

In his essay 'Mapping Penetrability' David Fredrick reviews the idea that there is a fundamental "scopic regime" for Rome in the late republican and early imperial periods: 'Whether one walks into a house, a theater, or one of the fora, this is the bedrock of physical and spatial experience: at the apex, "impenetrable" penetrators, elite men; at the base, the most penetrable: the least important slaves and the poor free of either gender.' (*The Roman Gaze*, 258). His essay is typical of recent work in the area of 'masculinities' in that, although he later complicates the model by suggesting that there are areas of hierarchical confusion rather than a simple division between "penetrator" and "penetrated", the binary structure around which he frames his discussion is one which has dominated the study of gender and sexuality in the ancient world since its spectacular reflation in the early 1980s. The acknowledgement that sexuality was constituted differently in the ancient world than in our own (and differently, indeed, between Greece and Rome) has helped in the struggle to de-essentialise contemporary models of sexual behaviour and expose the arbitrariness of the labels 'normal' and 'deviant'. And yet the way the opposition penetrator/penetrated has tended simply to replace that of heterosexual/homosexual reveals a reluctance to let the insights of queer theory about the multiplicities and contradictions within sexual identity re-invigorate the debate.

This paper will utilise Ovid's account of the metamorphosis of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis to think about, in the idiom of Kosofsky Sedgwick's oft-cited definition of queer, the 'open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' surrounding the nexus of terms for the effeminate man in Rome. Maud Gleason has described how these terms overlap: whilst *androgynos* in its most literal sense describes an appearance of gender-indeterminacy, 'he who is between man and woman' and the word *cinaedus* describes sexual deviance, 'in its most specific sense referring to males who prefer to play a "feminine" (receptive) role in intercourse with other men, in fact, 'the two terms become virtually indistinguishable when used to describe men of effeminate appearance and behaviour' (*Making Men*, 64). In its aetiological aspect, Ovid's story can be seen as dramatising a similar range of positions, flirting with the possibility of androgyny as plenitude but also representing it as deficiency and lack. Luc Brisson has offered a reading that describes it as a myth accounting for passive homosexuality, commenting that the interest of the passage lies in its total originality for 'Ovid was the first to recount the myth of Hermaphroditus and the only writer to establish specific links between dual sexuality and masculine homosexuality of the passive kind' (*Sexual Ambivalence*, 42). But both Nugent and Liveley have emphasised Hermaphroditus' status as sexually ambivalent *before* his transformation, so that Ovid's aetiology can be seen as more complex than Brisson's and the final transformation regarded as figuring continuity alongside change. The paper will evaluate these readings to demonstrate that the Ovidian story mercilessly confounds binary logic and, in resisting any attempt to render sexual identity or desire as self-evident, monolithic or natural, has considerable implications for configurations of the Roman male.

Bibliography

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