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The Perception of Bodies: An Exploration of Ancient and Modern Constructs of Gender

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Introduction

The way in which one views themselves can sometimes be in contention with how they are viewed externally, and the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus represents this duality of identity and perception. There is a modern standard that bodies are binary in terms of gender and sex, man vs woman; male vs female, rather than a spectrum of identity and variation in characteristics. Ancient Greece and Rome offer us examples of intersex bodies in antiquity which would suggest that nonbinary bodies exist in nature and have always been with us. Since the Middle Ages, those who have not fit clearly into the binary gender and sex distinctions have been forced into one category or the other; this has contributed to the erasure of nonbinary and intersex bodies. This is manifested in our society, for example, through the surgical "correction" of intersex bodies to fit as either male or female.[1] In this thesis I will examine the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus, a statue depicting an intersex body originating in ancient Greece and later copied in ancient Rome, to reveal that intersex bodies and nonbinary identities have always existed.

Intersex bodies have historically been subjected to ridicule and "othering" for not fitting into a binary understanding of gender and sex. Examining intersex bodies in antiquity and the reaction to them allows us to see how the intersex body was subjected to the gaze of the more powerful. In classical scholarship, a similar power dynamic is at play: those with social and political power dominate classical scholarship which alienates identities not aligned with power from the field which minimizes diverse conversations. By widening the field of Classics and offering more diverse voices, there is more room for discussion and debate rather than a single

[1]Fausto-Sterling, Anne. n.d. "Gender & Sexuality." Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling. Accessed November 30, 2022. http://www.annefaustosterling.com/fields-of-inquiry/gender/.

voice speaking for all. The powerful, those dictating the norms within a society during a specific time and place, play an important role in how intersex and nonbinary bodies move within society. The ways in which power operates is historically and culturally contingent, so the power dynamics in antiquity are going to be very different from the power dynamics today. The comparison between the power dynamics in antiquity and today – both of which are grounded in arguments of nature – exposes the extent to which the social constructions of sex and gender support the status quo in which those who conform have social and political power and those who do not suffer the consequences. We can also then lift up underrepresented voices if we can pinpoint how power functions within society today, and offer voices to ancient individuals who have been overlooked due to the singular story that has been told of Classics.

At first glance it seems that the ways in which the Romans looked at intersex bodies is similar to the ways in which the intersex body is threatening to cis men today; it undermines the perceived naturalness of their own power grounded in the cis male body which has historically shaped the interests of the society, resulting in the patriarchal state. Intersex bodies, by subverting the binary sex system, disrupt the assumption of male power over the female body since they do not exist in either male or female categories. If one is unable to place someone into a strictly binary category, they do not know where the person lands on the power balance and cannot situate themselves in relation to the other; power is, in other words, relational. Today, in our patriarchal culture, men's interests – however unwittingly – prevail over women politically, socially, and economically. In ancient Rome, men's social power was determined by their role in sexual acts. Sexual roles were divided between active and passive participation, meaning those who penetrated and those who were penetrated. For elite men, it was socially acceptable to participate both actively and passively, while for women it was only acceptable to participate

passively. The passive and active roles suggested, however, a gendering of sexed bodies. The active role was considered masculine and the passive role was considered feminine.[2] In this way, the role one plays in sex is linked to power when one considers age. Ancient Roman ideas of gender were more reliant on passivity and activity rather than the binary gender structure despite their sex structure being binary as ours is, so that raises the question of where the intersex body would land within the Roman conceptualization of gender and sex.

There is no clear physical signifier of where the intersex individual lands on the pyramid of power, so they are met with fear, violence and "othering". This fear, violence, and "othering" becomes a means of maintaining a patriarchal order and exercising control over bodies, the existence of which threatens the socially constructed binary of sex. Even though the social significance of sexual acts in ancient Greece, Rome, and today are different, these societies all rely on the supremacy of men's power, the foundation of which is their claims to power situated in the body. In these societies intersex bodies threaten the perceived naturalness of men's claims to supremacy ultimately disrupting societal expectations of behavior and creating responses of fear, violence and "othering" as a means of regaining control. In my thesis I will examine the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus and the scholarship surrounding nonbinary and queer identity in the Classics.[3] By researching intersex bodies and queer identity in Classics, I hope to find more community for any and all people who align themselves outside of established gender and sexuality norms.

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[2] Robinson, M. 1999. "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid. Met. 4.285-388)." *The Classical Quarterly* 49 (1): 212-223. https://www.jstor.org/stable/639498.

[3] I will be using the term "queer" as an overarching identifier for those whose gender and/or sexuality exist outside the established binary. Historically, the term queer has been used derogatorily, but in recent years the term has been reclaimed to embody a representation of those who feel othered by hyperspecific LGBTQ+ rights movements. For me, queer means an existence without boundaries and limitations, an acceptance of sexuality and gender as fluid, always in flux, and a release of trying to identify myself according to others understandings of LGBTQ+ identities. Cheves 2019.

I will begin by looking at literary evidence for intersex bodies, specifically examining power dynamics in ancient Rome. Then I will look at the statue itself to understand its context: why it exists and the ways in which it was perceived in antiquity as well as today. I will then move on to the history of academic treatments of the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus in the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as intersex bodies in Greek and Roman literature to examine how the norms of the gender and sexuality of academics' own times shape how they engage "objectively" with intersex bodies. My goal here is to show how "objective scholarship" is, in fact, shaped by the unmarked perspectives of elite white men. After looking at the history of interpretations of the statue and content regarding intersex bodies as well as various sexual identities, I will examine how people are talking about intersex bodies and the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus today through public scholarship.

The discussion will conclude with my final point: that if our interpretations of statues are contingent on our own norms of gender and sexuality, then we need more diverse scholarship within the Classics. In the 21st century there has been a shift academically towards STEM and research, the University of Vermont being an example of this by defunding the Classical Civilizations major. My argument here is that, by reducing accessibility to this area of study, the Classics will again become elitist and discriminatory by excluding conversations around gender and sexuality in antiquity. With my research I hope to contribute to the conversation in Classics about gender, sex and sexuality in ancient civilization, but also bring to light the implications of a move away from Humanities scholarship and study.

Chapter 1

Before discussing intersex bodies, a clarification of terms is necessary. Understanding how we conceptualize nonbinary bodies will allow us to compare our own typologies to those of

the ancient Romans with greater clarity. The points of contrast will expose the socially constructed origins of how we understand bodies, in particular how bodies are inscribed with social and political significance. Here, I am doing what scholars of gender and sexuality have always done, which is to engage with the past according to the terms of one's present culture.[4] The difference is that I am offering a new narrator to the picture.[5] In the history of classical scholarship, the dominant perspective on the past has been that of white men, but by diversifying the discipline not only does Classics benefit from the more lived experiences of individuals, but different stories are selected as meaningful.[6] For example, the story of Tiresius retold through the lens of gender transformation.[7] I am not condemning the engagement with the past through one's present culture; I am condemning the fact that there is only one culture that has been used to engage with the past.

Fausto-Sterling establishes that "both sex and gender are in part social constructs" while recognizing that "they take place in the body, and so they are simultaneously biological."[8] Here she acknowledges the intersection between more intangible, social understandings of gender experience and expression and the physical aspects of the body that act as signifiers for sexual categorization. She upholds that "labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision…our beliefs about gender can define our sex" which is to establish again that both sex and gender are socially constructed.[9]

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[4] See pages 30-35 for a more complete discussion.

[5] I am using the language of "narrator" here to bring light to the discourse around the "unreliable narrator". Previous narration in the retelling of ancient source material has exclusively been from one viewpoint, so by expanding the discussion to include more diverse voices and topics, there is a new narration occurring.

[6] See pages 30-34 for more complete discussion.

[7] See pages 37-38 for more complete discussion.

[8] "Sociology of Sex, Beyond Two Sexes – Introduction to Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World", n.d.

[9] "Sociology of Sex, Beyond Two Sexes – Introduction to Sociology: Understanding and Changing the Social World", n.d.

