

Speech, Silence, and Gender in the Hermaphroditus Myth of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.274-388)

In this paper, I analyze the Salmacis and Hermaphroditus myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4.274-388) in terms of direct speech and explicit references to silence for both of the principal characters. I argue that Ovid uses direct speech to empower both the aggressor Salmacis and the victim Hermaphroditus; in the former case, speech serves to align Salmacis with other rapists and aggressors throughout the *Metamorphoses* and characterize her negatively, while in the latter case, Hermaphroditus' speech enables him to resist Salmacis' advances, at least initially, and ends the narrative proper, a fact that allows Hermaphroditus the last word, as it were. Silence, on the other hand, serves in Salmacis' case as a rhetorical tool to gain the upper hand (4.329 and 4.338-340), but in Hermaphroditus' case, the narrator Alcithoë mostly prevents Hermaphroditus from speaking to emphasize the visual allure of his body and his victimhood. While previous scholarship on the episode has focused on such considerations as Salmacis' appropriation of the male gaze, the subversion of "traditional" gender roles, and the iconographic and literary representations of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus prior to Ovid (Salzman-Mitchell 2005, 160-163; Keith 1999, 216-221; Nagle 1984, 248-252; Robinson 1999, *passim*), this paper expands the existing scholarship by focusing on the role of speech and silence in the episode in the constitution of each character, Salmacis as a gender-defying rapist and Hermaphroditus as an empowered, recalcitrant male victim.

Salmacis speaks directly four times in the narrative: 4.320-328, to proposition Hermaphroditus; 4.337-338, to feign a departure to mollify Hermaphroditus; 4.356, to declare victory; and 4.370-372, to taunt Hermaphroditus as he tries to escape and to pray to the gods that they be joined together. Her words draw lexical resonances with other rapists or aggressors like Jupiter (1.589), Tereus (6.513), and Circe (14.355) and highlight the subversion of Salmacis' two

identities as a woman and a nymph. Meanwhile, Hermaphroditus speaks directly twice: 4.336, to ask Salmacis to stop kissing and groping him; and 4.383-386, to pray to his parents to enchant the pool of water to emasculate and feminize simultaneously any man who enters into it. Hermaphroditus' first instance of direct speech proves an effective deterrent to Salmacis' assault, as evidenced by her reaction (*extimuit*, 4.337). His final words evince a quasi-normalization of the inverted gender hierarchy of the episode inasmuch as Salmacis' consciousness is effaced by the combination of the two; the only part of her that remains is the physically female portion of the new body (Richlin 2014, 145). Hermaphroditus may have been transformed against his will, but he receives the final direct speech in the narrative and exercises agency in the dictation of what the pool of water that has transformed him will do for the rest of time. This final act of speech comes as somewhat of a surprise in a narrative in which Hermaphroditus has largely been silent, except for one line of hexameter (4.336), and restores some of the agency that had been stolen from him, both narratologically and within the context of the story.

An added layer of narratological complexity resides in the fact that Salmacis' and Hermaphroditus' direct speech is buried two narrative levels deep; their words are crafted and delivered by Alcithoë, one of the Minyides, whose words themselves are crafted and delivered by the omniscient narrator of the *Metamorphoses*. Alcithoë's direct narration is itself bracketed by a ring structure of silence, first that of her sisters (*postquam siluere sorores*, 4.274) and then that of herself (*finis erat dictis*, 4.389), which throws her speech into relief. This overall structure within which the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus unfolds reframes the context in which we see the characterization of both and the presentation of gender subversion, as the iconoclastic Alcithoë uses direct speech to accompany the Minyides' feminine act of weaving, which itself is being utilized to deny the quintessential gender-bending god, Bacchus, his due worship.

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