolic removal of

[103] Garvie (1994), 142.
[104] Anderson (1997), 446.
[105] Garvie (1994), 142.

chastity', and then play with a ball (6.93ff).[106] However, this does not mean that the girls consciously expose themselves to a potential sexual threat. As Garvie suggests, they rather 'unconsciously render themselves more vulnerable to any sexual advance', considering that they remove their headbands to be able to move more freely.[107] They do not become intentionally unchaste, which is again stressed by the comparison of Nausicaa to Artemis (6.102-109). Whereas both female characters have an amorous interest in a male character, Salmacis, unlike Nausicaa, will act unchaste and intentionally remove her chastity.

An intertextual play occurs in the context of the speeches. When the Odysseus-speech is recognized in Salmacis' speech, the audience may notice the characteristics of the girl Nausicaa in both Salmacis and Hermaphroditus.

### 2.4.2. Ambiguous roles of the speakers

Odysseus gives his speech in an ambiguous position. In the events leading up to the speech, he is both inferior, from the view of the audience and himself, and a threat, from the view of the girls. The landscape of the river Nausicaa goes to, implies that Odysseus may be a threat, in the eyes of Salmacis and the servants. The river is described as having beautiful water (ποταμοῖο ῥόον περικαλλέ᾽, 6.85) and being surrounded by sweet water grass (ἄγρωστιν μελιηδέα, 6.90). It is a 'traditional setting in which acts of sexual violence take place'.[108] Girls lack 'the protection of a civic place', in places like this.[109] However, as the audience already knows, Odysseus will not be a threat to Nausicaa and the servants. A reversed course of events will take place.

When Odysseus wakes up by the girls' screams, he, not knowing where he is (6.115ff), gets up and hides his nakedness with a leaf (6.127-129). He is compared to a mountain lion (λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, 6.130), trusting his strength (ἀλκὶ πεποιθώς, 6.130), worn out by rain and wind (ὐόμενος καὶ ἀήμενος 6.131), with blazing eyes (ὅσσε δαίεται, 6.131-132) and going into a flock, forced by his hunger to attack it (6.132-134). Through this lion-simile, it becomes clear for the audience, that Odysseus is reluctant to approach the girls.[110] He approaches the girls (ἔμελλε μίξεσθαι, 6.135-136), forced to do so by need, although he is naked (γυμνός περ ἐών· χρειὼ γὰρ ἵκανε, 6.136). The verb μίξεσθαι, can refer both to a context of battle, and to a context of sexual intercourse.[111]

The girls flee out of fear (6.138).[112] However, they seem to be more scared of his bewildered appearance, than of his nakedness (σμερδαλέος δ᾽ αὐτῇσι φάνη κεκακωμένος ἅλμῃ, 6.137, 'he

[106] Karakantza (2003), 19.
[107] Garvie (1994), 106.
[108] Karakantza (2003), 11.
[109] Karakantza (2003), 11, 12.
[110] Jong (2001), 158.
[111] Garvie (1994), 117.
[112] Garvie (1994), 117.

appeared terrible to them, wretched by sea-water').[113] The fleeing of the girls is, however, a *topos* of rape scenes in literature.[114] Nausicaa does not run away, for Athena gives her courage, and faces Odysseus (6.139-141).

Odysseus is in doubt about his approach: grasping the girl by her knees as a supplicant (γούνων λίσσοιτο λαβὼν, 6.142) or standing at a distance and beg her with soothing words (ἐπέεσσιν ἀποσταδὰ μειλιχίοισι λίσσοιτ', 6.143-144), in order that she would show him the city and give him clothes (6.144). He decides to do the latter, out of fear that the girl would be offended if he would hold her knees (μή οἱ γοῦνα λαβόντι χολώσαιτο φρένα κούρη, 6.145-147). Thus, just before and during the speech, there is a reversal of gender roles: the man is in an inferior position and the girl in a superior position.[115] This is however, from Odysseus' point of view. For Nausicaa and the girls, he could still be a threat.[116] His appearance and nakedness are reminiscent of lustful gods and creatures, who are threats for young girls.[117]

As seen in chapter one. Salmacis is also ambiguous. Her active role is a reversal of rape scenes. Her speech is another aspect of her ambiguity. Like Alcithoë, Salmacis speaks, and thus does not comply to the idea that women should be silent.[118] The fact that Salmacis uses a speech given by a male hero, seems to stress that it is a male occupation to speak and that Salmacis tries to take this male position. However, when considering the context of Odysseus' speech, it is clear that Odysseus gave his speech at a very unheroic moment, in an unheroic and inferior position. Thus, from the perspective of the audience, Salmacis' use of the speech undermines her own attempt to take the male, active role. This fits her other failing attempts to take the male role throughout the story. On the other hand this speech is an attempt to make the boy love her. In this way she is trying to take the inferior, supplicant position. We should keep in mind however, that it is unclear whether Salmacis is aware of the speech of Odysseus and uses it knowingly.[119] Ovid at least uses Homer's words to represent Salmacis as failing her speech, which plays with the expectations of the audience.