Furthermore, sex and gender are not an issue of nature and nurture, but they are instead intrinsically related to one another and interact throughout a person's life in varying degrees. She uses sex hormones, testosterone and estrogen, as an example of this, for they change intermittently throughout the day, time of year, depending on external situations, and everyone has varying levels of sex hormones. This variation influences the way in which people experience their identity, including that of gender, for "we acquire our sexual essence before birth and…it unfolds as we grow and develop".[10] The gender binary is based on the idea that two distinct and complementary sexes are natural and are, in turn, upheld by social institutions and practices. [11]

Cisgender people, "conform to the gender binary and identify their gender as the same as the sex they were assigned at birth."[12] Cisgender people present in accordance with their assigned sex at birth, and within the expectations of the assumed gender roles based on that sex assignment. Intersex, in contrast, refers to "individuals born with any of several variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that…do not fit the typical definitions of male and female bodies."[13] The sex of an individual – on the basis of which assumptions are made about gender – is determined by physical attributes. The lived experience, however, does not always map so clearly onto the binary of sex. In the case of intersex people doctors make this assignment when individuals are infants, so there is no real lived experience. Intersex bodies do not fit neatly into the sex binary, which complicates their cisgender adult potential due to the assumption that everyone is cisgender. Doctors are making decisions about bodies are social decisions; the idea that bodies should neatly align with one end of the sex

[10] Fausto-Sterling, n.d.

[11] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. N.p.: Basic Books, 6.

[12] Fausto-Sterling, n.d.

[13] Fausto-Sterling, n.d.

binary or the other is being driven by gender, which is social and not biological. Doctors thus erase any evidence existing in nature that would contradict the socially upheld belief in gender.

Historical developments affect gender norms, for there is an intersection between technological development and social development that can be seen through this correlation of industrialization and strict gender roles; intersex bodies disrupt attempts to naturalize binary sex categorization. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as industrialization swept across the world, society required new forms of discipline. As societies moved away from the feudal structure of arbitrary divine power to legal equality, there was a capitalist need to control the 'insertion of bodies into the machinery of production."[14] This control manifested itself in strict heteronormative and cisnormative social establishments to maintain the categorization and predictability of individuals to function within a society run by cisgender, white men. Heteronormativity and cisnormativity, in the context of my argument, are the ways in which heterosexual relations and cisgender identity are the standard in society, thus othering any identity that does not align with those expectations. An example of a social establishment of this kind is the institution of marriage rewritten in America in 2015 to include same-sex marriage. This move, however, assimilates homosexual relationships into a heterosexual power structure which creates legal safety, but erases part of what it means to be queer (existing outside of social norms and that existence being okay). As mentioned before, intersex bodies challenge this system of societal control as they exist outside of the binary that was established as a means of control.

[14] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. N.p.: Basic Books, 7.

The American Journal of Epidemiology defines intersex as "a broad term to describe variations in sexual biology…that do not fit into binary definitions of male or female" and nonbinary as "a gender identity that embraces a diversity of expressions, moving beyond and not confined exclusively to the man/woman, masculine/feminine gender binary categorization."[15] This is an important distinction: intersex and nonbinary gender identity are not the same thing. Intersex refers to a combination of male and female characteristics, biologically speaking, that make the subjective medical determination of one's sex to be male or female more difficult. Nonbinary, however, refers to one identifying socially with neither man or woman gender categories, regardless of their assigned sex at birth. This gender identity can exist on a sliding scale, or conceived of as a "third gender" though that is often thought to be limiting the idea of gender to, yet again, another category. Transgender, on the other hand, refers to "self-identification with a gender that differs from the gender assigned at birth" on the basis of sex.[16] For this reason, the term transgender can often overlap with nonbinary gender identity as it is about identifying with a gender other than the gender correlating with the assigned sex at birth. Intersex, nonbinary, and transgender are all in opposition to cisnormative expectations in our society, and therefore are subject to societal ridicule and judgement as a means of controlling others' behaviors and bodies that call into question the naturalness of sex and gender binaries.

Understanding the intersections between sex, gender and sexuality allow for a reimagining of these concepts in a fluid sense that changes throughout space and time, rather than static, permanent identities. To observe this relationship, we must reflect on ancient Greek and Roman norms of gender and sexuality. The assumption that sexuality is a static trait erases

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[15] Morrison, Tessalyn, Alexis Dinno, and Taurica Salmon. 2021. "The Erasure of Intersex, Transgender, Nonbinary, and Agender Experiences Through Misuse of Sex and Gender in Health Research." *American Journal of Epidemiology* 190, no. 12 (August): 2712-2717. 10.1093.

[16] Morrison, Dinno, and Salmon 2021.

the ways in which homosexuality was defined in different cultures. The social significance of sexual acts changes throughout time and place, and so the naturalness of cisnormativity and heteronormativity are called into question.

We function in a society that assumes that every individual is either sexed male or female, should move within society in accordance to the social expectations of their gender, man or woman, and uphold relationships with the opposite sex. If the lines between sexes, and therefore genders, are blurred, society cannot determine whether or not a relationship is heterosexual or homosexual – two people of opposite sexes or two people of the same sex – and the existence of bodies that complicate binary categories of sex threaten the cultural need to maintain clear distinctions between the sexes. Bodies are no longer controllable and predictable, and it becomes more difficult to determine how rights and privileges within a society would be allocated. This fact threatens those in power, cisgender white men, because "to maintain gender divisions, we must control those bodies that are so unruly as to blur the borders. Since intersex people quite literally embody both sexes, they weaken the claims about sexual difference."[17]

While today our own heteronormative cultural imperative has led to suspicions regarding gay men's claims to manhood – the assumption being that sexual acts are predicted on a fundamental inequality between the two participants and men are dominant – in ancient Greece and Rome, sexual acts were legible not because of the sex or genders of the participants, but the role one plays in the sexual act. Classicist John J. Winkler discusses the social dynamics of pederasty in an ancient Greek context, but it maps onto Roman practices as well.[18] I am bringing pederasty into the discussion of ancient sexuality, and the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus,

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[17] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. N.p.: Basic Books, 8.

[18] See Ormand, Kirk. 2008. *Controlling Desires: Sexuality in Ancient Greece and Rome*. N.p.: ABC-CLIO.

because understanding this practice helps us understand how the statue might have been viewed. One must ask the question: is the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus sexually alluring? Is it sexually alluring because of the two forms it represents: woman and youthful boy? Pederasty, a practice in ancient Greece and Rome in which older male citizens would be sexually involved with younger boys, is an example of a cultural phenomena relying on power relations and masculinity rather than binary sex, gender and sexuality as understood today. The model relied on the "active" and "passive," or the penetrator and the penetrated, with the passive partner embodying a form of effeminacy, countering traditional masculinity. The Sleeping Hermaphroditus represents a body that is sexually appealing because those are the bodies that reaffirmed men's dominance.

Knaidos was a term used to describe socially deviant men, for his behavior would violate the dominant social definition of masculinity. This idea does not equal "homosexuality is bad" as we understand it today. In fact, what we would deem "homosexual" acts were not an issue whatsoever; the deviance was in the embodiment of effeminacy by desiring penetration which was rooted in ancient misogyny rather than homophobia. In Athens, a deeply competitive state, there were winners and losers in sex, and to take the passive role willingly was an expression of wanting to lose. According to Winkler, in a society that relied so heavily on the male exercise of power and control over themselves and others, the *knaidos*, in this ideology, would desire to be mastered and therefore contradict the expectations of masculinity. The vilification of deviance from traditionally understood masculinity, here in Greece and later in Rome, would influence the ways in which intersex bodies were perceived and interacted with as they did not embody the necessary characteristics for their masculinity and were therefore vulnerable.[19]

[19] Winkler, John J., Froma I. Zeitlin, and David M. Halperin, eds. 2020. *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. N.p.: Princeton University Press.

To understand the complexities of the penetration model and how it functioned within Roman culture specifically, one must examine the idea of Stuprum and how the intersex body complicated the assignment of active and passive roles in sex. Stuprum was a word used to describe an offense consisting in the violation of sexual integrity. Therefore, pederasty was a subset of stuprum.[20] Pederasty, however, was not entirely stuprum, for the concept had much more to do with adultery than pederasty. Due to the marriage laws enacted under Augustus, there was a strict moral code solidified into law that condemned all acts of adultery and sexual coercion, and pederasty was a practice that could fall within that. These laws were reflected in traditional Roman ideas of masculine sexual behavior, emphasizing self control as well as power over those subject to the man. In turn, these restrictions were more directed at control over female sexuality, rather than any homosexual relationships. Furthermore, the rhetoric and understanding of strict homosexual and heterosexual categories did not exist in the same way in ancient Rome, therefore it is not constructive to place modern categories onto their culture. Rather their culture should be examined beyond those confines. Laws concerning sexual behavior focused on the control of women's bodies rather than regulating the sex or gender of one's sexual partners. This emphasis on control over the body, rather than sex or gender, shows how intersex bodies were policed similarly to the woman's body: control over what deviates from the expectations of masculinity.

