A Clinging Embrace

A Study of the Female Rapist in Ovid’s Metamorphoses

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I. INTRODUCTION

I. Background
The Metamorphoses is a fifteen-book, 11 995 verses long poem of epic verse, the only remaining poem of epic nature Ovid wrote (Ralph Hexter 2010: 8). It is not an epic with one hero: instead it follows many characters with a loose theme of transformation on an ostensibly chronologial line from the world’s creation until Ovid’s own time (Hexter 2010: 8). From 8 CE when it was published until now it has been popular. Long after Ovid died and Rome fell, his poems were read and studied: by monks in Ireland and England, by Carolingian poets and during the high Middle Ages. The Metamorphoses, in particular, was an inspiration to artists and musicians and a source for pagan myths that was studied even in Christian schools (Hexter 2010: 10-11). From cathedral schools we have commentaries on all of Ovid’s poems, demonstrating they were used in education (Hexter 2010: 10). It remains popular today, in education and in translation: 2015 a new Swedish translation by Ingvar Björkeson was published, 2014 Penguin Classics printed a new edition of it in English, and 2004 the most recent text edition came out, edited by R. J. Tarrant, following W. S. Anderson’s 1993 edition. Its stories have undeniably influenced Western culture via art and literature, from Shakespeare and Kafka, to various idioms used in our language (such as “flying too close to the sun”). The Metamorphoses and its stories are central in European culture and in education. Even if it is used less in education today, it has been studied by a large number of people throughout history: it has influenced the people who make up our history. Therefore, it remains relevant to study it today. One such thing worth thinking about is that the Metamorphoses is comprised of about 250 myths and at least 50 rapes (Amy Richlin 1992: 158). This begs the question: what have people for 2000 years been reading of rape and its effects? I aim, in this paper, to examine two of those rapes and see what the poem may say about them.

II. Previous research
Research on Ovid has grown greatly in the last fifty years, because his eclectic, varied and often transgressive texts let a variety of fields find material to study, such as feminism, formalism, narratology and intertextual approaches (Efrossini Spentzou 2009: 381).1 Stemming from the political circumstances Ovid lived in and worked with, much of his output is interested in power, anti-authority and exile (Spentzou 2009: 382-83). This has then

1 For more details on Ovidian scholarship from the second half of the twentieth century, see Spentzou (2009).
sparked a massive interest in gender studies, from which aspect power could be examined in depth (Spentzou 2009: 384). For example, Spentzou comments that “studies of Ovid’s amatory elegiac poetry have been instrumental in power-conscious readings that celebrate the ways in which Ovidian elegy troubles and experiments with the nature of Roman manhood” as well as “essentializations in gender stereotypes in Roman culture” (2009: 384), particularly male. When gender studies evolved to examine performance of gender, identity and communication it became another focus of Ovidian studies in the late twentieth century (Spentzou 2009: 385). Philomela became a poster-girl for these studies: “her powers of invention and communication are sharpened by the knife of her brother-in-law and tormentor, Tereus, who cut her tongue to steal her voice”, Spentzou summarises (2009: 385). The discussion centered around silence and how female characters often are forced to use silence as their only mode of communication, unless they find other modes – such as writing – much like an exiled poet. Another branch of recent research is narratology, especially focused on the Metamorphoses and its appeared lack or undermining of narrative (Spentzou 2009: 386). There is a narrator who promises to tell the history of the world as the authoritative voice “but the Ovidian narrator all but disappears, allowing a mêlée of other narrators to claim center stage and deliver their histories” (Spentzou 2009: 387). Further on, we have research interested in the desire and absence with a Lacanian perspective (Spentzou 2009: 389). Love is successful only in the absence of the lover (seen both in the absent lover of elegy and the transformed escapee lover, like Daphne, of the Metamorphoses) and the desire for the Other is instrumental in the movement of the stories in the Metamorphoses. Other psychoanalytical theories have been applied to Ovid lately, as well as a wider use of desire and desiring subjects (in particular by Rimell 2006, see below). What emerges is that desire both drives stories forward (sometimes literally chasing victims) and undermines the borders between subject and object, interior and exterior and so on (Spentzou 2009: 392).

In addition to the above research on subject and desire I want to bring attention to the feminist research on Ovid, and the Metamorphoses in particular. One big influence in the field was Amy Richlin’s essay collection Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome (1992). Richlin wrote herself in it about Ovid’s female characters in the essay “Reading Ovid’s Rapes”. According to Richlin, “even in his lifetime critics found his poetry disturbing because of the way he applied his wit to unfunny circumstances” (1992: 158). Richlin introduces her essay with those words in order to ask the question “how [are we] to read texts, like those of Ovid, that take pleasure in violence” (1992: 158). In her essay she discusses the problems of doing a feminist reading of such a text without dismissing it or praising it.
wrongly. Her essay reviews possible solutions to this question, and because it is polarising as well as methodological it has inspired feminist research into Ovid since then, and its explicit interest in rape is useful to this paper. However, more recent discussions of Ovid’s women and feminism focus less on the dated view of pornography (Alison Sharrock, another authority in the field, points out that the texts in Richlin’s essay collection include many different aspects of sex and label it all pornography [1998: 184-85]), and are turned to a broader gendered study of many examples of “queer” characters.

In the Metamorphoses there are a number of women that have what Richlin describes as “excessive desire” (1992: 166). They include women who desire unions that are either problematic (like Medea in book 7 and Scylla in book 8) or incestuous (like Byblis in book 9 and Myrrha in book 10), out of which only two get who or what they want through more or less open means (Medea and Myrrha). But, among those 50 rapes, there is only one female rapist, who, in addition, appears in “the only rape scene in the Metamorphoses that involves explicit physical contact” (Richlin 1992: 165). It is in the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in book 4 (verses 285–388). Hermaphroditus has appeared in the recent scholarship on Ovid that focuses the queer or gendered readings on various gender-transgressive characters. Hermaphroditus is of interest here because in Ovid’s hands, Hermaphroditus becomes both male and female when a man and a woman fuse, and is not born that way (although this is not clear-cut, as pointed out by Georgia Nugent [qtd. in Zajko 2009: 188] and Robinson 1999: 217). The research has mainly been interested in what it is that emasculates Hermaphroditus, his dual gender and whether the union is successful or not (for example Romano 2009, Robinson 1999 and Zajko 2009). Such research does not ignore Salmacis, but as of yet, Salmacis has not been treated with the research-attention she deserves. There are a number of aspects that make her an interesting subject to study.

Victoria Rimell in her book Ovid’s Lovers (2006) is interested in the desiring subject. Her grasp of desire is, according to Spentzou “triggered by the conflicting energies and irreconcilable tendencies of the Ovidian selves” (Spentzou 2009: 391). The desiring subject is not only looking for an Other to fulfill them in a Lacanian sense (like Narcissus) but is also actively looking and the gaze has a “self-realizing potential” (like Medusa) (Spentzou 2009: 391). These looking, desiring subjects stare at their victims and become victimised, and also reveal the relational subject that comes about in a relationship with others as well as itself. The point of using Medusa’s way of looking – Rimell finds her off-spring throughout Ovid’s writing – is that “subjects become objects, victors become victims, interiors become exteriors” (Spentzou 2009: 392). This is one aspect in which Salmacis is interesting: there are
few female desiring subjects in the *Metamorphoses* and even fewer of those that act in any way against the will of their desired object. But desire is, in Rimell’s study not “just … a bland, incessant game of absence and lack but also … a collision of creative energies and convictions” (2006: 21). Desire, in a poem such as the *Metamorphoses*, is one of the driving forces. Because of this, desiring subjects are allowed to voice their adventure to a larger extent.