### 2.4.3. Intentions of the speeches

The purposes of both speeches differ. Odysseus' speech is not meant to seduce the girl, but to get her to help him and to get home. He anticipates on the age and expectations of marriage of the girl standing in front of him. His ideas resemble those of Athena. The audience knows why Odysseus

[113] See also Garvie (1994), 117.
[114] E.g. Karakantza (2003), 11.
[115] Karakantza (2003), 10.
[116] Karakantza (2003), 17, 18.
[117] Karakantza (2003), 11.
[118] See on women's silence, Sharrock (2002), 100-101.
[119] James states that Salmacis knows the story and that Hermaphroditus does not. James (2019), 44, 45.

approaches the girl as he does. The speech does have, however, unintentionally, an amatory effect on Nausicaa, which may have been increased by her expectations of a marriage. Eventually, Odysseus reaches his goal, gets helped by Nausicaa and goes home, but Nausicaa's wish is not fulfilled.

All elements of Odysseus' speech aim for his goal: he flatters the girl, instantly makes clear he is a supplicant and he compares her to Artemis because of the beauty and chastity of the goddess.[120] He explains that he thinks so because of her appearance. His detailed explanations are necessary to conciliate the girl. Due to his circumstances, moreover, he needs to ask whether she is divine, for it could be a goddess standing in front of him, considering the story of Artemis and Actaeon. Odysseus cannot afford to receive the same fate. He needs to be very careful.

Salmacis goal instantly becomes clear at the start of her speech. She is not a supplicant, but does flatter the boy to seduce him. Salmacis thinks she does not have to ask if he is divine. The audience understands that Salmacis should have been careful and, like Odysseus, should have asked the question, for she truly is encountering a god. However, she only uses the flattering part of Odysseus' speech, comparing the boy to a god, without showing caution or respect, for she neither addresses the boy with a divine word. The comparison with Cupid, shows her erotic goals.[121] She rushes to the next possibility, the boy being human, and does not mention the reason of the family's fortune. The fact that she mentions a sister and nurse are striking differences. They are women in the life of the boy, who Salmacis envies. The sister could come close to the boy, like a brother, and was able to touch him.[122] The *nutrix* also was able to have physical contact with the boy, which Salmacis mentions. Salmacis wants to have physical contact with him in an erotic way. The mentioning of those women prepares the audience for Salmacis' wish for sisterly kisses (4.334-335).

Salmacis mentions the fortunate wife of Hermaphroditus. Unlike Odysseus, she mentions the possibility that he already is married. The reason becomes clear in the final part of her speech, in which the difference between the intentions is most clear. She explicitly says now, that her lust is concealed. She offers to become his wife if he does not have one. She does not wait as long as Odysseus to reveal her goal. Moreover, her proposal shows that she may be more like Nausicaa, uttering her wish of marriage, but in an extreme way.[123] Although the audience is already aware of the differences between the speeches, this straightforward, sudden proposal may come as a surprise. Despite the differences, until now, Salmacis followed Odysseus' speech quite closely. Eventually, after he blushes, the boy rejects the nymph's seductive words and behaviour (4.329ff).

[120] Jong (2001), 161.
[121] Anderson (1997), 446.
[122] Anderson (1997), 447.
[123] Robinson (1999), 218.

It turns out that the speech by a man had an amatory effect on the girl Nausicaa, but the appropriation of the speech by a female figure does not have the same effect on a boy. Salmacis does have an amorous purpose and the boy is of comparable age as Nausicaa, but the nymph does not show the same psychological insight as Odysseus did, when mimicking his speech. Her speech is not appropriately adjusted to achieve her goal. It is based on and rushes to the same outcome that Odysseus speech had on the girl Nausicaa, whose love and expectations eventually remained unanswered, but does not take into account the differences in intention, speaker and addressee, such as the boy's expectations about and knowledge of love (4.330 *nescit enim quid amor*). The female Salmacis is represented as not able to correctly and effectively appropriate the male-hero speech.