Rather than binary distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality that was determined as a static characteristic, as is understood in the US today, ancient Roman culture was much more concerned with a man's effeminacy. Maude Gleason argues that the ways in which one held oneself, from their voice to their mannerisms to their appearance, "aimed at translating

[20] Craig A. Williams, 96-98.

the ideal of beardless ephebic beauty into adult life" in Ancient Greece which could appeal to women and boys who were considered naturally submissive, but adult men as well.[21] She continues that "a man who actively penetrates and dominates others, whether male or female, is still a man. A man who aims to please – any one, male or female – in his erotic encounters is…effeminate" which shows that what one does with one's body sexually did play a role in the perceived gender of the individual, but the lines were drawn differently than what we do today.[22] The man who penetrated another man did not see his masculine capital diminished because he was still embodying the expected dominant power that was associated with masculinity, regardless of the sex of his partner. What we would consider to be "homosexual" acts did not determine a man's sexuality, rather that if a man was perceived as being less masculine it was assumed that he was penetrated which was considered "bad."

The fear of effeminacy stems from Latin terminology and can be seen in Ovid's account of Hermaphroditus.[23] After Hermaphroditus has been combined with Salmacis, becoming an intersex body, they pray to the gods that "whoever shall enter this stream as a man (vir), let him step out a half-man (semivir) and let him grow soft (mollescat) just by touching the water!" which alludes to how any deviation from masculinity was seen as.[24] Any masculinity that did not fully embody the hegemonic, or dominant understanding, was deemed a version of effeminacy. Effeminacy could be used for judgements that had nothing to do with homosexuality or sex, but

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[21] Craig A. Williams. *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*. N.p.: Oxford University Press, USA, 138.

[22] Craig A. Williams, 138.

[23] Here I want to address the use of pronouns when discussing Hermaphroditus. In my work I will be using gender neutral, they/them, pronouns. In other works I have examined a wide range of pronouns used when discussing both the mythological figure and the statue I will be analyzing later in this work. Robinson consistently uses he/him pronouns. When describing Hermaphroditus as "a female figure with male genitals", the use of he/him pronouns is used which brings the question of what determines gender. Is it the male genitals that invokes the use of he/him pronouns? If Hermaphroditus was represented as a male body with female genitals, would she/her pronouns be invoked? This is evidence of gendered assumptions of bodies that do not neatly fall into the binary.

[24] Ov. Met. 4.380-6

also for characteristics that were simply considered undesirable due to the assumption that effeminacy meant to take on the receptive role during sex, like a woman. This ties back to the idea of stuprum, for example, for men who pursued other men's wives were not embodying the self control of expected masculinity and therefore were deemed effeminate. In conclusion, "an effeminate man cedes control and is dominated, whether by his own desires and fears or by others' bodies – and those bodies may be male or female" which supports the greater argument that modern ideas of binary gender and sexuality do not map easily onto ancient Roman understandings for it relied heavily on the idea of control of self and others rather than the sex or gender of one's partner.[25]

To describe sexual practices in other times and place, such as ancient Greece and Rome, "imputes a Western model of sexuality…that relies on Western ideas about gender, erotics and personhood, and that ultimately obscures the meanings" of their cultural practices, according to anthropologist Deborah Elliston.[26] Furthermore, Nigerian anthropologist Oyeronke Oyewumi furthers the idea "by writing about any society through a gendered perspective, scholars necessarily write gender into that society…thus scholarship is implicated in the process of gender-formation".[27] Ancient Greek and Roman sexual practices are different from the sexual practices in modern Western culture, and therefore applying our understandings and structure of sex, gender and sexuality as a universal truth completely erases historical and global evolution of human behavior and experience.

Fausto-Sterling upholds that "sex and gender are best conceptualized as points in a multidimensional space" and that "sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum" that defies the

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[25] Craig A. Williams, 170.

[26] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. N.p.: Basic Books, 18.

[27] Fausto-Sterling 2008, 20.

limits of traditionally understood binaries. The Romans own acknowledgement of sex and the gender's fluidity is encapsulated in the story of Hermaphroditus as told by Ovid.[28] Here, we can look at ancient record of intersex individuals. The term hermaphrodite, a term used for intersex individuals in a lot of scholarship, comes from the Ancient Greek combination of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, and Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual love and beauty. Hermaphroditus is the child of Aphrodite and Hermes who is transformed from a man into an intersex person after a sexual assault. This version of the story is told by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. According to the myth, Hermaphroditus was a young man who would bathe in the Pool of Salmacis. One day, Salmacis, the nymph of that pool, surprised and trapped Hermaphroditus in her pool, invoking uncontrollable lust, and prayed to be united with him forever. The gods, honoring her prayers, joined the two into one person. Her spring also acquired the ability to make men who bathed in its waters "effeminate." Ovid recounts the event: "[Salmacis'] prayer found gods to hear; both bodies merged in one, both blended in one form and face…when in the fast embrace their limbs were knit, they two were two no more, nor man, nor woman – one body then that neither seemed and both."[29]

This myth serves as a creation myth for intersex people, evidence for the real-life presence of intersex people in Roman society as it apparently needed explanation. It is also an example of the common "transformative" theme in Ovid's work. The transitioning or transformative theme that was present in Ovid's work, specifically in the story of Hermaphroditus, is one that can resonate with the queer experience of understanding one's

[28] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. n.d. "Gender & Sexuality." Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling. Accessed November 30, 2022. http://www.annefaustosterling.com/fields-of-inquiry/gender/.

[29] Ov. *Met*. 4.346-388.

identity. Hermaphroditus is born a man, but he becomes something else which suggests divine intervention and an organic element to their existence. Most importantly, the creation myth of Hermaphroditus supports the argument for the presence of intersex people throughout history. On the other hand, the nature of how intersexuality came to be is notably through a sexual assault scenario: Salmacis, invoking a mythical theme of uncontrollable lust and surprise sexual assault, traps Hermaphroditus in her pool and the gods merge them together after her prayers are heard, with no consent from Hermaphroditus. This merging of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus can be interpreted as sexual, for Salmacis wished for sexual union with him, or literal, for the two individuals were combined into one person embodying both sexes. This instance of violence and exploitation of the intersex body recorded in ancient literature suggests how intersex people were received in their society.

After establishing the definitions of several terms referring to experiences of sex, gender and sexuality, as well as looking at how those understandings interact with ancient Greek and Roman ideas of them, one can conclude that intersex individuals have existed throughout time and place regardless of how they are conceptualized in society. Fausto-Sterling makes an important point about the role of materiality in this context, for if established understandings of sex and sexuality are embedded in more philosophical ideas of how matter forms into bodies, i.e. sex organs, then the very matter of bodies can never form neutrally. This lack of neutrality, due to immediate association of matter with meaning, restricts the extents to which sexual difference can be explored and understood.[30] This can be literally experienced with the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus, and all bodies for that matter, by examining the ways in which a body is

[30] Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2008. *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*. N.p.: Basic Books, 22-23.

subjected to gendered expectations and how one experiences power within society based on their physical form.

Chapter 2

In this chapter I will be examining power dynamics in literary evidence for intersex bodies in antiquity. First, I will argue that the representation of intersex bodies in ancient literature suggests that intersex bodies are not a modern development. Second, I will prove that intersex bodies posed a threat to the established power relations in ancient Greek and Roman society. A comparison between the experiences and representations of intersex bodies in antiquity to today suggests that those power structures are still present.