The story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus is told by the Minyeides, the daughters of King Minyas, who stay inside spinning and weaving rather than celebrating the god Bacchus, because one of the sisters, Alcithoe, “non ... orgia censet / accipienda dei, sed adhuc temeraria Bacchum / progeniem negat esse Iovis” (determines to not participate in the secret rites of the god, and even recklessly denies that Bacchus is the son of Jupiter) (4.1-3). In other words, they are too “good” to take part in the wild orgies and stay inside to dutifully and modestly keep their hands busy with weaving and spinning. But modest as they are, “the wild, transgressive, erotic nature of the tales which the women tell to lighten the work raises problems and contradictions in their self-presentation as too respectable for Bacchic inspiration” (Sharrock 2002: 213). The aspect of storytelling, gender and subjectivity is important in Ovid’s writing, and yet another aspect that informs Salmacis’ story and can help explain why it is different from the other rape scenes in the *Metamorphoses*.

There are, in summary, many fruitful modes of reading put forward in the last thirty years of Ovidian scholarship that are generated by gender studies. With this in mind I want to read the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, which is interested in all of this: rape, desire, and storytelling. In addition to the above mentioned scholars, I have used readings and analyses of Ovid’s works by Don Fowler, on presence and communication (2000), Philip Hardie on narrative and desire (2002), and Alison Keith, on sexuality and gender (2009).

III. Method and Aim
The danger of misreading and misunderstanding is, according to Spentzou, stressed by Ovid’s stories, despite all the possible readings they present (often retelling an already-told story in a different way or with a different conclusion) (2009: 387). Spentzou claims “choosing the wrong reading is disastrous,” (which, in the poem itself, Narcissus and Cephalus do) (2009: 388). The danger or misunderstanding is present on all levels, from the character to the reader: “the author does not determine meanings and the reader has the responsibility and must face

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the consequences of deciding on the meaning of the text” (Spentzou 2009: 388). And this has to be done on a text full of “silences, gaps, and narrative seduction” (Spentzou 2009: 386). One solution to such a problem is to read the passages that are filled-in and undress the narrative seduction (or the seductress), i.e. to use the passages that are more explicit to see what they reveal, and engage with the narrator’s motivations and possible desires. Thus, turning to Salmacis is an essential venture, because her story is unusually explicit.

I aim in this paper to study the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in depth. In particular, I want to study Salmacis and her identity as a female rapist. Previous research has remained at the study of the Salmacis’ emasculating environment, whether she acts like a male rapist, and if she fails as she does. I am interested in all of these things, but would like to see how she relates to the other characters she is like, i.e., is she like other nymphs, other rapists or other desiring subjects. In order to do so I plan to use a comparative study of what I call a “prototypical” rape scene and Salmacis’ rape scene. What I refer to as a prototypical rape scene is an attempt to find a generic rape scene from the Metamorphoses, which is one committed by a man unto a powerless woman. I have chosen, as that prototype, the story of Jupiter’s rape of Europa. Partly because it is well-known and quite typical – it is Jupiter and one of his many victims – and partly because Europa’s story and her child leave a trail throughout the rest of the Metamorphoses, which demonstrates the lasting effect such a rape has on the poem at large. I will compare how the rapists and their victims are depicted, in what environment they appear, how the rape is portrayed and what the story results in. In addition to this comparative analysis, I will look at Salmacis’s story from some of the aspects mentioned in the above theoretical background: her desire and the narrative framework. This will help me see what allows rape to take a center stage in this poem.

Rimell writes that recent scholarship on ancient texts has been too interested in a binary division and analysing either masculinity or femininity, which she means stems partly from an “Anglo-American feminist ideal of a gender-neutral human subject” (2006: 3). Instead of reviewing Ovid’s construction of masculinity or femininity, or whether his writing can be viewed as feminist in any way, she asks “about relationality, about the desiring subject in Ovidian poetry as being-in-relation” (2006: 4). She focuses on the most dialectical work of Ovid, the double Heroides, where lovers write each other letters. But this view can certainly be extended to his other works (and she does this as well), where desiring subjects never act alone, even when their desire is one-sided. She comments on “Ovid’s fascination with communication between lovers, and with doubling, interaction, competition and exchange more generally” (2006: 8) and says that it culminates in Heroides. But much of Ovid’s writing
is about relationships, connection, love and so on. I would like to extend the idea of
communication between subjects desiring each other (as in *Heroides*) to communication
between desiring subjects of his stories, via doubling, interaction and exchange. There is, I
think, more exchange of approach, characterisation and action between Salmacis and Jupiter
than between Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, or Jupiter and Europa.
II. THE PROTOTYPE: JUPITER AND EUROPA

In order to discover what, if anything, happens in a gender-reversed rape, I will first do a study of a typical rape scene in *Metamorphoses*, i.e. an example of the most common kind of rape in the poem. I will focus on one of the most known pairings in the poem, the god Jupiter and the princess Europa, the result of which is king Minos of Crete. A typical aspect of this prototypical rape is that it may also be called abduction, because the sexual act is not pictured at all.3

The main part of the story happens at the end of book 2. Europa is a daughter of the king of Sidon. Mercurius is called by Jupiter and ordered to set the scene for him, “nec causam fassus amoris” (not admitting that the cause is love) (2.836). Mercurius moves a herd of cattle from their grazing ground to a beach where Europa regularly spends time with her friends. Jupiter goes to the beach and transforms himself into a bull. He seduces Europa by making her comfortable with him as a bull, and takes her away, swimming, from the beach. Book 2 ends here and when book 3 picks up, Europa is no longer mentioned except as the sister whom prince Cadmus must set out to find. But we are told Jupiter has revealed his true form and now spends his time on Dicte, a mountain on Crete. At this part of the story we are not told much else of what happened to Europa, only that she is “raptam” (carried off/violated) (3.3) from her father. The word indicates what has happened to her, but we are never explicitly told about it. Later on, in book six, Arachne alludes to what has happened to Europa when she counts her among other women Jupiter has taken (Leda, Danae etc.).4 If not for Arachne’s exposure, we know Europa’s end only by book 8 where Minos of Crete is introduced and named “Europa’s son” (8.24 and 120) and later on “Zeus’ son” (8.122). The first mention in the book is by the narrator, the second mention of both mother and father spoken by Scylla (king Nisos’ daughter) when she has been spurned by Minos. Worth noting is that these more explicit revelations that Europa actually was raped and had a child are by women. They are desiring women: Arachne exposes the gods’ various misdeeds as she is eager to prove a better weaver than Minerva (“stolida … cupidine palmae / in sua fata ruit” [insensibly, she hurries her fate in a desire to win] [6.50-51]) , and Scylla, in love with Minos, was ready to betray her father for him, but instead was rejected by him for this betrayal.

