

## Derrida's Salmacis: the Phallogocentrism in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4.285-300

The aetiology of the Salmacis spring, as told by Alcithoë (Ovid *Met.* 4.285-388), reveals the bizarre agency behind the spring's enervating properties. The role of the nymph Salmacis as an elegiac *amator*, rather than the desired object, provides an excellent example of phallogocentric narrative as prescribed by Derrida's theoretical model. Derrida's theory on phallogocentrism deals with the linguistic and cultural demarcation between what is masculine (unmarked) and feminine (marked). Derrida allocates logocentrism to "a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of logos, to the paternal position" (Derrida-1981: p.76). Salmacis, on the other hand, resists this platonic schema when Ovid portrays her as the elegiac *amator*.

To examine the depiction of Salmacis as the elegiac *amator*, I will compare the Salmacis story with various rape scenes in the *Metamorphoses*, particularly the vocabulary used by the rapist which Salmacis incorporates in her own speech. Next, I will explore an intertextual relationship between the Salmacis story and Ovid's *Amores* 1.3 and 1.5. To understand how Salmacis the *amator* uses a paternal *logos*, I will compare her to Ovid's *amator* of the *Amores*. For example, the speech Salmacis delivers to Hermaphroditus echoes some aspects of *Amores* 1.3; while the description of the desired object, Corinna, in *Amores* 1.5, resembles Ovid's characterization of Hermaphroditus in the *Metamorphoses*. I will also demonstrate how the flattery used by Salmacis recalls Odysseus' flattery of Nausicaä (Homer *Od.* 6.149ff.); although, as I will show, Ovid's rendition is more sexually charged. By relating the behavior of Salmacis to Odysseus, I am able to illustrate how the logocentric flattery, reserved to a male figure, is acquired by Salmacis.

These examples demonstrate how Ovid incorporates the phallogocentric structure of elegy and how he reverses marked/unmarked relations between the elegiac *amator* and the object of desire. Indeed, we see this dichotomy presented in the relationship between male characters and their female counterparts in Ovid's stories. Salmacis, on the other hand, inhabits the realm of marked terms while using unmarked phallogocentric speech. This manner of narrative structure is exceptional to the story of Salmacis in the *Metamorphoses*. The ambiguity of her performative role is the reason why Salmacis stands out as an excellent subject matter in Derrida's theory. Her speech act and characterization goes against the Platonic schema described by Derrida.

### Bibliography

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