Hermaphroditus, specifically looking at the Borghese statue, is represented as possessing both breasts and a penis, and the face of a youthful boy. This suggests that the figure was a mixture of understood male and female physical traits, representing a form of an intersex body, but was considered effeminate due to their deviation from expected masculinity that did not possess breasts or softness in any form. The penis is not enough to embody traditional Roman masculinity fully, and therefore the figure is deemed effeminate, according to Roman ideology. Any deviation from the expected masculinity resulting in a lack of social power resulted in "effeminacy" being used to police the boundaries of embodied masculinity. In the example of Hermaphroditus, if an intersex body exhibited the qualities of social dominance, then men's claims to power based on naturally occurring sexual differentiation would be groundless. Hermaphroditus, despite being depicted with a penis and therefore the implied ability to penetrate, still embodies effeminacy due to their bodily deviation from the expectations of Roman masculinity. The way in which intersex bodies are represented through figures such as Hermaphroditus reflects social norms and discourses concerning sex, gender, and sexuality in

ancient Rome.This effeminacy also means that Hermaphroditus was viewed as a deviant man, rather than a deviant woman, due to where Hermaphroditus would land on the scale from traditional man, effeminate man, and woman. This is the opposite, however, of Catullus 63 where Attis was ultimately viewed as a "false" female. This distinction implies again the discourses of intersex bodies as a means of policing the boundaries of masculinity. The male body, therefore, is the default, the unmarked body. If the female body was the default, then the penis would be the marker of deviance rather than softness or breasts. Unlike Attis, they were not castrated in their transformative process, so they must represent an effeminate man, as opposed to Attis who is an illegitimate or fake woman.

To move on to the actual myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, as relayed by the Roman poet Ovid in his work Metamorphoses, Robinson argues that Ovid's account of the myth is problematic because it "seems to present the result of the metamorphoses," the combination of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus into one being through divine intervention, virtually erasing Salmacis which suggests the resilience of masculinity, but the erasure of femininity as well. Despite reversed gender roles, wherein Salmacis takes on the model of the lustful male pursuer, her feminine identity is erased from the storyline and both of their femininity and masculinity is combined to produce effeminacy. Salmacis' femininity reduces Hermaphroditus' masculinity to something undesirable: effeminacy. This feminine erasure can also be observed in my previous points regarding feminine penetration and effeminacy: sexuality was reliant on the misogyny of ancient Greek and Roman society to counter "good" masculinity with "bad" femininity.

To establish foundation understanding of Hermaphroditus as a mythical figure, Salmacis and the role of the spring, as well as pre-Ovidian reference to myth, I am going to be looking at the academic article "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One" by M. Robinson

to establish foundational understanding of Hermaphroditus as a mythical figure, Salmacis and the role of the spring, as well as pre-Ovidian reference to the myth. First, the mythological Spring of Salmacis was understood in the ancient Greek world to make men "effeminate" through a loss of masculinity and permanent sterility. That was the reputation it had in relation to the myth of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis. It is important to clarify that "the sting in the charge of being effeminate was not that one was homosexual as opposed to heterosexual, but rather that instead of the active, male role, one preferred the passive, female role" which implied that a man's claim to masculinity, and therefore social power, would be stripped of him by embodying passivity through effeminacy.[31]

Ovid is showing his perception of Hermaphroditus as a deviant man, rather than a deviant woman, due to the specific invocation of effeminacy, which implies a deviation from the default of masculinity. Ovid's account of the myth of Hermaphroditus focuses on the transformation to align with the themes of metamorphoses in his works, and less on the representation of gender fluctuation. That said, this literary evidence of an intersex experience is still valuable to understanding how intersex people were perceived in ancient Roman society. The power dynamics that are relevant here are those of masculinity versus femininity, furthering the argument that femininity was societally ranked under masculinity. Since Hermaphroditus, in this context, was mostly referred to with effeminate language, they are, again, associated with the feminine and therefore passivity insomuch as it is assumed they would allow their body to be used as a woman's body by being anally penetrated.

[31] Robinson, M. 1999. "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid. Met. 4.285-388)." *The Classical Quarterly* 49 (1): 212-223. https://www.jstor.org/stable/639498, 213.

Another significant play between femininity and masculinity in Ovid's account of the myth of Hermaphroditus lies in the "bath of a goddess"[32] motif which references the the trope in ancient Greek and Roman myth that a goddess would be subject to sexual pursuit when vulnerable at the bath. The importance of this is, in the myth, Hermaphroditus is the one undressing while Salmacis, the nymph, looks on without their knowledge. Salmacis is pursuing (active) while Hermaphroditus is being pursued (passive). Usually this kind of non-consensual gaze would be the male character viewing the female character, for masculinity embodies power over femininity in this context, and these scenes often led to sexual assault. For example, the story of Io, wherein Jupiter " first saw her returning from her father's stream… when the god hid the wide earth in a covering of fog, caught the fleeing girl" and sexually assaulted her.[33] The tradition is subverted because Hermaphroditus, a male god, is the object of Salmacis', a female nymph's, desire, implying that she will be the aggressor. Even before the transformation of Hermaphroditus there is gender role ambiguity, foreshadowing the ambiguously sexed body of Hermaphroditus.

When examining Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus, his account of the myth does not describe their specific sexual characteristics when Salmacis watches them at the bath. The lack of clarification of Hermaphrodtius' characteristics, namely if they are a male body with female genitals, a female body with male genitals or a binary body, suggests a preemptive ambiguity in the story. The question of "what will Hermaphroditus' nudity reveal?" rises, but does nothing to stop the assault by Salmacis.[34] Ovid himself does not explicitly state whether Hermaphroditus' body was intersex before they were pursued, leaving out detail of their genitals. This account

[32] Robinson, M. 1999. "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid. Met. 4.285-388)." *The Classical Quarterly* 49 (1): 212-223. https://www.jstor.org/stable/639498.

[33] Ov. Met. 1.587-600.

[34] Robinson, M. 1999. "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid. Met. 4.285-388)." *The Classical Quarterly* 49 (1): 212-223. https://www.jstor.org/stable/639498, 219.

addresses several things: the unknown of Hermaphroditus' physicality, and the irrelevance of it for Salmacis. Hermaphroditus' lack of physical description in this version of the myth, as well as Salmacis' disregard of their genitals despite the implication that they may possess some version of intersex characteristics, creates a queerness surrounding the entire encounter. It shows that gender is not a necessary or important factor for Salmacis' sexuality and shows no disgust for a body that defies gendered expectations. However, at the same time, this disregard for the physical body also results in sexual violence towards an intersex body. Not only are there representations of intersex bodies and genderqueer identity in ancient source material, but the ways in which the intersex body were discussed and understood show that their bodies undermined male claims to power and were therefore ridiculed.

First I will look at Lucian's Dialogue of the Courtesans 5, to explore the ways in which sex, gender and sexuality can be embodied outside of the intersex body and how important queer scholarship is to the Classics.[35] The following passages show that ancient Greeks and Romans understood the difference between sex (bodies) and gender (social roles). In Dialogue of the Courtesans 5, Lucian describes an encounter between Leaina and Megillos.[36] Leaina is recounting to her friend the story of her involvement with Megillos/Megilla, the point of the discussion being over how they embodied their gender expression sexually. On the one hand we have discussions of Megillos who shows that if one is crossing gender lines, then the body itself must represent this, as shown by the constant invalidation of their identity. On the other hand, we have Catullus with something subtracted, that is, the penis. These are both stories of bodies that do not fit within the expectations of masculinity, just as Hermaphroditus. Due to

[35] Lucian was a Hellenized Syrian satirist who combined elements of comedy and philosophy, claiming to have invented the Comic Dialogue.

[36] Megillos/Megilla uses both the feminine and masculine form of their name. I will be using the pronouns "they/them" for Megillos due to the ambiguity of how they identify while acknowledging that by using these pronouns for them I am participating in an interpretation of the text from my cultural context.

Megilla/Megillos' masculine gender presentation, Leaina questions constantly questions their sex. Leania inquires if Megilla/Megillos is "surely not a hermaphrodite,' … 'equipped both as a man and a woman, as many people are said to be?' and Megillos replies that 'No, Leaena, I'm all man.'"[37] This shows that the ancient Romans had an understanding of the difference between sex and gender; Megillos self identifies as a man as their gender, despite their physical characteristics. Furthermore, Leaena recognizes intersex as an option for sex identification.

Most prominently, when Leaina attempts to classify Megillos as a woman, they reject womanhood and feminization. This rejection of feminization leaves the body in question up for interpretation to the reader, for Leaina insists on Megillos' femininity without disclosing details of their physical form, while Megillos insists on their gender identity as male. Furthermore, the use of the title "wife" for Demonassa, Megillos' partner, suggests that Megillos is a man, for marriage was almost always between male and female individuals in this context, so Megillos is invoking maleness through language as well.

