

Reinventing *καλός*: ‘Effeminate’ Men in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousae*¹

1. ‘Queer’

I posit that Greek sexuality and gender constructions recognize behaviors different from the normalized constructions as “Other” and thus I will use the term ‘queer’ to encapsulate this phenomenon. ‘Queer’ in this context pertains to “denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender.”²

2. Sexual Terminology

φύσις – nature; penis

καταπύγων – “down the butt cheeks;” unnatural, immoderate (often used as the opposite of σωφρών)

εὐρύπρωκτος – “with a wide anus” (from frequent receptive anal sex); bugged

κίναιδος – “butt slut”; man who has regular receptive anal sex

κινεῖσθαι (slang of βινεῖσθαι) – “to be fucked”

3. Agathon’s Appearance and Promiscuity

Euripides: πρῶτα μὲν γινώσκομαι
ἔπειτα πολίος εἶμι καὶ πώγων’ ἔχω (190)
σὺ δ’ εὐπρόσωπος, λευκός, ἐξυρημένος,
γυναικόφωνος, ἀπαλός, εὐπρεπῆς ἰδεῖν.

First of all, I will be recognized, next, I am gray-haired, and I have a beard, but you are fair-faced, white-skinned, clean shaven, voiced like a woman, delicate, and easy on the eyes.

Agathon: κάκιον ἀπολοίμην ἂν ἢ σύ.

Euripides: πῶς;

Agathon: ὅπως;

δοκῶν γυναικῶν ἔργα νυκτερήσια
κλέπτειν ὑφαρπάζειν τε θήλειαν Κύπριν.
(205)

I would be destroyed worse than you! – How?
—I’ll tell you how! When I am a woman, I steal their nightly deeds and rob them of their feminine love.

Euripides:
Ἄγαθων, ἐπειδὴ σαυτὸν ἐπιδούναι φθονεῖς...
(249)

Agathon, since you refuse to submit yourself...
– I don’t refuse (to submit)...³

Agathon: οὐ φθονῶ (252)

¹ Abstract: <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2021/abstracts/2530EffeminacyinAristophanes.pdf>

² Oxford English Dictionary

³ The translations on this handout are my own.

4. Euripides' Kinsman responds to Agathon's song

ὡς ἡδὺν τὸ μέλος, ὦ πότνια Γενετυλλίδες (130)
καὶ θηλυδριῶδες καὶ κατεγλωτισμένον
καὶ μανδαλωτόν, ὥστ' ἐμοῦ γ' ἀκροωμένου
ὑπὸ τὴν ἔδραν αὐτὴν ὑπῆλθε γάργαλος.
καὶ σ', ὦ νεανίσχ', ἥτις εἶ, κατ' Αἰσχύλον
ἐκ τῆς Λυκούργειας ἐρέσθαι βούλομαι. (135)
ποδαπὸς ὁ γύννις; τίς πάτρα; τίς ἢ στολή;
τίς ἢ τάραξις τοῦ βίου; τί βάρβιτος
λαλεῖ κροκωτῶ; τί δὲ λύρα κεκρυφάλῳ;
τί λήκυθος καὶ στρόφιον; ὡς οὐ ζύμφορον.
τίς δαὶ κατρόπτου καὶ ξίφους κοινωνία; (140)
σύ τ' αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, πότερον ὡς ἀνὴρ τρέφει;
καὶ ποῦ πέος; ποῦ χλαῖνα; ποῦ Λακωνικά;
ἀλλ' ὡς γυνὴ δῆτ'; εἶτα ποῦ τὰ τιθία;
τί φῆς; τί σιγᾶς; ἀλλὰ δῆτ' ἐκ τοῦ μέλους
ζητῶ σ', ἐπειδὴ γ' αὐτὸς οὐ βούλει φράσαι;
(145)

How sweet your song, oh Genetyllides
goddesses, and feminine-smelling, and an
object of French kissing, and lascivious, that
when I heard it, tickling came up under the
very seat of my pants. I also want to ask you,
young man, what (woman) are you in
accordance with Aeschylus from his
Lykourgeia trilogy. What sort of androgeny?
What is your homeland? What is your dress?
What is your confusion in life? Why does your
barbitos sound with your saffron-colored robe?
Why does your lyre sound with your hair
wrap? Why the oil lamp and the breast band?
As it is not helpful. Why do you have a mirror
and a sword? You, boy, are you being brought
up either as a man? Where is your penis?
Where is your chlaina? Where are your
Laconian shoes? Or as a woman? Then where
are your breasts? Why do you speak that way?
Why are you silent? Do I have to find out your
gender from your song, since you do not wish
to point it out?