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3 I will study only what is known of the myth in this book. However, this story is well known and more detailed in other sources, which may explain why it relies on the readers filling in many gaps by themselves.

4 “elusam designat imagine tauri / Europen; ... / ipsa videbatur terras spectare relictas / et comites clamare” (she depicts Europa tricked by the appearance of a bull; … she appears to look back at the abandoned land, and call out to her companions) (6.103-106).
Below I look at the story of Jupiter and Europa as it takes place in book 2 and 3. I have looked at the act, the rapist, the victim and the surroundings and how they are described, as well as the result of the story, in order to compare these aspects in a gender-reversed scenario.

I. Fallacis Imagine Tauri (the Rapist)
I begin with the rapist: Jupiter. He becomes the centre of narrative after Mercurius has tried and failed to unite with a princess he falls in love with. His position and power is established, “ille pater rectorque deum” (the father and leader of the gods) (2.848), before he transforms himself. After this Jupiter as the bull is described over 9 verses (2.850-58): he has “faciem tauri” (the appearance of a bull) (2.850), “formosus” (beautiful) (2.851), and “color nivis ... quam nec vestigia duri / calcavere pedis nec solvit aquaticus Auster” (the colour of snow, not treaded over by traces of hard feet, nor loosened by the wet southern wind) (2.852-53). The bull is muscular (“colla toris extant” [the neck stands out with muscles] (2.854)), impressive and masculine, with small but beautiful, delicate horns (they are “facta manu” [made by hand] (2.856) which also means they are the perfect size for a hand to hold, which matters later on), “pura ... magis perlucida gemma” (clearer than a pure jewel) (2.856), and with a calm demeanour: “nullae in fronte minae, nec formidabile lumen: / pacem vultus habet” (no threats on the forehead, nothing dangerous in the eyes: the face is peaceful) (2.857-58).

Europa wonders at the bull: “tam formosus ... proelia nulla minetur” (so beautiful … indicating no fight) (2.859) “mitem” (mild) (2.860), with “candida ... ora” (a white mouth) (2.861). As it goes on, the bull is described with the word “latus … niveum” (a snowy side) (2.865). Many of these words have sexual connotations, for example latus, often applied to humans in a sexual situations, and here applied to Jupiter even though he is a bull. Horns are similarly sexual, as a common penis metaphor, and particularly so when described to perfectly fit a hand.

The reader is given clues of the false identity by the narrator. Since we already know that Jupiter is the bull, the clues emphasise his deceit. We have not been told what Jupiter has planned to do, so they also appear as a warning to the reader and Europa, a warning the latter cannot hear and the first cannot act upon, except to understand what will happen. When he takes Europa away he leaves “falsa pedum … vestigia” (false tracks of feet) (2.871). In the beginning of book 3, after the fact (we assume), Jupiter “posita fallacis imagine tauri” (the

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5 Palearium here means dewlap, which in this context I take to mean the thickness of the bull’s neck, indicating virility.
6 Cf. many of the examples in OLD, s.v. latus, meanings 1 and 2.
7 falsa agrees with vestigia but in sense should refer to pedum, i.e. it is more likely the feet are false than the tracks of them.
disguise of the false bull laid off) (3.1) and “se confessus erat” (has revealed himself) (3.2). His exposure has two steps: first he removes his bull-costume, and then he reveals himself (makes himself known), i.e. first his shape then his mind. What he has planned to do is a part of what he is and not the mask he wears.

The final thing said about Jupiter is in an aside (a parenthesis in many editions): “(quis enim deprendere possit / furta Iovis?)” (for who could find Jupiter’s stolen goods?) (3.6-7). This is an overt comment by the otherwise silent narrator. It seems to be a warning to the king because of his order to send out his son to look for the stolen girl. We have actually been told where Jupiter left Europa, but as the narrator warns, she is not mentioned in this book and seems to be on many levels hidden away from the text. It paints a picture of Jupiter as a repeating offender and of what happens to his victims. And with that, we turn to the victim of this story, Europa.

II. Praeda/Rapta (the Victim)

Europa has a very small part in the story. She is described only with these words: “magni filia regis” (the daughter of a great king) (2.844), “Agenore nata” (Agenor’s daughter) (2.858), “virginea” (virginal) (2.867), “regia virgo / nescia …” (the royal maid, unaware of…) (2.868-69), “praedam” (booty) (2.873), “ablata” (carried away) (2.873), and, in book 3, “raptam” (3). Book 2 ends with “tremulae sinuantur flamine vestes” (the trembling clothes billowing in the wind) (875). Throughout the episode Europa is rarely the subject of the verb and is described much less than Jupiter. She is not even objectified or particularly admired by Jupiter: her sole interest to him seems to be her innocence, availability and royalty. Her own vulnerability grows as she goes from being described as the daughter of the king to the maiden, to the booty and finally the one-carried-away. To the king and to her brother she is only “raptam.” Her absence from the story is emphasised by the fact that her name is not mentioned until this episode is described later by Arachne.

Her actions and reactions are limited. At first she wonders at the bull, she is afraid of it, but then she dares to touch it, feeds it flowers, lets him touch her (she does not, at first stroke him, but Jupiter “pectora praebet / virginea plaudenda manu” [presents his breast for her virginal hand to pet] [2.866-67]), hangs garlands on his horns, touches him and rides him. When the bull leaves the beach, she is terrified (“pavet” [2.873]) and looks back (“respicit” [2.874]), and then is merely held in place and seen to disappear into the waves. The last thing seen of

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her is her trembling clothes; it is the only thing expressing her fear. Knowing that the bull is Jupiter and with him being presented in such a sexual way, the reader can guess what he has in mind. Thus, Europa’s innocent gestures are viewed as naïve and pliant. She does very sexual things but is completely unaware of it, such as stroking his side, riding on his back and holding his horns. She is too innocent for her own good: she has unknowingly let herself be the victim by initiating actions that take her nearer to Jupiter.

III. Taurus Mixtus Iuventis (the Environment)
The environment is important. First of all: Jupiter sets up the scene of his abduction on the beach. It is convenient because Europa spends time with her “virginibus Tyriis” (Tyrian maidens) (2.845) and supposedly without any other protection or supervision. However, it cannot be the ideal place to graze a herd of cattle. They are removed from the natural element: “procul montano gramine pisci / armentum regale” (far off by the mountain, a royal herd grazing the grass) (2.841-42). But the placing is ideal for the abduction of a girl. Rimell writes that the “woman’s place is on the shoreline” (2006: 186), where many heroines, not least in Ovid’s writing, spend time waiting for their lover to return. The man leaves for adventures out in the world but the woman must stay behind on the beach. But, Rimell points out, “seascapes are often explicitly female or subject to female control” (2006: 186). A woman on a beach is near that uncontrollable female sphere of the water, but still on safe land. However, the water might actually be safer for the female victim: many rapes or rape attempts in the Metamorphoses happen on the beach, for example Thetis by Peleus (in book 11), Scylla by Glaucos (in book 13), and Triopeis by various men and possibly Poseidon (in book 8). The water on the other hand is full of female monsters in which element they are in charge. Europa, however, is kept safely on the shore and when they leave, Jupiter makes sure she sits on him and depends on him, even as they are in an element subject to female control.