By taking on the active role in sexual relationships through the use of a phallus, they invoke the qualities of power and dominance that were associated with male sexuality in ancient Greece. Gilhuly argues that "Lucian's dialogue focuses on the feminine penetration of the feminine, precisely the sexual power relation that is all but unnamed and excluded from the sexual-social hierarchy of the ancient Greeks" due to the necessity of masculine power and the male embodiment of both penetrative and receptive roles as well as general misogyny.[38] By using the phrase "feminine penetration of the feminine" Gilhuly negates Megillos' gender identity –

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[37] Lucian 5.21

[38] Gilhuly, Kate. 2008. "The Phallic Lesbian - Philosophy, Comedy and Social Inversion in Lucian's Dialogues of the Courtesans." In *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*. N.p.: University of Wisconsin Press.

she focuses solely on the assumed anatomy of Megillos, through the use of a phallic instrument, and reduces Megillos to “feminine" despite their arguments throughout the dialogue that they are a man. This assumption of anatomy and how such anatomy inherently suggests femininity makes Gilhuly’s interpretation problematic, for it perpetuates this idea that gender expression is reliant on sex.

That said, the idea of “feminine penetration” does not exist in ancient Greek sexual understanding, for penetration and masculinity are synonymous, so Megilla/Megillos embodies the masculine here to make feminine penetration a possibility within their cultural confines. Their story is an example of transition and metamorphoses through gender and sexuality, as well as how arbitrary ones assigned sex is in these contexts, and provides source material for queer studies in the Classic as well as evidence for an understanding of sex vs gender.

One of the most famous pieces of literature concerning sex and gender in Ancient Rome is Catullus 63. An analysis of Catullus’ treatment of Attis who castrated himself shows that body parts mattered to the Romans insofar that castration turned men into women (socially). For Hermaphroditus, an individual embodying body parts that do not align neatly with binary sex understanding, Roman establishment of sex is complicated and the distinction between man and woman is blurred. Catullus explores identity transition through the act of castration, which brings about gender transformation through the lack.Without the phallus, immediately Attis becomes a “fake woman”, or *notha muller*.[39] Attis shows that once one’s anatomical body deviated from the normative male body, from a Roman perspective, the body in question became not just a man’s body that lacked, but a fake woman.

[39] C. Valerius Catul. 63.74-78.

Catullus' representation of Attis complicates how the Romans may have perceived Hermaphroditus. While Attis is rendered a fake woman by his castration, there is nothing to suggest that Hermaphroditus is incapable of penetration. This sexual system that relied much more on one's expected sexual role, regardless of sex, blurs the lines of the binary in contrast to the modern binary because it was more situational than constitutive of one's identity: identity in ancient Rome was not determined by one's preferences but was more fluid since it was based on the role one played, which was subject to change, as in pederasty. Identity revolved around one's association with masculinity and how well they embodied it through control and, therefore, penetration. This system of Roman sexuality relates to Hermaphroditus, for they are depicted with a penis and breasts, therefore demonstrating the penetrative ability required for traditional masculinity, but the feminine and youthful qualities that then imply passivity, in Roman sexual practices. This duality leaves Hermaphroditus "penetrable" and therefore deviant from traditional masculinity.

Early evidence suggests that Hermaphroditus was worshiped as a deity, despite the lack of representation of the figure both in literature. Hermaphroditus was the offspring of the messenger god Hermes and the love goddess Aphrodite, so "as a religious figure he represented sexual union, but owing to the fact that the ανδρόγυνος in a literal sense, he came to be represented in literature and art as ανδρόγυνος in a pejorative sense, that is effeminate and pathic."[40] Hermaphroditus embodies sexual union due to their posession of both male and female sex characteristics suggests a sort of ambiguity or unity of all genders embodied in Hermaphroditus.

[40] Robinson, M. 1999. "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid. Met. 4.285-388)." *The Classical Quarterly* 49 (1): 212-223. https://www.jstor.org/stable/639498, 217

Chapter 3

The statue I will be examining is the Borghese Hermaphroditus located in the Louvre Museum in the Borghese Gallery. The original statue dates back to the 1st half of the 2nd century A.D., roughly 100-150 CE. First discovered in 1618 in the Baths of Diocletian in Rome, the statue is made from marble and is a sculpture in the round, which means that the work is meant to be viewed from 360 degrees of perspective, completed all the way around in a 3D format.[41] This marble statue is a Roman copy of a Greek original which was made of bronze around 150-140 BCE by the Greek sculptor Polykles.[42]

The Borghese statue was one of three main figural types of Hermaphroditus statue when discussing Hellenistic hermaphrodite figures. Stackelburg states that “the prone body reveals itself to the viewer by degrees, either by circulating the gaze from the back to the front, or from the head downwards, challenging and surprising the viewer with unexpected changes through the use of a controlled viewpoint.”[43] Sculpture in the round was expertly utilized to play with perspective and viewer participation specifically in the context of intersex imagery. The Borghese statue is described to have a “feminine waistline” and “rounded buttocks and thighs" invoking strongly feminine-assoicated features to contrast the possession of a penis.

When viewed in the context of a museum, these statues of Hermaphroditus do not contribute to understanding the Roman experience of viewing the statue. To understand this perspective, we need to understand Roman perceptions of intersex bodies. Stackelberg describes

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[41]“statue ; Hermaphrodite endormi.” n.d. Louvre Collections. Accessed November 30, 2022. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010250571.

[42]isconti, Ennio Q., Antonio Nibby, and Gian L. Bernini. n.d. “Sleeping Hermaphroditus by Bernini.” Borghese Gallery. Accessed November 30, 2022. https://borghese.gallery/collection/sculpture/sleeping-hermaphroditus.html.

[43] Von Stackelberg, Katherine. 2014. “Garden Hybrids: Hermaphrodite Images in the Roman House.” *Classical Antiquity* 33, no. 2 (October): 395-426. 10.1525, 400.

the emphasis on the confusion of genders in Roman art as "the dangers of looking and the power of recognition."[44] Intersex bodies were considered to be prodigies under Roman religious law, but they simultaneously represented divine intervention in the relationship between humankind and the gods which created a state of social flux between protection and danger for intersex people. Why were there so many copies of the Sleeping Hermaphrodite then?[45] Why immortalize the intersex body in the form of myth and marble? Stackelberg argues that "the visual confusion between male and female identity signaled the dangers of looking at things that you shouldn't; simultaneously, the power of recognition was apotropaic", much like the myth of Medusa.[46] In the case of Medusa, by literally looking at her the viewer would be turned to stone. A similar theme can be invoked here when speaking about the Sleeping Hermaphroditus, or intersex bodies in general because the distinction between viewing and recognition is made. Recognition goes a step beyond viewership in the way that it offers identity to something viewed. Once identity is established, it is brought into the social circle to be understood and adapted to the current social context in which it exists. Through the process of recognition that the statue is intersex, a balance can be found between the party viewing the statue and the statue itself. This can be mapped onto gender understanding, for categories and forced gendering and sexing occurs so that one's person can be recognized and adapted to the social context in which they exist.

Stackelberg analyzes the statue of a Sleeping Hermaphrodite found in the House of Octavius Quartio dating to 79 A.D. rather than the Borghese Hermaphrodite located in the Louvre. However, both of these statues are of the Borghese type and served the same purpose within the Roman domestic sphere, so her research is helpful for understanding the social and

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[44] Von Stackelberg 2014, 401.

[45]Facella, Margherita, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, and Domitilla Campanile, eds. 2017. *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*. N.p.: Taylor & Francis.

[46] Von Stackelberg 2014, 403.

spatial context of Hermaphroditus statues generally. In the House of Octavius Quartio, the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus was moved several times. In the original setup of the house, the statue was located through the garden on the back wall which promotes personal discovery of the piece, but in 1922 the statue was relocated to the tetrastyle pavilion, removing the statue from its original location in the house.[47]

The Roman placement of the statue was in the garden because they associated themes of flux, metamorphoses, and transition with nature. This suggests that the body itself existed in a state of nature, the body occurred naturally, rather than being manufactured like Attis. The original placement of the statue supported the ancient Roman correlation of intersex bodies and garden spaces that was consistent with Roman cultural practices that required the viewer to find the statue, search for the statue, and connect it with naturalistic elements. The garden space "is both interior space, bounded by the architectural matrix of the house, and exterior space, connecting its occupants to the natural elements of sunlight, air, water, and vegetation and by extension to landscapes of mythic narrative" which suggests how the garden unites elements of the lived Roman experience.[48] Furthermore, the placement of the statue in the garden would have emphasized Hermaphroditus's role as a deity associated with passageways and transitional spaces.[49] The movement between natural elements and man-made elements that were included in the structure of the house suggests boundary-crossing, therefore linking those themes of transitioning and metamorphoses often associated with nature and divinity, as well as Hermaphroditus, to the domestic sphere. The modern relocation suggests a different association

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[47] Von Stackelberg, Katherine. 2014. "Garden Hybrids: Hermaphrodite Images in the Roman House." *Classical Antiquity* 33, no. 2 (October): 395-426. 10.1525.

