

Fabre- Serris, J. (2018) “Desire and rape in the feminine. The tales of Echo and Salmacis: an Ovidian answer to Propertius 1.20?”, in *Through Women’s eyes: Female vision in elegiac and epic Latin poets*, J. Fabre-Serris and J. Hallett, Guest Co-editors, *Helios* 45.2., 127-44.

My paper proposes a comprehensive study of two stories told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 3 and 4, each about the meeting between a boy (Narcissus/ Hermaphroditus) and a nymph (Echo/ Salmacis), consumed with desire at first glance. In both passages Ovid uses a narrative pattern recurring in many erotic tales of the *Metamorphoses* with male and female protagonists: the sudden sight of an erotically attractive young individual, followed by violent desire, declaration of love in vain, and attempted rape. In my opinion, the two passages I compare typify Ovid’s personal, authorial choice to empathize with women’s point of view and behavior by giving literary space to a female voice. I would argue that Ovid has derived the idea of constructing two parallel stories of erotically blazing nymphs, Echo and Salmacis, from Propertius 1.20. In this text Propertius provides the *exemplum* of mythical Hylas’ rape to support advice given to his friend, Gallus, about Gallus’ beloved, also named Hylas: *huic ... nympharum semper cupidas defende rapinas* (“ward off from him the acts of ever lustful rape by nymphs”, 7.11). In both narratives, Ovid refers, through a wide range of textual echoes, to various passages of Propertius 1.20. But Propertius is only interested in the masculine point of view. He describes in detail the sexual advances of Boreas’ sons, Hylas’ fascination for his own image seen in the water, and Hercules’ despair after Hylas’ abduction. Only at the end, and very briefly, does he mention the kidnapping of the boy by the lustful Mysian nymphs.¹ Unlike him, Ovid focuses on the *nympharum cupidas rapinas* by describing how both women, although very different—one a nymph possessing extremely limited speaking capability, the other of some eloquence—fall in love at first sight, try to seduce the boy they desire, and react after suffering an initial setback by attempting a rape.

¹ On the fact that Propertius “gives the myth a much greater homoerotic colouring by the simple expedient of incorporating allusions to a number of male lovers beside the main mythical Hercules-Hylas pair”, see Ingleheart 2015: 129 and above all. I add that, compared to Tibullus 1.8, based on some similar pattern (the poet has lost his beloved, Marathus, because of a woman), which may suggest a Gallan precedent, Propertius’ elegy appears to be more male-centered.