

## Anatomizing the Archetype: Character Conflation in Book Four of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Despite the abundance of ancient sculptures and paintings that lend color and shape to the dualities of Hermaphroditus, Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus is the earliest extant Roman text to fully flesh out the narrative behind this ambiguous figure. Recent discussions of this myth have explored Ovid's attempt to "surprise" his audience much in the manner that sculptures of Hermaphroditus may evoke puzzlement, shock, and laughter upon a viewer's eventual apprehension of Hermaphroditus' anatomical surplus (Groves Forthcoming). Beyond statuary, however, few scholars have located sources for Ovid's narrative aside from the Salmacis inscription and Diodorus Siculus' brief anecdote. Additionally, too many scholars choose to focus on Hermaphroditus' long attested associations with marriage rather than tackling the narrative's gender and sexuality difficulties head on (Romano 2009). In order to lend more support to the arguments for Hermaphroditus' role as a symbol for the sexually passive male (Swancutt 2007, Nugent 1989), this paper will argue that Ovid found inspiration for his Hermaphroditus in the Greek myths of Heracles' beloved, Hylas. I will propose that Ovid conflates the *eromenos* archetype represented by Hylas with the androgynous features earlier ascribed to Hermaphroditus in order to fully engender the passive figure in all of its sexual inscrutability.

The beginning of this paper will engage in textual analysis to illuminate the similarities in plot, characterization, and topography shared by Ovid's narrative of Hermaphroditus and the narratives of Hylas in Theocritus' *Idyll* 13 and Book 1 of Apollonius' *Argonautica*. Both poems are rife with the same bucolic imagery, young male victim, translucent body of water, and, perhaps most importantly, the female rapist nymph(s)—all of which appear together in later myths of Hylas and Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus, but nowhere else. Although there are

salient parallels to be found between these myths, only a brief sentence in Segal's article on Theocritus' *Idylls* has managed to hint at the connection between the Hylas and Hermaphroditus narratives (1974). Secondly, this paper will look at the Roman tendency to group the two figures into a similar category. Statius' *Silvae*, in the space of three lines, denounces the spring of Salmacis and the river of Cebrinis together and berates the nymphs' *culpa* (1.5.19-21). An epigram by Martial frames the myths of Hermaphroditus and Hylas among myths of monsters and other themes worthy of derision (*ludibria*) (10.4). Antonius Liberalis' second century myth of Hylas in his *Metamorphoses* perhaps best demonstrates a longstanding penchant for conflating Ovid's Salmacis myths and the Hylas myth since the young Hylas is ultimately transformed into an echo. The fact that Ovid and Liberalis are both said to have borrowed from Nicander certainly entreats us to look more closely at the possibility of Hylas-Hermaphroditus conflation in Ovid.

Despite all of the similarities between the two figures, the fact remains that Hermaphroditus suffers a far different plight than Hylas. Hylas' narrative ends with his disappearance, but Hermaphroditus' rape transforms him, a *puer*, into a *semivir* with *mollita membra*. This vocabulary clearly points to a fraught rite of passage from *pueritas* to *semi-viritas* with terms frequently used to categorize the sexually passive male (Robinson 1999, Nugent 1989). Moreover, there can be little doubt that Hermaphroditus' status as neither *femina* nor *vir*, but of *duplex forma* conforms to an earlier attested Hermaphroditic androgyny exemplified by the sculptures of Hermaphroditus (Groves Forthcoming). The emasculating language inherent to Ovid's description can be further clarified by the evidence that Ovid did indeed borrow from the myth of Hylas and append an anomalous anatomy to the passive male archetype. Ultimately, I will argue that Ovid's narrative circumscribes a category for the *semivir*, whose debilitating

transition results in a sex-gender limbo. I will argue that Ovid could perhaps be inventing a mythological precedent for the real Roman *cinaedus*, who is at once reprehensible and titillating, same and other, strange and familiar, neither and both (*neutrumque utrumque*) (Richlin 1993).

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