[48] Von Stackelberg, Katherine. 2014. "Garden Hybrids: Hermaphrodite Images in the Roman House." *Classical Antiquity* 33, no. 2 (October): 395-426. 10.1525, 401.

[49] Clarke, John R. 2007. *Looking at Laughter: Humor, Power, and Transgression in Roman Visual Culture, 100 B.C.- A.D. 250*. N.p.: University of California Press, 181.

with the intersex body; the statue was moved to a more front and centered part of the house suggesting spectacle and oddity rather than naturalism. Here, we see a dichotomy in the way in which intersex bodies are understood based on the location moving from the garden space to the main house: for the Romans the intersex body existed naturally, but in the 20th century it was viewed as a spectacle.

The relocation of intersex imagery from the original Roman context shows how modern ideas of gender, sex and sexuality bleed into the works, rewriting how the works, and what they represent, are perceived and understood. The movement of intersex images from the garden space which allowed for self-discovery and intimate interaction with the piece, to erotic and confrontational positioning reflects how intersex bodies are viewed as unnatural and medicalized in a modern setting.[50] By literally quarantining the statue from its original, natural environment, there is a level of control over who views the statue, how they view the statue, and why they view the statue. It is made into a spectacle to put on display, in a confrontational manner that does not allow for circulatory movement, and is ultimately suggested to be an oddity. The intersex body disrupts "normalcy" in our society, so by isolating the imagery from a "natural" or "organic" environment, such as a garden, the intersex body – as well as trans, non-binary, and any body that does not align with heteronormative and cisnormative ideas of "normal" – are othered.

The relocation of the statue within the Roman house suggests the influence of cultural context when viewing art and, in turn, perception of bodies. Modes of viewing are culturally specific; that is, how an object is viewed, or interpreted, is filtered through a cultural understanding and context that carries biases. For example, the Roman placement of intersex

[50] See page 1 for earlier discussion of the medicalization of the intersex body.

imagery was in the garden because they associated themes of flux, metamorphoses, and transition with nature. This is contrasted against the same intersex body being deemed odd or unnatural in a modern context which is reflected in how the statue was moved to a more central location for direct viewing.

To elaborate on the idea of viewership and recognition, intersex images provide a visual focus for the intersection between male and female sexuality, and bodies inherently prompt identification. In a binary sex structure, intersex bodies confuse this identification process, disrupting the established methods of categorization. Theoretically, the objectification of women's bodies essentially reaffirms male-constructed and male-centered power structures, but the application of such objectification onto the intersex body exhibits fallacies in those structures. The Borghese Hermaphroditus represents a feminized body and is therefore subject to sexual objectification as women's bodies are. On the other hand, this representation also contains a phallus that places this depiction of an intersex body both in the penetrative position of power while simultaneously being subjected to the objectification women experience. Objectification itself is a means of asserting power, yet the statue is not a woman's body. By embodying contradicting claims to power, the intersex body exists in the space of effeminacy and "false" womanhood, according to the Romans. The intersection between masculine and feminine spaces that the intersex body represents, then, reflects how intersex imagery was associated with natural environments. For the Romans associated flux and transformation with nature.

In conclusion, the appearance of intersex imagery within the Roman home suggests not ridicule, disgust, or eroticism, but a reflection of desired domestic harmony. The imagery of Hermaphroditus, especially in such a bridge-like place such as the garden, represented the idea of marriage, for "divine order establishes social order, the metamorphic union of male and female

in one body" could be "mirrored by the social union of man and woman in marriage, a union that has its spatial configuration in the domestic house."[51] The idea of intersex imagery representing a heteronormative expectation not only exemplifies how Hermaphroditus was adopted and rationalized within Roman society, but how different that understanding is from modern ideas of intersex people. This suggests how fluid and flux queerness is, and how it flows through time and space, for Hermaphroditus remains a queer figure both in an ancient and modern context regardless of how they were rationalized.

Chapter 4

Classics has been a traditionally cisgendered, heterosexual white male discipline and has evolved into a space to exhibit the expectations of those identifiers at the cost of those who do not align with them. As a result, there has been a lack of interest in ancient work such as the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus and very little research has been done on intersex bodies in antiquity. The effect of that is a very one dimensional scholarly picture of ancient Rome that only caters to one point of view and lived experience, rather than bringing light to a range of narratives that existed both in ancient Rome and today. This is why the discipline needs to expand.

The assumption that something is natural to the culture of a scholar is really a result of that specific space and time, ultimately resulting in a biased perspective due to the context in which the scholar approaches the source material. By acknowledging the place in which a scholar approaches ancient work, what is considered inherent can be questioned and there is greater conversation. Furthermore, in the case of this conversation, queer voices can offer their

[51] Von Stackelberg, Katherine. 2014. "Garden Hybrids: Hermaphrodite Images in the Roman House." *Classical Antiquity* 33, no. 2 (October): 395-426. 10.1525.

own context to ancient material, bringing to light a new perspective. Those in power have a stake in maintaining the naturalness and supremacy of those with whom they identify. This means that their scholarship is reaffirming their positionality. The gap between the individual who lived in Rome and the scholar researching Rome is bridged by interpretation and reception. Scholarship of Roman society gives voices to those who lived in that culture, and if there is only one perspective providing that voice, then only one interpretation will be offered and there will be no discussion. By offering more diverse backgrounds within Classics there are more interpretations and the reality of what it means to live in ancient Rome can be more accurately represented and more deeply understood.

Ancient statuary can reflect constructions of gender identity at the time of their creation which can, in turn, provide evidence for modern analysis of both Roman understandings of gender identity and power dynamics, as well as further questioning of modern constructions and where they came from. The expansion of the field to encompass more representations of non normative identities parallels the expansion of the field to include more diverse voices contributing to this scholarship. R.J. Barrow discusses the ways in which complexities of bodily representation and reception can be examined through statuetic art. The body plays a key role in establishing one's gender socially, so examining the differences between various representations of bodies can help us understand social constructions of gender in different cultures. The Sleeping Hermaphroditus specifically embodies ideas of naturalism and the "represented" imitation: the figure does not reflect precise imitation of a human body, instead giving the appearance of a certain human form based on the desired attributes and standards of the cultural constructs of the time period. Much like ancient depictions of Aphrodite, Hermaphroditus embodies this ideal female form with the face and the genitals of the ideal youthful boy. A

modern scholar can look at this statue and examine the ways in which femininity and masculinity play a role in power dynamics, as discussed previously.[52] These particular identities being combined represents an established understanding of submission or lesser power compared to the traditional Roman masculine ideal, which ultimately reflects the ways in which gender identity and sexual characteristics played a role in constructions of power in ancient Rome.

The Knidian Aphrodite can show the ways in which sexual characteristics and gender identity played a role in the power constructions in ancient Rome due to the fact that the representation of the goddess is recognized to be a statue sculpted by and for men.[53] By looking at a female bodily ideal in relation to the feminine attributes of Hermaphroditus, as represented in statues, one can observe the ways in which masculinity controls the body. The assignment of power based on physical characteristics upholds men's "natural" claims to power.[54] This reflects a constructed "ideal" of the female body, according to men or those in power. Examples such as Sleeping Hermaphroditus and the Knidian Aphrodite require deeper analysis into constructed ideas of beauty, gender, sexuality and sex in their original cultural context to reveal the ways in which these power structures are present today.

The use of statues to represent Sleeping Hermaphroditus and the Knidian Aphrodite brings bodily discourse to the three-dimensional plane that allows for viewer interaction. In the case of the Sleeping Hermaphroditus, one interacts with the sleeping body of an intersex person in a voyeuristic way due to the scrutiny the nude body undergoes at the hands of the viewer. This statue, like Barrow addressed, is a performance of gender for the viewer; Hermaphroditus is a representation of a lived experience. Elaine Freedgood discusses the use of an intersex body to

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[52] Barrow, Rosemary. 2018. *Gender, Identity and the Body in Greek and Roman Sculpture*. Edited by Michael Silk. N.p.: Cambridge University Press.

