

## Forever To Be Joined As One: Genesis' "The Fountain of Salmacis" and Ovid

In November of 1971 the progressive rock group Genesis released their album *Nursery Cryme*. Their third album, it is considered by music critics and fans to be their first 'classic' album, first in a series of ambitious albums released between 1971 and 1974 (Erlewine, 2014; Prog Archives, 2014). Musically the album features songs of lengths and structures unusual in pop music, with four of the seven tracks lasting more than five minutes and one of those stretching to nearly ten and a half minutes. This musical ambition was matched by singer and primary lyricist, Peter Gabriel, who treated subject matter far outside the norm for pop music and who adopted a number of personas across the course of the album, even changing points of view several times within the same song.

The final song of the album, the eight-minute long, "The Fountain of Salmacis," encapsulates many of these features. Gabriel draws upon Ovid's story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis at *Met.* 4.274-388 (Fransson, 1990). Gabriel assumes the parts of narrator, Hermaphroditus, and Salmacis, just as Ovid gives voice to Hermaphroditus, Salmacis, and the narrator of the story, Alcithoë. Gabriel follows Ovid's narrative fairly closely, describing the rearing of Hermaphroditus at Mount Ida, his travels through the wilderness, the pool of Salmacis, her advances and his failed rejections, and the merging of their bodies. It is likely that Gabriel encountered Ovid while a student at Chaterhouse School at Godalming, Surrey, UK (Bright, 1998).

In my paper I will first lay out the correspondences between Ovid's narrative and Genesis' song. Next, I will contend that Genesis' song represents a phenomenon analogous to Ovid's reception in opera (Sternfeld, 1988; Solomon, 2014). The band intended their live performances to be total experiences, combining music, words, lighting, and elaborate staging

and costumes, the latter largely thanks to Gabriel (Gallo, 1980). Finally, I will discuss what this story meant in the context of the band's other songs of the time and to the audience for progressive rock music in the 1970s. In doing so I will consider the sexual themes of the story (Robinson, 1999; Zajko, 2009) in relation to other lyrics of Gabriel's of the time period (Holm-Hudson, 2008). I will conclude by discussing the song in light of progressive rock's relation to the religious and philosophical ideals of the counterculture of the 1970s, particularly the song's depiction of an experience of unity that transcends gender (Macan, 1997; Stump, 1997; Martin, 1998; Bromell, 2002; Hegarty and Halliwell, 2011).

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