There are more aspects of the environment that enhance this sexual and unequal meeting. Jupiter’s closest surroundings are unfertile. Jupiter transforms himself to a “taurus”, bull. The herd he hides in is made up of “iuvents” (2.843), young bulls. Jupiter is a full-grown “man” among a group of not-yet sexually mature youths. His environment makes sure he is the only sexual being there, in addition to heightening the fact that he is a very sexual being.

Apart from his nearest non-fertile surroundings, the beach is lush. Jupiter the bull walks around among “teneris herbis” (tender herbs) (2.851). He plays in “viridi … herba” (blooming herbs) (2.864). The herbs on the beach mirror Jupiter’s “mood”. When he wanders around –
“obambulat” (2.851) – they are as soft as he is and when he jumps around to show his playfulness – “exsultat” (2.864) – they are viridis, blooming and youthful. Clearly, the environment is used to emphasise the subject, but Europa is there unaware of this Jupiter-imbibed environment.

IV. Love and Power (the Rape)
This brings us to the rape itself. The act is not pictured, but the reader is not unaware of what will happen, unlike Europa is. The goal is never explicit but it is hinted at. The narrator reveals that the reason for Mercurius’s job of moving the herd of cattle is “causam … amoris” (2.836), but Mercurius is not privy to that information. However, Europa has not been introduced when this is said, so the object is unclear: we have an amorous reason and a place. Eight verses later the narrator says the king’s daughter spends time on this beach.

Now, why does Jupiter transform into a bull? The narrator explains that “non bene conveniunt nec in una sede morantur / maiestas et amor” (love and power do not meet well and do not linger in the same place) (2.846-47). Jupiter then strips himself of his signs of might: the sceptre (“sceptri gravitate relicta” [having left the heavy sceptre] [2.847]) and his own human hand (“cui dextra trisulcis / ignibus armata est” [whose right hand is armed with three-forked fire] [2.848-49]). The verbs convenio (meet) and moror (linger) suggest it is a meeting on equal terms, that one of the parties may leave, and that Jupiter has transformed in order to level off the imbalance between the king of the gods and the human princess. But as seen above, the imbalance remains and it does so because of the parts’ disparity in knowledge. Europa, because of her lack of knowledge, participates in her own rape by acting like a consenting lover.

The rape scene happens in the gap between book 2 and book 3. Jupiter can hardly wait for “sperata voluptas” (hoped-for pleasures) (2.862). We are told afterwards that Jupiter “se confessus erat” (3.2) and Europa finds out what the readers have known: that it is Jupiter. But still, little is said explicitly. After Jupiter has revealed himself, we find Europa’s father and brother who now must search for her. She has been abducted, rapta, which means she has been raped. The narrator is unwilling to describe this power play in closer detail, partly, I think, because it is an uneven match. Jupiter has already won, when he carries Europa off. It is not the overpowering via sex that is of interest in the story, but the overpowering itself and here it happens with deception and omission of information.
III. THE FEMALE RAPIST: SALMACIS AND HERMAPHRODITUS

The story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus is told by Alcithoe to her sisters as they sit inside and weave during a festival to Bacchus. Her two sisters go first and tell the stories of Pyramus and Thisbe and Clytie and Helios. When it is Alcithoe’s turn, she begins by mentioning a couple of stories she won’t go into: a nymph, angry at a shepherd who pursues her, transforms him into a stone; Sithon, who was both man and woman; Celmis who went mad; the Curets born out of rain; and Smilax and Croco, lovers who were turned into flowers. Instead she chooses a story “dulci ... novitate” (a lovely novelty) (4.284). It is about Salmacis, a nymph who lives alone in the forest, who prefers resting and grooming herself over hunting with Diana, like the other nymphs. She sees the young man Hermaphroditus, son of Venus and Mercurius, coming to the pond she lives by. She falls instantly in love, he tells her to go away, she hides and when he goes swimming she is overcome and rushes to him. As she clings to him, she begs the gods that they may be united. The gods grant her wish, they are joined in body and soul and Hermaphroditus leaves the pond both male and female. He responds by praying to the gods that they poison the water so everyone who enters it will be like him. This is an alternative origin story to Hermaphroditus’ dual gender. It is the only occasion of a woman explicitly raping someone in the Metamorphoses and it is the most explicit sex scene in the poem (Richlin 1992: 165).

Before I delve into the story itself, I want to bring attention to the narrator of the story. When Alcithoe has finished, Bacchus notices that they blatantly ignore his festival and in punishment their looms and fabrics are turned into plants and they are turned into bats: “conatae … loqui minimam … vocem / emittunt peraguntque leves stridore querelas” (trying to speak they emit the smallest sound and finish their small complaints with a high-pitched sound) (4.412-13). They are punished for ignoring one god, Bacchus, despite choosing to honour another god, Minerva (“nos … quas Pallas, melior dea, detinet” [we keep to Pallas, who is a better goddess] [4.38]). Their punishment is targeted to their speaking and story-telling: they are not explicitly silenced, as many others are in the Metamorphoses, but it is made certain that no one will be able to understand their talking. Many characters, and women in particular, are turned into birds, trees and water and often these leave a trace in the world as a reminder of their disappearance – Myrrha’s tears become the myrrh oil, Philomela and her sister are remembered as sweet-singing birds and laurel-leaves from Daphne adorn Apollo’s head. The Minyeides, however, are turned into creatures that must hide in the dark (“lucem … perosae / nocte volant” [detesting the light, they fly at night] [4.414-15]) and will not be heard
by anyone but themselves. Either what they do or what they tell stories of is not something worth honouring.

Below I will look at the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Alcithoe’s sisters also tell stories of desiring women and failed unions (Pyramus and Thisbe famously die together and dye the mulberry tree’s berries red; Clytie is in love with Helios and Helios with her, until he sees another woman, Leucothoë. Clytie tells Leucothoë’s father of their relationship and he kills his daughter, and Clytie hopes this will win back Helios, but he ignores her. She sits watching the sun for days until she transforms into a flower that follows the sun). But Salmacis is something entirely different from them. Below I look at the following aspects: the rape, the rapist, the victim and the surroundings and compare them to the story of Jupiter and Europa. I have also included the transformation as its own aspect in order to view the story’s conclusion.

I. Non Nota Dianae (the Rapist)
Salmacis is the name of the nymph and of the pond the story revolves around.9 The line between the nymph and the water is vague and this will become apparent in a number of ways. The first mention of Salmacis is of the pond. The story will explain how the water came to be “infamis,” (notorious) (4.2.85) and how and why it effeminises, “quare male fortibus undis / … enervet” (why it wrongly effeminises with powerful waves), and softens, “remolliat,” whoever touches it (4.285-86). The narrator tells us that the water is famous, “vis est notissima fontis” (the power of the pond is famous) (4.287). Since this is the prelude to the story, it seems like the pond is the main character of the story, rather than the nymph or Hermaphroditus. However, I believe it is too simple to separate the nymph from the water, and that in the end we have to talk about the nymph-as-the-water.