[53] Squire, Michael. 2018. "Classical Art History: An Introduction." *Association for Art History*. https://www.academia.edu/37551059/M_Squire_Classical_Art_History_An_Introduction_Art_History_VI_2_1_10.

[54] Feminine characteristics undermine one's claim to masculine power.

show how queerness functions within society. She argues that if gender is a performance and it is not an essential to life, then every human is "capable of performing another gender and of creating the continuum of gender that we now see all around us but have yet to name or un-name adequately. We are not yet queer."[55] This summarizes how intangible and fluid gender is; gender is a performance that only exists within the confines of human creation and interpretation. Though it has real-world consequences due to the meaning it has been given over time, gender is, essentially, a constructed idea made by humans and is therefore subject to change. This is exactly how gender and sexuality are fluid throughout time and space. By examining statues like the Sleeping Hermaphroditus and comparing the way in which its environment interacts with it in both an ancient and modern context, the ways in which gender and sexuality are understood both in Ancient Rome and today can be observed through the reactions of the audience to the statue.

The current state of the Classics discipline is a reflection of the need for greater diversity in scholarship. If those with social, political, and cultural capital are the ones who have access to classical education and have the potential to become classical scholars, then we run the risk that only narratives that support their claim to power are going to be told. This not only excludes any identity that does not align with theirs, both ancient and modern, but also perpetuates discrimination identity-based discrimination and harassment in the field. The Committee on Gender and Sexuality in the Profession (COGSIP) created a survey in 2018 to gauge harassment and discrimination in the Classics field to bring to light not only the lack of diversity in the discipline, but also the harmful results of this homogeny.[56] The goal of this study was to reveal a

[55]Freedgood, Elaine. 2015. "We Are Not Yet Queer (in Victorian Studies): Response." *Victorian Studies* 57, no. 3 (Spring): 445-448. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/victorianstudies.57.3.445, 446.

[56] "Blog: Harassment in Classics is endemic and persistent, COGSIP survey says | Society for Classical Studies." 2022. | Society for Classical Studies. https://classicalstudies.org/scs-blog/carolinebishop/blog-harassment-classics-endemic-and-persistent-cogsip-survey-says.

range of possible experiences, from being made uncomfortable by racist or sexist language to feeling physically or fiscally threatened.

Ultimately, 40.9% of the membership of the Society for Classical Studies (SCS) responded to the survey, and out of those respondents, 48.9% reported incidents of harassment that made them feel uncomfortable or afraid. 85.4% of these incidents occurred when the respondents were in untenured positions which further suggests that these incidents were perpetrated by people in positions of higher rank revealing that a large part of harassment stems from issues of power abuse in the field based on gender, race, and rank.

To look specifically at gender and sexuality in Classics, the report also revealed that members of sexual minority groups experienced sexual harassment and the intentional misgendering of transgender and non-binary respondents, which is a direct act of violence against one's identity. Many respondents reported feeling pressure against their identity as queer or non-binary due to the discrimination both in their immediate sphere of influence as well as the field at large. Lastly, the survey reported that respondents from the LGBTQI+ community acknowledged oppressive environments, conversations that mocked queer people, discussions in which it was assumed that everyone identified as heterosexual, and differential opportunities for benefits and advancement based on their gender or sexuality.[57] This data reflects how the field is unwelcoming to identities that do not uphold or support the established status quo of power, that being cisgendered, white heterosexual men.

When looking at the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus, one can reflect on the constructed ideas of gender, sex and sexuality in ancient Rome, but one can also take into

[57] "Blog: Harassment in Classics is endemic and persistent, COGSIP survey says | Society for Classical Studies." 2022. | Society for Classical Studies. https://classicalstudies.org/scs-blog/carolinebishop/blog-harassment-classics-endemic-and-persistent-cogsip-survey-says.

account their own perception of the statue to examine modern constructs of gender, sex, and sexuality. The lack of scholarship on the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus serves as a microcosm of a greater problem facing the Classics field: queer people are discouraged from participation in Classical discussion and therefore queer stories are not told. All of this comes back to identity: those whose identity holds power only want to find source material to support their power. Marginalized identities that could offer alternative interpretations of that source material are barred from that exploration because it could minimize those claims to identity-based power.

The Classics have been built upon the hegemonic masculinity that adopted ancient Greek and Roman culture as their own. By claiming lineage to this fantastical, idealized culture, those in power are able to maintain their power and limit the individuality and diversity of the field and the narratives expressed through ancient source material. Statues like the Sleeping Hermaphroditus offer an opportunity for expansion and growth within a greatly untapped discipline; perhaps an intersex person can identify with the lived experience of the intersex person represented in the statue that would have not been otherwise told.

Chapter 5

Eidolon, an online journal for scholarly writing about Classics will be used here and throughout to look at the discussion around intersex bodies and the statue of Hermaphroditus today, specifically through the eyes of young academics. This resource, though more public facing, offers a more diverse and open platform for conversations about Classics and scholarship. The expansion of the Classics, through more accessible platforms such as *Eidolon*, is crucial to the future of the field because it creates a space for nontraditional scholarship and readership that would otherwise be excluded from the field. This includes scholars of color and

queer scholars and topics such as race and gender studies. Greater diversity in voices goes past acknowledgement of the problematic composition of the field and creates movement within the discipline by forcing new necessary conversations and debates.

The first article I will be speaking about is "The Body In Question" by Grace Gillies that looks at non-binary gender in the Greek and Roman worlds.[58] Public scholarship like this piece show that Eidolon actively publish articles on transgender issues in comparison to L'Année Philologique, a standard index of scholarly work in Classical fields, which only records fourty-four articles or books on the topic of hermaphrodite. This article focuses on a copy of the statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus located in the Museo Nazionale Romano di Palazzo Massimo. This particular Sleeping Hermaphroditus was carved from a single block of white marble and was found in 1879 on Viminal Hill in Rome. It dates to the Antonine Period, between 130 and 150 CE, and is the most skillfully carved of the series of Roman copies of Sleeping Hermaphroditus[59]. Gillies describes that the viewer has the ability to approach the piece from all sides, but with a limited view at any given perspective, while Hermaphroditus lies naked and asleep for complete exposure to the viewer.

This description aligns with my previous discussion of the Borghese Hermaphroditus, showing how there is a commonality between representations of intersex bodies: nudity and unknowns. The way in which the viewer moves around the statue plays with the idea of "looking" and how it relates to perceived gender, as well as the role of consent when the figure represented is unconscious. The viewer is in a place of power and control when interacting with the statue because not only does it represent two submissive forms in ancient Greek and Roman

[58] Gillies, Grace. n.d. "The Body in Question." *Eidolon*.

[59] Perry, Ellen, and Brenda Longfellow, eds. 2018. *Roman Artists, Patrons, and Public Consumption: Familiar Works Reconsidered*. N.p.: University of Michigan Press.

culture, the feminine and the youth, but it is also unaware that they are being seen. Jennifer Trimble, the author of the chapter "Beyond Surprise: Looking Again at the Sleeping Hermaphrodite in the Palazzo Massimo", addresses this duality, stating that this specific combination represents a "dual object of desire" and represents several dualities including, but not limited to: male and female, viewing and response, real and myth. In terms of viewing and response, the way in which the statue is situated, asleep and exposed, invites viewership and invokes response from the viewer showing how those two actions interact with each other.[60] This combination of femininity and youthfulness suggest passivity and a lack of social power because it confers power onto the viewer. The lack of awareness, then, results in a voyeurism that reflects the way in which trans, nonbinary, and intersex bodies are observed, ridiculed, and assigned identity often without their consent. The control exercised over these bodies through the act of seeing, judging, and assigning identity results in violence because it establishes a norm to breach one's personal boundaries and presentation for the sake of categorical understanding.

Gillies concludes their article acknowledging that the language to describe non-binary gender identity is fairly new, which implies ahistoricity of an identity, which is false. Here they offer their perspective on Classics as a queer, nonbinary person. Their interpretation and scholarship is an important recognition of the identities that are present in the field that have historically been barred from expression and connection with ancient source material. They also acknowledge that the language used today to explain the experiences of being gender nonconforming, or queer in any way, in our specific cultural context is fairly new because the discipline has signaled one's elite identity historically; those producing scholarship in Classics have a stake in maintaining the veneer of respectability. This causes a shying away from

[60] Perry, Ellen, and Brenda Longfellow, eds. 2018. *Roman Artists, Patrons, and Public Consumption: Familiar Works Reconsidered*. N.p.: University of Michigan Press.

questions that might undermine the naturalness of their privilege which stems from their cisgender, heterosexual white identities. Fluidity in gender and sexuality is, regardless of the social constructions of what is "normal," a deeply human concept that has been present in the human experience as long as humans have existed.