James states that '[i]n combining the different motivations and their articulation by Odysseus and Nausicaa, Salmacis is demonstrating that she is equally adept at being the proactive male and the responsive female'.[124] She also seems to imply that Hermaphroditus should have reacted like Nausicaa, stating that the boy 'does not take his cue from the compliant and flirtatious response of the literary Nausicaa' and that he is 'clearly not as well read as the nymph'.[125] I do not follow these statements. Ovid's intertextual gender play goes further than James suggests. Rather, the combination of female and male features makes Salmacis inept in both. She is represented in the speech scene as incapable of fulfilling the male role. She is neither correctly fulfilling the responsive female role, for she approached the boy. Hermaphroditus, moreover, does not play the role of responsive female, for he does not react like Nausicaa, but rejects the advances. On the other hand, he does not know what love is, so he may also reject her because of the straightforwardness and his expectations of love and marriage, which differ from Nausicaa's expectations.

## 2.5. Conclusion

Ovid plays with (expectations of) gender roles through the intertextuality with Odysseus' speech and the context. The use of the speech increases the gender ambiguity of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, through similarities and differences with Nausicaa and Odysseus. Moreover, Odysseus' speech is also part of a context of switching gender roles in a potential sexual situation.

Salmacis' use of the speech and the way she uses it intensify the gender ambiguity and confuse the audience's expectations. A female uses the male hero speech in an opposite setting. She does not follow the speech as the audience would expect, knowing the model. She eventually does not reach her goal and it becomes clear that the appropriation of the male speech, does not work for the female character in approaching a male character.

[124] James (2019), 44. Robinson (1999), 218.
[125] James (2019), 45.

# Chapter 3 – The similes (*Met*. 4-361-367)

## 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the (use of) the three similes (4.361-367) that emphasize and further confuse the fight between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (4.356-360). These similes are all, collectively and separately, part of and a clear example of the play with gender roles in this story. They are also part of an intertextual, literary context and play. First, I will discuss the gender play in the context of the fight and the similes as a whole. Thereafter, I will discuss the role of the individual similes in the play with gender roles, looking into the intertextuality. How does Ovid use the similes, which have all been used by other authors, to fit the play with gender roles in his story?

## 3.2. The context and the similes

When the boy has entered the water, Salmacis cannot hold back anymore and attacks the boy. A struggle takes place (4.358ff). Salmacis, the female character, tries to overpower Hermaphroditus, the male character, who fights back against his attacker.

> *"vicimus et meus est!" exclamat Nais et omni*
> *veste procul iacta mediis immittitur undis*
> *pugnantemque tenet luctantiaque oscula carpit*
> *subiectatque manus invitaque pectora tangit*
> *et nunc hac iuveni, nunc circumfunditur illac;* – Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.356-360
>
> "I have won and he is mine!" screams the nymph and having thrown off
> all her clothes far away, she throws herself in the middle of the water
> and she holds him, while he fights back, she snatches resisting kisses
> and she lays her hand on him and touches his unwilling chest
> and she pours herself around the youth, now here, now there;

Both the start of the attack and the attack itself are unusual and play with the gender of the characters. Salmacis throws off her clothes (*omni veste procul iacta*), in contrast with the calm manner in which the boy undressed (*mollia de tenero velamina corpore ponit*, 4.345).[126] She then jumps into the spring, without testing the water (*mediis immittitur undis*), also more impulsively than the boy, who first

[126] Anderson (1997), 450.

tested the water (4.342-343).[127] The word *vicimus* is an Ovidian metaphor for the rapist, used earlier in the poem to describe Jupiter leaving as *victor* after raping Callisto (2.437). Tereus screams out the same, when he rapes Philomela (‘*vicimus!’ exclamat, Met.* 6.513).[128] In this case it mainly serves to introduce the erotic violence that will follow, for it is questionable whether the nymph really ‘wins’.[129] It is however interesting to note again here, that the watery form of Salmacis already captured the boy (*captus* 4.344).

Hermaphroditus resists the attack. He resists when she holds him (*pugnantem*) and she snatches kisses. She does not get them voluntarily (*luctantia*). In this fight, the boy is the object, Salmacis the subject, which stresses their roles as victim and attacker. The personification of the kisses by the adjective *luctantia* and of the breast by the adjective *invita* further emphasize the fight and the boy’s unwillingness.[130]

The verb *circumfunditur* makes clear that Salmacis tries to embrace the boy in all possible ways, but it also reminds us that the watery form of Salmacis is already embracing Hermaphroditus, since he entered the water.[131] The nymph’s hybrid form will also play an important role in the three similes:

> *denique nitentem contra elabique volentem*
> *implicat, ut serpens, quam regia sustinet ales*
> *sublimemque rapit (pendens caput illa pedesque*
> *alligat et cauda spatiantes implicat alas),*
> *utve solent hederae longos intexere truncos,*
> *utque sub aequoribus deprensum polypus hostem*
> *continet ex omni dimissis parte flagellis*. – Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.361-367
>
> Finally, she entangles him, while he is struggling against her and wishing to get away,
> Like a snake, which the royal bird holds,
> and carries off high (she, hanging, ties the head and feet
> and with her tail entangles the spreading wings),
> or like ivy is wont to wrap around long trunks,
> or like an octopus under the sea, holds the caught enemy
> with its tentacles, stretched out from every side

[127] Anderson (1997), 450.
[128] Anderson (1997), 450.
[129] Anderson (1997), 450.
[130] Anderson (1997), 450.
[131] Cf. Anderson (1997), 450.

These similes about entanglement foreshadow the outcome of the story. Moreover, they vividly paint how the fight develops and the strategy Salmacis uses. The boy seems to be the taller person in the fight. Like the eagle, he tries to pull himself up, like the tree he stands straight and firm. Salmacis at first glance seems 'to be the victim and the weaker party of each of these similes', which becomes most clear from the snake-eagle simile and the ivy-tree simile: the snake is the prey of the eagle, the ivy seems to be more fragile than the tree.[132] According to Lively, 'the very real danger that Salmacis poses to Hermaphroditus and his virginity is finally revealed in the image of the octopus: here is a rape achieved by enclosure rather than penetration'.[133] Lively does not make explicit how Salmacis may at first glance also seem to be the victim in the *polypus* simile. The *polypus,* however*,* is catching an enemy (*hostem*), which indicates that the *polypus* may also be in a threatened position. Moreover, both the snake and the ivy also pose the danger of rape by enclosure. The snake entangles the wings of the eagle, inhibiting its movement, the ivy poses the threat of suffocating the tree by surrounding it. Additionally, in the snake simile both creatures are quite similar in strength and have an even contest, but in the other two, Salmacis seems to get the upper hand, which will be further discussed hereafter.[134] So, all similes emphasize the strategy of the nymph to achieve her sexual desire: she is the smaller party in the fight, but uses her characteristics, being both nymph and water, to entangle the boy from everywhere. The similes and the verb *circumfunditur* (4.360) underscore that as a mere nymph, she would not be able to strongly entangle the boy, which differentiates her from many male attackers.[135]

## 3.3 The snake and eagle simile (4.361-364)

The snake and eagle simile is the most extensive simile. It plays with gender roles in several ways. The image seems clear at first: a snake entangles an eagle, just as Salmacis entangles the boy. It is however, an inversion of the situation: the eagle is attacking the snake.

The image of the eagle and snake has been used by several ancient authors.[136] Homer, for instance, used it in his Iliad. The Trojans are at the point of breaking down the Greek wall, when an omen occurs:

αἰετὸς ὑψιπέτης ἐπ᾽ ἀριστερὰ λαὸν ἐέργων,

[132] Lively (2011), 59.
[133] Lively (2011), 59.
[134] Anderson (1997), 451.
[135] See also Curran (1978), 216. Curran argues that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 'raped men can be quickly disposed of' because few men are raped and there is hardly any violence. He states that 'Salmacis, as long as she retains the form of a woman, cannot use force on Hermaphroditus', 216. Although the latter may be true, there is clearly violence in this story.
[136] Bömer (1976), 125.

φοινήεντα δράκοντα φέρων ὀνύχεσσι πέλωρον
ζωὸν ἔτ᾽ ἀσπαίροντα· καὶ οὔ πω λήθετο χάρμης·
κόψε γὰρ αὐτὸν ἔχοντα κατὰ στῆθος παρὰ δειρὴν
ἰδνωθεὶς ὀπίσω· ὁ δ᾽ ἀπὸ ἕθεν ἧκε χαμᾶζε
ἀλγήσας ὀδύνῃσι, μέσῳ δ᾽ ἐνὶ κάββαλ᾽ ὁμίλῳ,
αὐτὸς δὲ κλάγξας πέτετο πνοιῇς ἀνέμοιο. – Homer, *Iliad* 12.201-207

A high-flying eagle, encircling the army on the left,
Carrying a blood-red snake with its claws, huge,
Still living and struggling: and not yet did it forget the lust of battle:
For it struck him who carried it against the breast near the neck
After it bent backwards: and he sent it from himself to the ground
after he suffered pain, and he threw it in the middle of the throng,
and he himself, after he produced a sharp sound, flew with the blowing wind

In this omen, the eagle loses the snake, after the snake fights back, which is explained by Poulydamas to mean that the Trojans, like the eagle, will not accomplish their goal.[137]

