

## Theocritean Hermaphroditus: Ovid's Protean Allusions in *Met.* 4.285-388

The presence of thematic and visual resonances in the myths of Hylas and Hermaphroditus suggests that Ovid uses Theocritus' *Id.* 13 as an intertext, as many scholars have previously argued (see Charles Segal, Matthew Robinson, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood). In my paper, I explore how Ovid transforms Theocritus' Hylas myth into a new, distinct story: the Hermaphroditus myth (*Met.* 4). I argue that Ovid's references to *Id.* 13 go far deeper than "comparabilities" between the "nympholeptoi," both of whom are grabbed and fall into water at similar points in the narrative (Sourvinou-Inwood 2005). Rather, Ovid's recharacterization of the nymph Salmacis from kourotrophic guardian to sexual predator, as well as the assault on Hermaphroditus and consequential loss of "his" voice, distinctly echo the abduction of Hylas by the Kian nymphs. This suggests, then, that Ovid deliberately omits the Hylas tale later in the *Metamorphoses* in order to fuse it with his own innovative bucolic myth.

In order to examine Theocritus' influence on Ovid, I will conduct a comparative study between selected passages. First, I will draw parallels between the sexualization of Herakles' caretaker role (*Id.* 13.5-11) and the maternal overtones in the Kian nymphs' rape of Hylas (*Id.* 13.47-54.). I will then compare these details to Ovid's depiction of Salmacis as a sexually voracious nymph (*Met.* 4.288-95), a revision of her kourotrophic origin in the Salmacis Inscription (a Hellenistic inscription that identifies Hermaphroditus as a κοῦρος, whose wet nurse was Salmacis [Groves 2016; Sourvinou-Inwood 2005]). This particular overlap between the sexual and the parental seems to influence Ovid the most, since he uses Salmacis' innuendo-ridden speech about Hermaphroditus' parentage (*et fortunata profecto, /...et quae dedit ubera nutrix*, *Met.* 4.323-24) to preserve some reference to her prior conception as *nutrix*.

Next, I will compare the abductions of Hylas and Hermaphroditus, paying particular attention to the imagery and symbolism of their metamorphoses. In my analysis of the sexual assaults, I argue that Hylas' three rapists in Theocritus become a "three-bodied" rapist in *Met.* 4.361-67, based on Ovid's simile of Salmacis as serpent, ivy, and polyp. Finally, I argue that the trauma of the assaults affect each victim similarly. In both cases, the physical compositions of Hylas' and Hermaphroditus' bodies become permanently altered (one becomes immortal, the other a non-binary individual), and the voices of both become unrecognizable to themselves and their loved ones.

There are enough thematic correlations between *Id.* 13 and *Met.* 4 to suggest that Theocritus' work influenced Ovid. For Ovid, pushing back against the confines of elegiac poetry and imperial *mores*, Theocritus' innovation – experimentation with genre, blurring boundaries for the sake of art, and changing old tropes into new literary forms – likely appealed to his desire for freedom of expression. By applying *Id.* 13's themes of imprisonment, transformed voice, and futility of heroism, Ovid can use the story of Hermaphroditus as symbolism for the individual under empire – where the former, heroic inventor of marriage ultimately loses his purpose, his protection, and his entire identity.

### Bibliography

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