Salmacis the nymph enters in verse 302, after Hermaphroditus and the pond have been introduced. She is “nympha … sed nec venatibus apta nec arcus / flectere quae soleat nec quae contendere cursu” (a nymph who was not apt to hunt nor used to bend her bow or compete by running) (4.302-3). Despite being a nymph she is none of the things that a typical nymph is, suggesting she is less than or not really a nymph. More important though: she is “sola … Naiadum … non nota Dianae” (the only naiad not known to Diana) (4.304). Diana does not recognise her.

9 The water is described with a number of different words. For simplicity’s sake I will call it “a pond” in English. The words in Latin are: fons, stagnum, unda, aqua, latex and lympha.
Her sisters, the naiads, have told her to pick up her spear and quiver and combine her relaxation with hunting. When these “shoulds” are said (verses 4.306-7), they are spoken by the naiad sisters. The narrator coolly relates almost word-for-word that she does not pick up her spear and quiver nor combine her relaxation with hunting. The entire characterisation of Salmacis points out where she is not like other nymphs, but refrains from any outright moralisations. This narrator has this in common with Jupiter’s narrator: they report what happens without judging too much, except with occasional nods to the readers to alert them to pay attention.

Salmacis spends her time bathing her “formosos … artus” (beautiful limbs) (4.310). She combs her hair with “Cytoriaaco … pectine” (a boxwood comb) (4.311) and watches herself in the water: “spectatas consultit undas” (she consults the observed waves) (4.312). This is one indication that the water is an extension of her. This is made clearer when she is described “nunc perlucenti circumdata corpus amictu / mollibus aut foliiis aut mollibus incubat herbis” (now, draping her body with a transparent dress, she lies on soft leaves or soft herbs) (4.313-14). She is dressed in clothing that is, like the pond, “perlucens”. The pond is “lucentis” (clear) (4.297) and “perspicuus” (transparent) (4.300) and you can see all the way to the bottom, just like you can see all the way through Salmacis clothing. Moreover, she, like the pond, lies amid “foliiis” and “herbis”. She is a clear and see-through entity in a lush environment. Salmacis the nymph and Salmacis the pond are more or less the same – if not the same being, at least the same kind of being. Keith writes about Salmacis and her close link to the environment in her essay on sexuality and gender in Ovid’s poetry. She notes that “classical poets repeatedly feminize and sexualize the landscapes in which they set male action” (2009: 361). She also notes some similarities between Salmacis the pond (lymphae [4.298]) and Salmacis the nymph (nympha [4.302]): both are uniquely uncustomary – the pond uncustomarily empty of vegetation and the nymph uncustomarily uninterested in nymph-activities –, their transparency of water and clothing, and Salmacis’ use of the pond to mirror herself (Keith 2009: 361-62). Thus Salmacis and the environment are made the same, and the environment is feminised along with Salmacis.

However, the feminisation of Salmacis is less straight-forward. Matthew Robinson notes that “even before their combination into one androgynous being, both Hermaphroditus and Salmacis are playing the male and female part” (1999: 218). This refers not only to the fact that Salmacis has the aggressive role in the union. Salmacis is clearly different from the typical nymphs, all of whom are very innocent and feminine in their company of only women. But she appears to be more feminine than them, because she rejects the less-feminine
actions of Diana’s naiads – actions of active women who reject love and sex – while she embraces actions more typically female and passive. This is perhaps why she is not known by Diana: she has an interest in sex and Diana is usually blind to that (for example, see the story of Callisto in book 2, who is raped by Jupiter and then rejoins Diana. Diana, because she is innocent or virginal, [“et, nisi quod virgo est, poterat sentire Diana” (if she had not been a virgin, Diana could have sensed it) (2.451)] is the only one among the naiads who does not realise what has happened to Callisto when she becomes pregnant). It is remarkable to use the most girly and innocent of the gods to compare Salmacis to: Salmacis is at once not girl enough to hunt with Diana, but more feminine than those naiads, as well as both more innocent (picking flowers rather than killing animals) and less innocent than them, because she is not known by Diana, innocent virtue personified. In this setting, Diana’s naiads are like the young bulls Jupiter appears among. Salmacis, like Jupiter, becomes the most sexual being in a surrounding of asexual beings. Finally, several of her actions prior to engaging with Hermaphroditus are that of a sexual object, for example bathing. The flower-picking is not only preferred over hunting, it also, according to Keith, places her alongside nymphs about to be raped and women about to be married in epic poetry (2009: 363). But when she meets her lover, she is not “plucked” like these other women, but acts according to the male rapist of so many myths (Keith mentions Jupiter and Dis [2009: 363]) (for this idea, also see Robinson 1999: 217-18). Salmacis bends the tropes of femininity and nymphs and makes her difficult to predict, to Hermaphroditus’ disadvantage.

When Salmacis has seen Hermaphroditus, before she approaches him, she makes sure she is beautiful “nec tamen … / quam se composuit, quam circumspexit amictus / et finxit vultum et meruit formosa videri” (not until she has composed herself, inspected her dress and modified her face and deserves to be seen as beautiful) (4.317-19). This may be compared to Jupiter’s transformation into a bull. The same word is used to describe them, “formosus” (Salmacis was also said to bathe her “formosos … artus” earlier [4.310]). However, Jupiter is by the narrator called formosus, while Salmacis is by the narrator said to be making sure she deserves to be seen as formosa when she is about to approach her victim. She is aware of and ready for being objectified.

Hidden, she looks upon Hermaphroditus as he undresses and goes for a swim. She sees his naked body and

placuit ... cupidine formae

... exarsit: flagrant quoque lumina nymphae,
Despite the close link she has with the water, she burns. This brings to mind the previous story told by the Alcithoe’s siter, where Helios, the sun, also known as Phoebus, falls in love with the maid Leucothoë (Helios comes to Leucothoë dressed as her mother and rapes her [“ille / vim tulit invitae” (he took me unwillling with force) in her own words (4.238-39)], after which Leucothoë is punished by her father by being buried alive, away from the eyes of the sun). But the sun is translated into her element by being mirrored in the water. Salmacis is here likened to other rapists and her gazing at her object of desire is in itself an action, and one transformative since it is like the sun’s “gazing” – that is, able to burn.

As soon as Hermaphroditus has jumped into the water, Salmacis is moved to action. Fowler reads Salmacis impatience and inability to wait, her “vixque moram patitur” (and she is hardly able to wait) (4.350), as “hardly a female characteristic, but much more a mark of the male” (2000: 163). It is also recognised in the words that describe Jupiter’s desire: “vix iam, vix cetera differt!” (now, he can hardly postpone the rest) (2.863). In addition, Fowler finds her “whole attitude towards Hermaphroditus, and in particular her instantaneous move from spying to attempted possession, … one we can recognize as male” (2000: 163). But this is not the action of men only, as there are women throughout the Metamorphoses who act and are not willing to spy, such as Myrrha, Byblis, Medea and Scylla.¹⁰ What brings them together is their burning desire. This is an action of a desiring subject. We notice this because what motivates both Jupiter and Salmacis is “sperata voluptas” and “sperata gaudia” (hoped-for joy) (4.368) respectively. They are not happy with what they have: they are explicitly looking forward to what comes next. And along with Salmacis, I turn to the desired object, Hermaphroditus.