Virgil used the simile in the context of a war battle against a female leader, in his Aeneid. Tarchon has told the Etruscans not to be cowards, nor to yield for a woman and her army. Thereafter, he attacks and grasps a (male) enemy, who tries to fight back:

*utque volans alte raptum cum fulva draconem*
*fert aquila implicuitque pedes atque unguibus haesit,*
*saucius at serpens sinuosa volumina versat*
*arrectisque horret squamis et sibilat ore*
*arduus insurgens, illa haud minus urget obunco*
*luctantem rostro, simul aethera verberat alis:*
*haud aliter praedam Tiburtum ex agmine Tarchon*
*portat ovans. […]* – Virgil, *Aeneid* 11.751-758

and like when the tawny eagle, flying high, carries the caught snake
and folded her feet and clung with her claws,
but the wounded snake turns its winding whirls

[137] On Poulydamas' interpretation, see Ready (2012), 78 n. 112.

and raises its upright scales and hisses with its tongue,
rising up high, she does not less press the struggling with her curved beak,
at the same time she beats the air with her wings:
no different does Tarchon carry his prey from the Tiburtian army,
rejoicing.

The pattern is as follows: the eagle is in action, the snake fights back, but the eagle keeps the winning position.[138] The eagle, the attacker, is stronger than the snake.

It is clear that the motive is used in several ways to fit the story of the author. When Ovid uses the simile, the audience may not have a clear expectation of the way the simile will develop. The eagle, Hermaphroditus, should be the one to escape. The outcome in Ovid's story, is, that the snake and eagle both stay entangled, none of them wins the battle.[139]

The way in which Ovid's uses this simile is significant in the light of his gender play. First, the eagle is usually associated with Jupiter.[140] This king of gods is of course known for his sexual behaviour and assaults of girls. The bird is called the royal bird (*regia ales 4.362*), which is reminiscent of the parentage of Hermaphroditus. When this royal bird is mentioned, as the subject of the verse (*regia sustinet ales 4.362*), the situation as it would be expected by the audience, namely the boy attacking the girl, is recalled. This way, the inversion of the gender roles is accentuated: Salmacis pursues the role of the male deity, the boy is like the female victim.

Second, the contrasting movements of the characters, the eagle trying to fly up and the snake trying to obstruct it's flight by strangling it, are clearly distinguished in this simile.[141] This also underscores the contrasting behaviour of Salmacis.

Third, with respect to grammar, some details are striking. Ovid uses the feminine pronomina *quam* (4.362) and *illa* (4.363) to refer to the snake. Anderson notes that generally, Ovid refers to snakes as masculine, which may be explained by the fact that Ovid compares Salmacis to the snake.[142] However, it also fits the context of the gender switches throughout the story. Moreover, the object and subject change several times. The snake is at first the subject of the *ut*-clause. Then, she is the object of the second subclause (*quam 4.362*), of which the eagle is the subject. Next, the snake is the subject of *alligat* (4.364) and *implicat* (4.364). These switches confuse the simile and expectations of the audience, which accentuates the confusion of gender roles.

[138] See also Gildenhard, Henderson (2018), 509.
[139] See also Bömer (1976), 125.
[140] Bömer (1976), 126.
[141] Anderson (1997), 451.
[142] Anderson (1997), 451.

## 3.4. The ivy and tree simile (4.365)

This is the shortest simile, but Ovid nonetheless plays with gender roles by his use of this image. First, unlike the first simile, the situation is similar to the situation of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in lines 356-360: the ivy (Salmacis) surrounds the tree (Hermaphroditus).

Second, the verb *intexere* (4.365), used to describe the twining of both Salmacis and ivy, also fits the weaving of the narrator Alcithoë.[143] This is reminiscent of the context: the Minyads are weaving, while they reject to follow the other women in bacchantic worship. The word *intexere*, reminds the audience of the way a woman should behave and stresses that Salmacis, although she is weaving in a different sense, is not acting as she should.[144]

Third, the image of ivy is linked to the god Bacchus. In book three, for instance, the ivy is linked to the revelation of Bacchus (3.664).[145] This recalls the context of gender confusion of the story.