The next article I will be referring to is "Made Miracle: Tiresias Beyond the Gender Binary" by Charles-Elizabeth Boyles to explore another mythological example of gender fluidity in myth that can contribute to the presence of gender ambiguity in ancient source material.[61] Tiresias was a mythological figure with various different accounts of their experience, one of which is included in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, much like Hermaphroditus. The story generally tells of several divine interventions that result in Tiresias's frequent transformation between man and woman, ultimately resulting in blindness at the hands of the gods as a form of punishment. Matthew Scully, in his 2018 article entitled "Plasticity at the Violet Hour: Tiresias, The Waste Land, and Poetic Form", states that Tiresias' "seemingly oppositional but coextensive states of being – finite and infinite, male and female – do not negate and destroy each other; instead, Tiresias' plastic form allows him to survive his own potential self-destruction through metamorphic energy and potential."[62] In other words, Scully is arguing that the fluidity of Tiresias' experiences as both male and female are not in disagreement with each other, but alternatively are simply experiences without morality. That said, the idea of this transcendence of boundaries allowing them to survive their own "potential self-destruction" is a bit of an understatement for the transgender experience. When one does not align with society's

[61] Boyles, Charles-Elizabeth. 2020. "Made Miracle: Tiresias Beyond the Gender Binary." *Eidolon*, (July). https://eidolon.pub/made-miracle-784b28d20d53.

[62] Scully, Matthew. 2018. "Plasticity at the Violet Hour: Tiresias, The Waste Land, and the Poetic Form." *Indiana University Press* 41, no. 3 (Spring): 166-182. 10.2979.

expectations of their gender or sex, they often must go through a kind of transformative experience to avoid that self-destruction in ancient mythology.

Boyles relates this idea of Tiresias' embodied dynamic of boundary-crossing to the "dynamic [for trans, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people]. When we cross the borders of binary gender constructions, when we blur what are too-often accepted as hard lines, we are punished for it…but there are rewards to it nonetheless – the rush of gender euphoria, of feeling truly seen, is incomparable, and being able to live as yourself," again acknowledging not only how gender can move throughout the binary, but the experience of pain and joy can as well.[63] Boyles concludes that "Tiresias, situated between the binary genders, let alone everything else, can stand as a nonbinary figure, uniquely positioned to display the contingency of the binary they transcend" arguing that Tiresias can be another classical example of gender nonconformity and fluidity in constructions, as well as the complexities of applying our modern understandings of gender and sexuality, such as binary male and female, to ancient ones, such as the penetration model.[64] Again, the importance of transgender and nonbinary voices in Classics, such as the two scholars referenced in this section, reveal narratives of queer identity and gender ambiguity in ancient mythology through the lens of queer individuals today.

The final article I will examine is "Iphis' Hair, Io's Reflection, and the Gender Dysphoria of the Metamorphoses" by Sasha Barish.[65] I want to specifically focus on his conclusion, for he states that "it's no more anachronistic for me to draw parallels between my transgender experiences and the *Metamorphoses* than it is for someone heterosexual to draw parallels

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[63] Boyles 2020.

[64] Boyles, Charles-Elizabeth. 2020. "Made Miracle: Tiresias Beyond the Gender Binary." *Eidolon*, (July). https://eidolon.pub/made-miracle-784b28d20d53.

[65] Barish, Sasha. 2018. "Iphis' Hair, Io's Reflection, and the Gender Dysphoria of the Metamorphoses." *Eidolon*, (July). https://eidolon.pub/iphis-hair-io-s-reflection-and-the-gender-dysphoria-of-the-metamorphoses-4b75c1ba38d7.

between their cisgender heterosexual relationships" criticizing the "default" of heterosexuality and how that identity has already found its place in Classics while queer identities have had much less opportunity to do so. He continues that "we should not normalize the mainstream as the default with the excuse of avoiding anachronism" which, again, problematizes the idea of a "default" or "normal" way of being as cisnormative and heteronormative.

Finally, Barish concludes his essay acknowledging the theme of transformation in Ovid's metamorphoses and "by writing about people changing shape, the poet is exploring the relationship between the mind and body," or the ideas of how you perceive yourself and how you are perceived by others and how the two cannot be fully separated.[66] The idea of perception is again present, just as how perception plays a role in the viewing of the Sleeping Hermaphroditus and intersex or queer bodies. The way in which one views themselves can sometimes be in contention with how they are viewed externally, which is often the case for transgender and nonbinary people. The mind and body distinction is a significant part of the transgender experiences, but it is also a fundamental human experience because bodies, and the understanding of where the body ends and the mind begins, is a universal experience through space and time. As the examination of ancient art and literature shows, different cultures conceptualize gender and sexuality in different ways.

Conclusion

By examining the Borghese statue of Sleeping Hermaphroditus, this thesis has shown the ways in which societal constructs of gender, sex, and sexuality are culturally contingent with the ability to evolve over time into various different meanings, despite the human experience of fluid identity being constant. Hermaphroditus the mythological figure serves as an example of

[66] Barish 2018.

transformation and the intersex body existing in an ancient Greek and Roman context. Both accounts of Hermaphroditus, born intersex versus Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, parallel a tension within the queer community: born this way versus fluidity. I believe that neither is correct or incorrect; human sexuality is a deeply personal experience contingent on the culture the individual lives in. The representative statues of Hermaphroditus, specifically the statue located in the Borghese gallery, not only represents an intersex body through art, but brought into question ways of viewing and the power dynamics that result from that. Lastly, gender, sex, and sexuality can be studied through ancient source material through modern studies to better understand how such constructs change and what they mean in the context in which they are present.

By reviewing selected material from ancient Rome, the origins of the Borghese Hermaphroditus, the state of the Classics field and modern scholarship, specifically on queer theory in Classics, the shifts in understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality were able to be seen in various time periods and locations which supports the claim that ways of identifying oneself is culturally contingent and that the binary model that supports cisnormativity and heteronormativity is not, in fact, the "default" or "normal" way of being. Given more time and resources, a further examination of various art pieces would have contributed greatly to understanding ways of viewing in art to further emphasize the crucial role of the viewer both in the context of the Borghese Hermaphroditus, but queer bodies as well. However, the survey conducted in this thesis stands as an introduction to these ideas of fluid identity as well as the roles of consent and power when interacting with art and bodies.

To better understand the implications of this analysis, future studies should address the varying degrees of how power relates to perception and the forced embodiment of identities as a

result of the powerful gaze. For instance, this thesis addressed how, within the penetration model, the passive partner would be forcibly feminized by society, as well as the expectations of the active partner. This passivity was equated with femininity, which resulted in a blurring of gender lines that is different than in today's strict binary. It also means that the Romans would have viewed the statue differently than modern viewers see it in museums. Future research should remain curious about how the powerful gaze plays a role in the identification of bodies, as well as the humanity, masculinity, and femininity that are then associated with them.

The examination of a statue like the Borghese Hermaphroditus to better understand queer identities is simply the beginning for the Classics field; it is minute part of a much greater whole that has been left massively unexplored at this point in time. By claiming Greek and Roman history as our own, white Classicists have used ancient philosophy and accomplishments to justify a false superiority over historically marginalized groups of people. As this thesis shows, cultural context defines identity, so simply because pederasty was normalized in ancient Greece and Rome, does not mean it should be today, and modern scholars can condemn those acts within their lived context.

Lastly, by making the Classics discipline elitist, there is a discrimination being made against those who do not have the resources to learn Greek and Latin, to attend the best schools, and engage in active discussion of these topics. This class divide can be seen today, at the University of Vermont. With the removal of Latin and Greek majors at the university, there is an active participation in the inaccessibility of Classics. If removal of these studies continued, accessibility to the field would be again narrowed and the boundaries of elitism in Classics would be redrawn and reestablished to perpetuate this exclusion. There will be no reclaiming or contribution to the field if it is dangled too far above the heads of marginalized voices. These

voices will continue to feel shunned from history, unable to see themselves in art and literature, and the only voices to tell the stories will be those in power. This thesis serves as a refusal to allow the death of the Classics at the University of Vermont, and a contribution to the conversation about queer people, by a queer person, to find identity in history.

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