¹⁰ May I also bring up the perhaps most famous spy of the Metamorphoses: a man, Actaion, who watches Diana bathe in book 3, and is dearly punished for it.
II. Flowers and Ivory (the Victim)

Hermaphroditus is a “puerum natum” (boy child) of Mercurius and Venus (4.288), “cuius erat facies, in qua materque paterque / cognosci possent” (in whose appearance both mother and father could be recognised) (4.290-91). We may assume he is beautiful with those parents. We do not find out his name until after he has transformed, but we are told that he carries the name of both his parents (Hermes and Aphrodite in the Greek). I think he shares this aspect with Europa: she is made important as the mother of a famous child, King Minos, and we find out who she is only then. Similarly Hermaphroditus is made important once he is this male and female creature, not before, and thus we are given his name later. He has grown up on the mountain Ida with naiads and leaves it to eagerly discover the world and unknown places, and enjoys it (“gaudebat” [4.295]). One such place is the pond where Salmacis lives.

Hermaphroditus is in other ways not as anonymous as Europa is, but we find out most about him through the eyes of Salmacis. When she sees him, she approaches and and says to him that he is “credi / esse deus” (believed to be a god) (4.320-21), like Cupid, and that his parents, brother and sister, she supposes, must be “beati” (happy) (4.322), “felix” (lucky) (4.323) and “fortunata” (fortunate) (4.323) (Cupid actually being his half-brother). His would-be wife is “longe cunctis longeque beatior” (far more happy than the rest) (4.325). Thus, Hermaphroditus is desirable in the eyes of Salmacis but she does not tell him so directly, but thinks how it would be to be someone close to him. She is not yet entirely able to “objectify” him, but rather objectifies his relatives and herself, since she would like to be his wife.

When Salmacis has spoken her first words of love, Hermaphroditus acts like any pursued love-interest should: “pueri rubor ora notavit / (nescit enim quid amor), sed et erubuisse decebat” (the blush marked the boy’s face [for he did not know what love is], but to blush became him) (4.329-30). He blushes and the discomfort looks well on him. Richlin comments on this trope in Ovid’s writing: “the display of the woman’s body and fear to her rapist-to-be … often precedes her rape” (1992: 162). Hermaphroditus, however, does now show fear, but discomfort and a lack of understanding: he is so innocent he does not know of or recognise love. While he is in many way likened to the female rape victim, he is not frightened but rather ashamed, which is both a comment on his probable advantage in strength, and that the inequality between them, or between sexual aggressor and victim, is founded on lack of knowledge. This is similar to what was found between Jupiter and Europa: while Jupiter obviously had the upper hand in strength, he made a point of ridding himself of it, and what had Europa commit to being victimised was her lack of understanding of the situation.
But now, the narrator has begun to describe Hermaphroditus in various objectifying ways. The colour of his blush is like “aprica pendentibus arbore pomis / aut ebori tincto … aut sub candore rubenti, / cum frustra resonant aera auxiliaria, lunae” (apples hanging on a sunny tree or painted ivory or the moon’s whiteness become red when, in vain, copper resounds to help) (4.331-333). It is an apple lit by sunshine (ripe and ready to be picked), painted ivory (a beautiful thing unnecessarily painted) and the moon reddening with the eclipse, an omen believed to be painful to the moon, and which was driven away with noises of beaten copper (Björkeson 2015: 401n332-33) – an ominous simile, understood as a cry for help, and a colour not pleasing but meant to be driven off. This means that the colouring is not only viewed in a positive light. Additionally, according to Robinson, these similies evoke both male and female characters in Metamorphoses, for example Narcissus, Lavinia and Menelaus, and even “the moon was thought to be bisexual” (1999: 219n50). This predicts Hermaphroditus’ transformation, or suggests it is not only his union with Salmacis that makes him dual-gendered.

Hermaphroditus is allowed to explicitly express his uninterest (in contrast with Europa). He says “desinis, an fugio tecumque … ista relinquo” (stop, or I run away and leave this with you) (4.336). He threatens to leave the pond (ista) as well as the nymph, and partakes in mixing up pond and nymph. Despite this, he does not realise that the threat of the nymph does not go away just because the nymph does. When he is left alone, he removes “mollia … velamina” (the soft clothing) from “tenero … corpore” (the tender body) (4.345). Note, that Hermaphroditus’ body is already tender (soft, or young) before he jumps into the water. Again, it appears that he already has the femininity within. In the water he shines like “eburnea si quis / signa tegat claro vel candida lilia vitro” (ivory figurines or white lilies, if someone covered them with clear glass) (4.354-55). He is again likened to ivory, but this time only covered by glass (which was said to make ornaments more beautiful [Björkeson 2015: 401n355-56]), clearly preferable to being painted red, and to a white lily. A white lily in water brings a water-lily to mind and this, I think, is how the water works: already he is more linked to the water and to its femininity. When he was on land and more ready to resist Salmacis, he was likened to an apple in a tree. This alerts us to the importance of the environment, which is what I will examine next.
III. Temperie Blandarum Captus Aquarum (the Environment)
The pond is described in detail when Hermaphroditus finds it and it is at once remarkable to him: “stagnum lucentis ad imum / usque solum lymphae” (a pond with clear water all the way to the bottom) (4.297-98). The pond is crystal clear without any kind of growth: “non illic canna palustris / nec steriles ulvae nec acuta cuspidie iunci” (neither marshy reeds nor barren sedge or rush with sharp points) (4.298-99). The water is “perspicuus” (transparent) (4.300). However it is surrounded by lush vegetation: “vivo / caespite cinguntur semperque virentibus herbis” (surrounded by living grass and always vigorous herbs) (4.300-1). This is familiar from the story of Jupiter and Europa: the larger surroundings are fertile and alive, but the most central location is not fertile but is empty of life (Jupiter was a bull in a herd of young bulls, grazing on a beach full of herbs and plants). The infertile midst is a decoy for the danger it poses to the victim who enters it. However, the pond is not as indifferent to its visitors as those young bulls are: the pond has the ability to transform the swimmer.

When Hermaphroditus believes he is left alone in “vacuis ... herbis” (empty herbs) (4.341), he dips his feet in “adludentibus undis” (playing waves) (4.342) and the environment mirrors his mood. He is “temperie blandarum captus aquarum” (captured by the temperature of the coaxing water) (4.344) and the water is personified as an enticing being (acting as Salmacis in her absence). When Hermaphroditus jumps into the water, it is “in latices.... in liquidis ... aquis” (in the water … in the watery liquid) (4.353-354) and he “translucet” (shines) (4.354) – immediately taking on properties of the water.

As mentioned before, water is an element controlled by women. It is, Rimell writes, arousing as well as sexually threatening for men (2006: 187). The woman bathing is a common trope in Latin literature (Rimell 2006: 187), but in Metamorphoses it is a dangerous area. Salmacis’s pond is not only her domain, but an extension of her, and Hermaphroditus commits himself to the danger when going in the water. But he, like Europa, enters this freely because he does not know the implication of the water. Thus, because of his lack of knowledge, he commits himself to the rape.