Fourth, the connotation of the simile is important. In Latin poetry the image of ivy twining around a tree occurred for instance in Catullus' *Carmen* 61.31ff:[146]

> *ac domum dominam voca*
> *coniugis cupidam novi,*
> *mentem amore revinciens,*
> *ut tenax hedera huc et huc*
> *arborem implicat errans.* – Catullus, *Carmen* 61.31-35

> And call the mistress to the house
> Desirous of her new spouse
> Binding the mind with love,
> Like clinging ivy entwines a tree
> Here and here, as it is straying

Ivy often represents the woman, but here it is not completely clear who it represents.[147] The grammar (the female accusatives) also poses an interpretational issue, concerning who desires who.[148] This is

[143] Anderson (1997), 451.
[144] On weaving as a woman's task e.g. Keith (2009), 367.
[145] Bömer (1976), 127, Thomsen (1992), 108.
[146] For several occurrences, see Bömer (1976), 127.
[147] Feeney (2013), 70-97, 89. Thomsen (1992), 108. According to Thomsen the ivy represents Hymenaeus, Thomsen (1992), 108, 109. Fordyce says it represents love, Fordyce (1961), 243. Fedeli argues that it represents the woman. Fedeli (1983), 38.
[148] See more elaborately, Feeney (2013), 89. Bardon's edition is cited here. Kroll places a comma after *voca* and *revinciens*, making the man desirous.

taken up by the simile: the man and woman are truly entwined, which is stressed by the *arborem* being surrounded by *tenax hedera* and *implicat errans*.[149] The simile shows a very close love relationship.[150]

In Horace's *Epodes* 15.5-6 a woman (ivy) is clinging to the man (oak), when she swears an oath of everlasting love:

> *artius atque hedera procera adstringitur ilex*
> *lentis adhaerens bracchiis,* – Horace's *Epodes* 15.5-6
>
> and clinging more tightly than the lofty holm oak is tied by ivy,
> with your tenacious arms

The word *ilex* may refer to 'manly firmness'.[151] The verb *adstringitur* implies that the embrace by the ivy and thus by the woman, which is even more tight (*artius*), is oppressively tight.[152] This may be stressed by the adjective *lentis*. Although the simile may describe the woman's love at the time she swore the oath, the context shows that the speaker laments that the woman broke the oath. Thus, the simile may refer to the harmfulness of the woman's love.[153]

The ivy-image also occurs in Horace's *Odes* 1.36:[154]

> *[…] nec Damalis novo*
> *divelletur adultero*
> *lascivis hederis ambitiosior*. – Horace, *Odes* 1.36.17-20
>
> and Damalis will not be torn apart from her new lover
> more twisting than lustful ivy

The words *divelletur* and *ambitiosior* imply that the entanglement, an image of her temperament, not a literal embrace, is very strong. Even force will not make Damalis, an adulterer, considering the words *novo adultero*, leave her new lover.[155] The adjective *lascivis* shows Damalis' lustfulness, projected on the ivy.[156]

[149] Feeney (2013), 89.
[150] Thomsen (1992), 108.
[151] Watson (2003), 469.
[152] Watson (2003), 468.
[153] Cf. Watson (2003), 468.
[154] Bömer (1976), 127.
[155] Quinn (1980), 191, 192.
[156] Quinn (1980), 192.

So, the ivy simile signifies a very strong entanglement. It may be used in a context of strong devoted love and of dangerous loves. Anderson's argument therefore, that the ivy is a symbol of 'devoted female love' and does not have negative connotations does not completely hold.[157] Watson's argument that ivy-similes have the tendency 'to highlight the destructive closeness of the plant's embrace' also seems too rigid.[158]

In the case of Salmacis entwining Hermaphroditus, the image is used in the context of sexual assault by a woman. In this case it has the negative connotation of a fight, considering the placement of this simile between two similes, that clearly show struggle. This is enhanced by the word order: the words *hederae* and *intexere* are 'entangled' with the words *longos truncus (4.365)*, showing the movements of the tall boy that tries to stand up and Salmacis (and her water) that clings to him. This interpretation does not agree with Anderson's and James' who argue that this simile is meant positively.[159]

The simile fits Salmacis' ambiguousness. Her being compared to ivy once again stresses her womanhood, for, as note before, mostly women are compared to ivy. Additionally, being a woman, she may at first seem, like ivy, to be the weaker party. She turns out however, to be an aggressor. The embrace here, is injurious and violent, like ivy's embrace can be harmful, which seems to imply that she has a strong position in the fight now.

## 3.5. The polypus simile (4.366-367)

The last simile sheds yet another light on the roles in the fight. The polypus, a watery creature like Salmacis, is described to catch an enemy (*hostem, 366*). Hermaphroditus is suggested to be the enemy of, or perhaps a threat to, Salmacis, as was the case in the eagle-snake simile. The word *hostem* foreshadows line 370 in which Salmacis calls Hermaphroditus *improbe*, which is a switch of gender roles. It is notable, that it is Ovid's Alcithoë that uses the word *hostem* and in line 370 it is Salmacis who speaks. So, not only Salmacis, whose role continuously reverses as she tries to achieve her goals, but the (female) narrator also makes Hermaphroditus, the male victim, a threat or at least an enemy of the female character.

