

**Intersex Identity and Intersectionality:
Representations of Hermaphroditus in Ovid, Vitruvius, and Jeffrey Eugenides' *Middlesex***

Terminology:

intersex— a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit typical definitions of female or male. It is used in reference to people who are born with any of several variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that do not fit typical definitions for male or female bodies. (one useful resource: http://www.isna.org/faq/what_is_intersex)

hermaphrodite— intersex people were previously referred to as *hermaphrodites*, but that term has fallen out of favor as it is considered to be misleading, stigmatizing, dehumanizing, and unscientific (as it oversimplifies several possible variations in sex characteristics).

Hermaphroditus—a figure in Greek and Roman literature, mythology, art, and religion often depicted as having both male and female sexual characteristics, and a longstanding symbol of androgyny and ambiguous sexual anatomy. Hermaphroditus' name is derived from their parents, Hermes (a god associated with crossing boundaries) and Aphrodite (a goddess associated with desire and sexuality).

intersectionality—a term which refers to sociological approaches that seek to develop frameworks for analyzing the complex interactions of various forms of disempowerment, including sexism, racism, class oppression, and heterosexism. As an example, an intersectional theorist may consider ways in which the intersection of racism and sexism cannot not be fully understood by considering the dimensions of race or gender separately.

“Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination.” (Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist politics.” *U. Chi. Legal F.* 1989: 139-167)

Middlesex

1. “I’ve been ridiculed by classmates, guinea-pigged by doctors, palpated by specialists, and researched by the March of Dimes. ... An army tank led me into urban battle once; **a swimming pool turned me into myth; I’ve left my body in order to occupy others**—and all this happened before I turned sixteen.” (Eugenides 3)

2. ““Turkey! Why didn’t you say so? **Turkey’s a Muslim country. You a Muslim?**
‘No, Greek. Greek Church.’

‘But you born in Turkey.’

‘*Ne* [*yes* in modern Greek].’

...

‘So you [sic] probably mixed up a little bit, right? **You not all white.**’” (Eugenides 145)

3. ““Let’s see Southern Mediterranean. One point. Not in one of the professions. One point. Religion? Greek church. That’s some kind of Catholic, isn’t it? So there’s another point there. **And he has his parents living with him! Two more points!** Which makes—five! Oh, that’s won’t do. That won’t do at all.’

To explain Miss Marsh’s arithmetic: back in those days, the real estate agents in Grosse Pointe evaluated prospective buyers by something called **the Point system**. ... No one spoke of it openly. Realtors only mentioned “community standards” and selling to “the right sort of people.” Now that white flight had begun, the Point System was more important than ever. You didn’t want what was happening in Detroit to happen out here.” (Eugenides 255-256)

4. “*In addition, the subject has been raised in the Greek Orthodox tradition, with its strongly sex-defined roles. In general the parents seem assimilationist and “all-American” in their outlook, but **the presence of this deeper ethnic identity should not be overlooked.***” (Eugenides 436)

5. “When the kiss was over she opened her eyes very wide. ‘**I thought you were gay when we met,**’ she said.

‘Must have been the suit.’

‘**My gay-dar went off completely. ... Your body’s not like a boy’s.**’” (Eugenides 184)

Ancient Sources¹:

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (epic poem in Latin, circa 8 CE)

6. ... ‘pugnes licet, inprobe,’ dixit,
‘**non tamen effugies**. Ita, di, iubeatis, et istum
nulla dies a me nec me deducat ab isto.’
Vota suos habuere deos; nam mixta duorum
corpora iunguntur, faciesque inducitur illis
una. Velut, si quis **conducat cortice ramos**,
crescendo iungi pariterque adolescere cernit,
sic ubi complexu coierunt membra tenaci,
**nec duo sunt et forma duplex, nec femina dici
nec puer ut possit, neutrumque et utrumque videntur**.
Ergo ubi se liquidas, quo vir descenderat, undas
semimarem fecisse videt **mollitaque** in illis
membra, manus tendens, sed iam **non voce virili**
Hermaphroditus ait: ‘nato date munera vestro,
et pater et genetrix, amborum nomen habenti:
**quisquis in hos fontes vir venerit, exeat inde
semivir et tactis subito mollescat in undis!**’
Motus uterque parens nati rata verba biformis
fecit et **incesto** fontem **medicamine** tinxit. (Bk. 4.371-388)