IV. Sperata Gaudia Nymphae (the Rape)
The desire to take action begins with “visumque optavit habere” (she wishes to hold the one she has seen) (4.316) when Salmacis catches sight of Hermaphroditus. If there is someone else, Salmacis agrees that “mea sit furtiva voluptas” (my pleasure may be secret) (4.327): the idea that she will respect someone in her position, but not the object of her desire, removes
agency from her victim: she will not listen to what he says, but to whom he belongs. Otherwise, she thinks that “thalamum … ineamus eundem” (we would enter into the same bedroom) (4.328) which is a more equal action than what it turns out to be – however, she prophetically speaks the truth since they will enter any bedroom together when they are one. When she has spoken to Hermaphroditus she begs and begs him for “sororia saltem / oscula” (at least a sister’s kiss) (4.334-35) and she brings her arms around his neck. Afraid he will leave she says “loca … haec tibi libera trado” (I hand over this place for free to you) (4.337). She then “simulat ... discedere … / ... respiciens ... / delituit flexumque genu submisit” (pretends to walk away, … looking back, … hides and lowers herself, bending, to her knees) (4.338-40). As she hides she is at her most submissive, on her knee, but this is only her pretence. As Fowler has pointed out, Salmacis is one of the women who “want to be there, not merely to look on and watch and talk” (2000: 159). She is a desiring subject bound to act.

Consequently, when she has seen Hermaphroditus naked she can hardly put it off anymore, “vix iam sua gaudia differt” (now hardly postponing her joy) (4.350) (echoing Jupiters similar words). At this point she says “vicimus et meus est!” (we have won and he is mine) (4.356). This means two things: when Hermaphroditus enters the water he has already “lost” – Hermaphroditus is now Salamcis’ possession. In addition, notice the plural of vicimus – it may be the common humble plural, but this is the only time Salmacis uses the plural of herself. It is very much as if she and the pond are speaking together: she and the pond have won and now he belongs to her. In response, she removes her clothes and enters the pond.

Up until this point the story shares the narrative of the prototype story: the scene is set, the rapists have gotten the victims where he/she wants them, without protection, in an environment chosen by them (for both Jupiter and Salmacis, it’s in the water, even if the level of the victim’s vulnerability is different. Jupiter makes sure he is in control of Europa in the water while Salmacis is in control of the water). The narrator of Jupiter and Europa’s story stops and we will have to guess to understand what happens next. It is not difficult to guess and the narrator has given us plenty of clues. But the female narrator, Alcithoe, continues and does not shy away from saying what goes on in the gaps.

I read the rape scene from the moment Salmacis has gone into the water until she has begged the gods that they be united, imposing the transformation immediately after her words: we can no longer speak of Salmacis as her own subject. The scene is between verses 358-372. Over these fifteen verses, there are 21 predicates, 8 of which Salmacis is directly the subject, and 4 of which she is the subject indirectly in a couple of similes. 4 are spoken by Salmacis when she prays. 5 of the predicates have Hermaphroditus as a subject (1 passive).
Salmacis’ first 4 predicates and the passive predicate speak of her actions as forceful. Hermaphroditus is the object of them: tenet, carpit, subiectat, tangit (holds, plucks, holds from under and touches) (4.358-60). For every one of these verbs except subiectat, Hermaphroditus is unwilling: pugnantem (tenet) (fighting), luctantia (oscula carpit) (struggling kisses), invita (pectora tangit) (unwilling chest). The final predicate here, “haec … circumfunditur illae” (he is poured over from here and there) (4.360) demonstrates that he does not stand a chance of getting away, despite “nitentem contra elabique volentem” (struggling against and wanting to flee) (4.361). Salmacis is evidently the aggressor and Hermaphroditus is obviously unwilling – the narrator offers no doubt about it.

What follows then is a couple of similes. Salmacis is the subject of the main clauses (implicat, solent … intexere, contine [entangle, have the habit of covering, and holds fast] [4.362-67]) as a snake, ivy and octopus respectively. The snake simile is perhaps the most interesting: as in other similar scenes, the male is portrayed as an eagle (here “regia … ales” [royal bird] [4.362]) and the female as the snake he catches (Richlin 1992: 164). But this snake entangles itself in the bird’s head, feet and wings when it has lifted into the air. As the bird, Hermaphroditus is the subject of sustinet and rapit (restrains and carries off) (4.362-63): forceful and predatory words and actions. But Hermaphroditus the bird accidentally caught a snake able to fight back and Salmacis as the snake is the subject of the following verbs, alligat and implicat. The simile, according to Richlin, keeps the gendered descriptions but turns them around in this moment with reversed gender roles (1992: 166). Rimell reads the snake as Medusa hovering in the background (2006: 17, 29). Medusa is certainly someone who caught would be able to fight back: just by looking at her victim (or they seeing her), they are dead. The following two similes show, I think, the experience of being dominated by Salmacis. The ivy covers the long tree trunk completely, and the many-limbed octopus holds its caught enemy under water (another image of Medusa and her many-tentacled head [Rimell 2006: 93]): it seems as if Salmacis must have more than two arms. And the environment study has already showed that she does: she is in fact the pond itself.

Hermaphroditus then makes an attempt to be released. He is the subject of the predicates perstat and denegat (resists and denies) (4.368-69). But Salmacis takes over as the subject of premit and inhaerebat (presses and clings to) (4.369-70), like the octopus and the ivy, and at last, says her prayer to the gods, which will be her final mode of attack. Her words are what seals the deal for her. She says to him that it is no good to fight because he will not be able to

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11 In addition, he is the grammatical subject of “circumfunditur” (is poured over), a verb form that is rather passivizing in its semantics.
flee (once again with a prophetic strain to her words). Then she begs the gods that they “ita ... iubeatis” (order it so) (4.371) and that they will not be separated again. Her wish is granted by the gods and Hermaphroditus is neither released nor held against his will. They transform.

V. Mixta Duorum Corpora (the Transformation)
After this we can no longer speak of Salmacis the nymph, or a rape scene. What follows is the transformation of Hermaphroditus and his prayer. The transformation is described thus:
“mixta duorum / corpora iunguntur” (a mix of two bodies is united) (4.373-74) where the two appear to take equal place and then “faciesque inductur illis / una” (one appearance is put on them) (4.374-75) – they are still plural but in one shape. The transformation is compared to a tree grafted onto another tree, which “crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere cernit” (by growing they are united and appear to mature together) (4.375). It is true that both trees grow, but they will remain separated species, which makes their union perhaps less like Salmacis’ and Hermaphroditus’ (or reveals what their union is like in truth). The simile, though, says that they appear to grow old at the same time. The transformation goes on with the odd description: “complexu coierunt membra tenaci” (the limbs unite in a clinging embrace) (4.377). It seems to describe the rape rather than the transformation, by using the verb coeo and calling it a clinging embrace – Salmacis love is in every way a clinging embrace. Now “nec duo sunt sed forma duplex, nec femina dici / nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque videntur” (they are not two but of double form, and could be called neither woman nor man, and seems to be neither and both) (4.378-79). They are now a true merging of male and female, equally Salmacis and Hermaphroditus. Or are they?