The reputation of the octopus in antiquity, however, sheds a different light on Salmacis' position in the fight. Octopuses were believed to be cunning and powerful creatures and their tenacity and flexibility were deemed impressive.[160] The characteristics of the animal 'became proverbial'.[161] The

[157] Anderson (1997), 451.
[158] Watson (2003), 468.
[159] Anderson (1997), 451. James (2019), 50.
[160] Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 675, 676. See also Ingemark (2008), 150.
[161] Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 675.

description of Salmacis entangling the boy refers to the clinging of an octopus to its prey.[162] In the Odyssey, this clinging characteristic also occurs.

> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτε πουλύποδος θαλάμης ἐξελκομένοιο
> πρὸς κοτυληδονόφιν πυκιναὶ λάϊγγες ἔχονται,
> ὣς τοῦ πρὸς πέτρῃσι θρασειάων ἀπὸ χειρῶν
> ῥινοὶ ἀπέδρυφθεν· […] – Homer, *Odyssey* 5.432-435.

> Like when an octopus is dragged from its lair,
> many pebbles hold it by its suckers,
> in that way the skin of his bold hands was teared off against the rocks:

The simile is confusing: it is not completely clear what exactly is compared to the octopus with its suckers.[163] It is clear however, that the octopus has tentacles with suckers, that hold something tightly, or to which things cling tightly. Through this image, the situation of Odysseus holding on to the rock and his skin clinging to the rock is enhanced. Salmacis' clinging, may be similarly strong.

Moreover, octopuses were considered cunning creatures and to be able to change colour to protect or camouflage itself. Athenaeus states that Sophocles used this quality in his *Iphigenia* to illustrate the quality of matching oneself to a honest man[164]:

> ὁμοίως φησὶν καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἐν Ἰφιγενείᾳ·
> νόει πρὸς ἀνδρί, σῶμα πουλύπους ὅπως
> πέτρᾳ, τραπέσθαι γνησίου φρονήματος. – Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 513d

> Like Sophocles says in *Iphigenia*:
> Act wisely by turning to a man of a pure mind,
> like an octopus turns its body to a rock

Although this feature of the octopus is not explicitly mentioned in our story, it is significant in the comparison with Salmacis. An octopus is able to camouflage itself, Salmacis is a double formed creature, which she can use to achieve her goal: the tentacles stand for Salmacis' arms and her water.

[162] Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 675.
[163] See e.g. Jong (2001), 146, Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 675, Bergren (1980), 121, Heubeck, West, Hainsworth (1988), 285.
[164] Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 675, 676.

The cunning characteristic is also apparent. Salmacis is a cunning creature considering her speech and seducing behaviour, although she is not successful.

There were also some 'lurid stories' about octopuses.[165] Some describe giant, terrifying creatures that were able to strangle and kill men in the water with their tentacles (e.g. Pliny the Elders' *Naturalis Historiae* (9.91)).[166] In the light of such stories, Salmacis may have been perceived as a monstrous being, an enormous threat to Hermaphroditus and as able to kill him with her embrace, not as merely tightly embracing and seducing him.

It seems that Salmacis is in the winning position in the fight. This can also be inferred by the use of the verb *continet* (4.367), which is the first word in the similes, that implies that Salmacis holds the boy, rather than entangling him, and that she is now in control.[167]

Another aspect that occurs in the stories is the octopus' liminality. It 'often tends to straddle or transgress two cultural categories at once, fully belonging to neither'.[168] According to Aelian (*De Natura Animalium* 13.6) and Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis Historiae*, 9.30.92) for instance, the octopuses came on the land.[169] The comparison of Salmacis to an octopus not only stresses her ambiguous form again, but also calls attention to Salmacis' transgression of the line between male and female (sexual) behaviour.

## 3.6. Conclusion

Ovid uses the similes and several details in his versions to evoke the context of the story and associations that enhance the gender play. Moreover, both individually and collectively, they confuse who has the upper hand in the fight and emphasize the strategy of Salmacis, which is greatly dependent on her double form, an aspect that is also stressed by the individual similes. Although the fight is confused, it seems that Salmacis gets the upper hand. As we have seen in chapter one, however, the outcome of the fight is unclear: there seems to be no winner and both characters become eternally entangled. So, the entanglement similes confuse and foreshadow this outcome.

[165] Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 679. See also 675ff. See on these stories and the octopus in ancient thought also Ingemark (2008), 147ff.
[166] See e.g. Lewis, Llewellyn-Jones (2018), 678, 679.
[167] Anderson (1997), 451.
[168] Ingemark (2008), 150.
[169] Ingemark (2008), 147-150.