... ‘although you may fight, wicked one,’ she said,
‘**you will not escape**. And so, gods, may you arrange
that no day will separate him from me or me from him.’
The gods received her prayer, for the merged bodies of the two
are joined, and one figure is brought forth for them.
As when someone **grafts a twig onto another tree**
and he sees that they are joined in growing and reach maturity together,
in such a way their limbs were joined in a tight embrace,
**they are no longer two and the form is two-fold, such that it can be called
neither woman nor boy; it seems not either and yet both**.
When he sees that the flowing waves into which the man had descended
had made him half-man, and **his limbs were softened** in those places,
Hermaphroditus, stretching out his hands, says **in a voice
not belonging to a man**, ‘Grant this favor, father and mother,
to your son who has the name of both:
**whoever comes into this spring as a man,
may he become weak at the touch of the waves!**’
Moved, each parent enacted the words of their two-formed offspring
and infused the spring with an **unchaste poison**.

¹ All translations are my own. Key words and phrases have been placed in bold.

7. **‘Vicimus et meus est’** exclamat nais, et omni veste procul iacta mediis inmittitur undis; **pugnantemque tenet, luctantiaque oscula carpit, subiectatque manus, invitaque pectora tangit,** et nunc hac iuveni, nunc circumfunditur illac; denique nitentem contra elabique volentem **implicat ut serpens, quam regia sustinet ales sublimemque rapit...** (Bk. 4.356-364)

‘I have won, and he is mine!’ shouts the naiad [Salmacis], and with her clothing thrown far away she dives into the midst of the waves; she holds onto him as he fights against her, **she seizes resisting kisses, she fondles his arms and touches his unwilling breast,** and she overwhelms the youth on this side and that; **finally she enfolds him, struggling and wishing to slip away from her, like a serpent which the king of birds has snatched up on high...**

8. Unde sit infamis, quare male fortibus undis Salmacis **enervet** tactosque **remolliat** artus discite. Causa latet, vis est notissima fontis. (Bk. 4.285-287)

Now learn how Salmacis is of ill repute, how it **weakens and softens** limbs with its destructively strong waters. The cause is hidden, but the strength of the spring is well-known.

Vitruvius, *On Architecture* (architectural encyclopaedia in Latin, circa 30-15 BCE)

9. In cornu autem summo dextro Veneris et Mercuri fanum ad ipsum Salmacidis fontem. Is autem **falsa opinione putatur venerio morbo implicare eos**, qui ex eo biberint. Sed haec opinio quare per orbem terrae falso rumore sit pervagata, non pigebit exponere. Non enim quod dicitur molles et inpudivos ex ea aqua fieri, id potest esse, sed est eius fontis potestas perlucida saporeque egregius.

Cum autem Melas et Areuanias ab Argis et Troezene coloniam communem eo loci deduxerunt, barbaros Caras et Lelegas eiecerunt. Hi autem ad montes fugati inter se congregantes discurrebant et ibi latrocinia facientes crudeliter eos vastabant. Postea de colonis unus ad eum fontem propter bonitatem aquae quaestus causa tabernam omnibus copiis instruxit eamque exercendo eos barbaros allecibat. Ita singillatim decurrentes et ad coetus convenientes e duro **ferroque more commutati in Graecorum consuetudinem** et suavitatim sua voluntate reducebantur. Ergo ea aqua **non inpudivo morbi vitio**, sed **humanitatis dulcedine mollitis animis barbarorum** eam famam est adeptus.

But at the furthest wing there is a temple of Venus and Mercury near the spring of Salmacis itself. This spring, however, **by a mistaken opinion, is thought to afflict with a sexual disease** those who drink from it. And I will not be reluctant to explain why this opinion has spread widely through the world by a mistaken rumor. **For it cannot be because, as it is said, people are made effeminate and unchaste by that water;** the power of the spring is clear and its flavor is outstanding.

When Melas and Arevanias brought to that place a colony shared by Argos and Troezen, they cast out the barbarians, Carians, and Leleges. After being driven to the mountains, these peoples gathered together among themselves and made raids, and carrying out plunder they cruelly ravaged them [i.e. the Greeks] there. Afterwards one of the colonists, for the sake of profit, set up an inn with complete supplies near the spring on account of the excellence of the water, and while overseeing the inn he began to attract the barbarians. And so coming down, one by one, and mixing with society, **they changed from their rough and wild manner into the customs of the Greeks**, and of their own accord they were made more agreeable. Therefore this water obtained that reputation, **not through the fault of an unchaste disease**, but through the **softening of barbarian spirits by the delights of humanity**. (Bk. 2.8.11-15)

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