Into the water, “liquidas undas” (the liquid waves) (4.380), Hermaphroditus went as a “vir” (man) (4.380), and came up “semimarem” (half-male/hermaphrodite) with “mollita ... / membra” (soft limbs) and “non iam voce virili” (now without a male voice) (4.381-82). He prays to his parents that “quisquis in hos fontes vir venerit, exeat inde / semivir” (whoever comes into this pond as a man, will leave as a half-man) and that he will “mollescat” (grow soft) with the touch of the water (4.385-86). The softening is the most important aspect of his loss of manliness. But even as he speaks, Salmacis has no part in him. He speaks of his experience and what happened to him in the water. The aspect of Salmacis he wears is the softer limbs and the not-male-nor-female face, and this is the exact aspect he wants to imbue the water with. Salmacis is found not in him but in the pond. Finally, while Hermaphroditus
keeps his name – already a mix of a man and a woman’s – it is the pond that will wear Salmacis’ name.

The gods answer Hermaphroditus’ prayer as well. Both parents are “motus … nati rata verba biformis / fecit” (moved by the two-formed child they make his words true) (4.387-88) and “incesto fontem medicamine tinxit” (tinge the pond with polluting medicine) (4.388). The water is tinged – probably no longer as crystal clear as it was when Hermaphroditus found it – with incesto medicamine. Incestus refers to anything unclean and impure – that may be what it means, the no longer clear water – but it also carries the meanings sinful, defiled and in violation of religious laws. And these damning attributes Hermaphroditus’s parents apply to him.

In this episode, the narrator does follow the action one step closer. But compared to Jupiter and Europa, it is the rapist who disappears. The victim is able to leave, however traumatised or transformed, but with a voice. Georgia Nugent concludes similarly “Hermaphroditus remains … what he already is—and that is a male subject, always fully conscious of himself as such” (qtd. in Fowler 2000: 159). Salmacis, and the other desiring women in similar position to Salmacis, are very verbal and have a living interiority. Of these – Myrrha, Medea, Byblis and Scylla – Salmacis is the one with the smallest amount of spoken lines. But she, when she loses the ability to speak herself, has taken over someone else’s interiority. Europa is never anything but her body and her reproductive abilities. But Salmacis becomes one with her victim and gets to keep on making victims. Salmacis is a powerful rapist in this way. I want to suggest it is not Salmacis who is punished here, but the sisters who tell the story of Salmacis.
IV. CONCLUSION

I have compared two rapists from the *Metamorphoses*. Jupiter is a repeat offender and represents a more typical description of a rapist in comparison to Salmacis, who stands out as the only female rapist in *Metamorphoses*. However, the fact that Salmacis is a female rapist matters little: she is not made more masculine because of her actions, but remains, and is emphasised as, feminine. They share many traits such as being in control, not specifically in terms of strength, but in information. They are able to manipulate various circumstances, for example the environment and their appearance, which gives the victims a sense of security and has them “walk into the trap”. Most important, though: they are the narrative force of their story, not only subjects but actors. This is of course a necessity in making a rapist a rapist: being willing to act upon their desires even when their objects do not consent. But the narrative is not only willing to follow them, but also willing to present the actions with them in the centre. As Hardie says of the narrative in the *Metamorphoses*, in his Lacanian reading of it: “desire is the moving force of all signifying processes and is perpetually propelled forward as the desire for something else” (2002: 67). Rimell theorised similarly, but added that it is not, here, a desire for something lacking but a desire that opens up creativity and communication (2006: 21, Spentzou 2009: 391). Desire becomes the same thing as narrative force.

Their victims also share traits: both are innocent to a fault. They are made complicit in their own rape by being unaware of what their actions mean. Apart from this, they take up little room in the narrative. We know almost nothing of Europa and despite knowing a little bit more of Hermaphroditus, it is less than what we know about Salmacis.

I have noted similarities in the environment: there is one layer of infertility (the young bulls, Diana’s naiads and the pond’s lack of growth) in an otherwise fertile and living setting (the lush beach and the pond’s surrounding growth). The environment works to express the character’s interiority as they wander around it. We also have the proximity to water, which predicts what should happen. Europa should, like women in her position, be abandoned on the beach by her leaving hero, but she is instead taken away. Salmacis should, like nymphs, be discovered in her hidden grove and risk being raped, but instead she does that. The environment, more than anything, gives the victims a false sense of security. The environment mirrors and emphasises the characters’ various feelings and motives and if the stories’ victims knew better how to read environment, or knew of others like them, they could have used the environmental clues as warnings.
The rape scene’s representation is the most significant difference between these stories. Between Europa and Jupiter it is not shown at all and it all takes place in the gap between books 2 and 3. Between Hermaphroditus and Salmacis it is depicted – if not the actual sex than at least the overpowering. This is where I think the gender matters. The narration follows more closely in order to depict how the overpowering takes place. Jupiter is a god and male and his strength is obvious. Salmacis is not necessarily as strong, but we find she has means of overpowering her victim, despite his struggles, without much difficulties, and despite being portrayed as very feminine and even lazy.

Another thing the depiction of the rape offers is more empathy with the victim and their situation. Showing the rape scene gives the victim an ability to resist and, if not successfully, at least show that he or she is unwilling. Europa appears to invite the rape and since we are not allowed to see the rape itself we cannot see her reactions when she realises what is about to happen. She is afraid as she leaves but she cannot even wave for help, because she is in a position of holding on to her rapist. Hermaphroditus is not only allowed to vocally reject Salmacis, but struggle against her and exact a revenge. Depicting the rape might be gruesome, but it is a purging of the victim’s apparent complicity in the rape.

Finally, I would like to bring up the results of these rapes. A narrative obsessed with characters, how they are linked, and desire, will not tell stories for nothing. The narrative will bring about more of what it is interested in: characters and their creative desires. The result of Jupiter’s rape is Europa’s child, Minos. His life spans parts of book 8 of the *Metamorphoses* and brings about several stories of desire and action (for example about Scylla, Pasifaë, the Minotaur and Theseus). Jupiter is able to keep desiring others and keep creating stories. Europa’s brother is brought to look for her and incites other chains of events. The result of Salmacis’ rape is similar. Hermaphroditus walks away with Salmacis in his mind and his old eagerness for the world (the transformation does not appear to have changed him much) and that combination should bring about stories. Salmacis also becomes the pond that is now inbued with the effeminising poison, which will transform anyone who enters the pond: Salmacis, like Jupiter, will keep on violating victims that happen upon her. We do not hear of these possible stories, though, because their narrator was silenced and turned into a bat. Their narrator was the opposite of an active desiring subject, who spurned Bacchus in order to sit inside and tell her sisters stories.

What has been shown in this paper is that desiring subjects are actors, regardless of gender and power. The characters that move this complicated narrative forward are characters that desire things and act upon their desires, to their detriment or luck. Other superficially
powerless desiring subjects, like Medea and Myrrha, are allowed to voice their stories, but Salmacis is more desiring and more explicit than any of them. Despite them often being silenced in the end, we hear their voices in the poem because they want something and dare to take it.
V. BIBLIOGRAPHY