# Conclusion

I have examined how Ovid represents gender roles in the Salmacis-Hermaphroditus scene. It has become clear that Ovid continuously plays with the ambiguity of gender roles and the cultural expectations about the gender roles, in great detail.

The context of the story, the narrator Alcithoë and her sisters defying Bacchus, already sets the tone for the gender ambiguity that pervades the whole story. In chapter one we have seen that Salmacis and Hermaphroditus show both male and female features and behaviour throughout the story. The boy has ambiguous physical features due to his age. He is at the point of becoming a man, which he will never truly become. His reactions and behaviour in the encounters with the water and the nymph show male and female aspects. Salmacis is twofold. Physically the nymph is extremely feminine and her features resemble those of her watery form. Behaviourally, the nymph switches various times from female to male. Importantly, the nymph part of Salmacis tries, but is unable to maintain the male behaviour. She is neither able to win over and attack the boy and reach her goal. Her watery form on the other hand is able to do so: it seduces him and flows around him. The water gets its way, the nymph does not. Ovid continuously confuses the expectations about the already ambiguous figures, by references he makes to other stories in his *Metamorphoses*. Moreover, his novelties in language use stress the novelty of the situations.

In the second chapter, the role of intertextuality with Odysseus speech to Nausicaa has been explored. It has become clear that the play with gender roles goes further than just Odysseus' speech: the context, especially the ambiguous position of Odysseus and the expectations of Nausicaa, play a role in the expectations and confusion of the audience when the nymph gives her speech. It turns out that the nymph is unable to effectively appropriate the male speech.

In the third chapter it became clear that the similes stress and confuse the fight between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus and Salmacis' strategy in it: she has to use both her nymph form and her watery form to attack the boy. Within the similes, the details continuously evoke thoughts about gender and gender confusion, which complicate the roles of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus.

The play with gender is thorough in this story. At first sight it is a story of a female figure violently attacking a male figure, an attack which ends in both figures becoming one gender ambiguous body. It turns out however that the gender aspects are confused in great detail throughout the story. We may conclude that Salmacis as a mere female figure is not able to play the male role and 'effectively' attack Hermaphroditus. The nymph is eventually punished for her attempts to transgress the gender boundaries: she loses her subjectivity.

We should not forget that this is a story of a violent sexual assault of a male figure by a female figure, which has an everlasting (physical) effect on the boy (and the nymph). However, by focusing on the literary representation of gender roles in this violent context, which complicates the story, we see

how cultural ideas about gender(roles) are integrated in the text. The intertextuality with Odysseus' speech and the similes are significant in this representation. The literary play confuses and triggers the audience, both the ancient and the modern, to think about the gender roles in this story of sexual assault and in (sexual assault in) society.

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# Appendix

320 ‘Tum sic orsa loqui: “puer o dignissime credi
esse deus, seu tu deus est, potes esse Cupido,
sive es mortalis, qui te genuere, beati
et frater felix et fortunata profecto
si qua tibi soror est, et quae dedit ubera nutrix;
325 sed longe cunctis longeque beatior illis,
si qua tibi sponsa est, si quam dignabere taeda.
haec tibi sive aliqua est, mea sit furtiva voluptas,
seu nulla est, ego sim, thalamumque ineamus eundem.’’

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.320-328

“Γουνοῦμαί σε, ἄνασσα· θεός νύ τις ἦ βροτός ἐσσι;
150 εἰ μέν τις θεός ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν,
Ἀρτέμιδί σε ἐγώ γε, Διὸς κούρῃ μεγάλοιο,
εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε φυήν τ᾽ ἄγχιστα ἐΐσκω·
εἰ δέ τίς ἐσσι βροτῶν, τοὶ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσι,
τρισμάκαρες μὲν σοί γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
155 τρισμάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι· μάλα πού σφισι θυμὸς
αἰὲν ἐϋφροσύνῃσιν ἰαίνεται εἵνεκα σεῖο,
λευσσόντων τοιόνδε θάλος χορὸν εἰσοιχνεῦσαν.
κεῖνος δ᾽ αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
ὅς κέ σ᾽ ἐέδνοισι βρίσας οἶκόνδ᾽ ἀγάγηται.
160 οὐ γάρ πω τοιοῦτον ἐγὼ ἴδον ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
οὔτ᾽ ἄνδρ᾽ οὔτε γυναῖκα· σέβας μ᾽ ἔχει εἰσορόωντα.

Homer, *Odyssey* 6.149-161