5. Agathon's Defense

Agathon:
ὦ πρέσβυ πρέσβυ, τοῦ φθόνου μὲν τὸν ψόγον
ἤκουσα, τὴν δ' ἄλγησιν οὐ παρεσχόμην·
ἐγὼ δὲ τὴν ἐσθῆθ' ἅμα γνώμη φορῶ.
χρὴ γὰρ ποιητὴν ἄνδρα πρὸς τὰ δράματα
ἃ δεῖ ποιεῖν, πρὸς ταῦτα τοὺς τρόπους ἔχειν
(150)
αὐτίκα γυναικεῖ' ἦν ποιῆ τις δράματα,
μετουσίαν δεῖ τῶν τρόπων τὸ σῶμ' ἔχειν.
...
ἀνδρεῖα δ' ἦν ποιῆ τις, ἐν τῷ σώματι
ἐνεσθ' ὑπάρχον τοῦθ'. ἃ δ' οὐ κεκτήμεθα
(155)
μίμησις ἤδη ταῦτα συνθηρεύεται.
...
ἄλλως τ' ἄμουσόν ἐστι ποιητὴν ἰδεῖν
ἀγρεῖον ὄντα καὶ δασύν. (160)
...
ὅμοια γὰρ ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τῇ φύσει. (171)

Oh old man, old man, I heard the censure from
your reproach, but I did not let it offend me. I
wear this clothing along with my thought. It is
necessary for a poet, a man, concerning his
characters, which he needs to compose, to hold
his own way of life along with theirs.
Therefore, if someone were to compose female
characters, he must hold his body in
participation of the characters' way of life. ...
If someone is composing male characters, they
already have the ability there in their body.
The things which we don't possess, mimesis
now provides. ...

Besides, it is unmusical for a poet to look
rugged and hairy. ...

It is necessary to write characters similar in
nature to you.

6. Kleisthenes' Appearances in Aristophanes

Acharnians – as Siburtius, a *καλός* nobleman

Knights – as Straton, a *καλός* nobleman

Clouds – as *γυνή*

Thesm. – as hairless

Wasps – K. has sex with Androkles

Birds – while Athena goes for her armor, K. goes for a penis

Lysistrata – men have sex with K.; women might have to have sex with K., since they are against men

Frogs – Dionysus mounts K.; Hercules had sex with K.

7. Kleisthenes' Entrance Speech

Kleisthenes:

φίλοι γυναῖκες, συγγενεῖς τοῦμοῦ τρόπου·
ὅτι μὲν φίλος εἶμι' ὑμῖν, ἐπίδηλον ταῖς γνάθοις.(575)
γυναικομανῶ γὰρ προξενῶ θ' ὑμῶν ἀεὶ.
καὶ νῦν ἀκούσας πράγμα περὶ ὑμῶν μέγα
ὀλίγω τι πρότερον κατ' ἀγορὰν λαλούμενον,
ἤκω φράσων τοῦτ' ἀγγελῶν θ' ὑμῖν, ἵνα
σκοπῆτε καὶ τηρῆτε μὴ καὶ προσπέση (580)
ὑμῖν ἀφάρκτοις πράγμα δεινὸν καὶ μέγα.

Chorus Leader:

τί δ' ἐστίν, ὦ παῖ; παῖδα γὰρ σ' εἰκὸς καλεῖν,
ἕως ἂν οὕτως τὰς γνάθους ψιλὰς ἔχης.

Dear Women, participants of my lifestyle. It is clear on my cheeks that I am dear to you. I am woman-crazed, and I will always be your advocate. And now, after I heard your great situation being discussed down in the agora a little while ago, I have come pointing this out and announcing to you so that you may investigate and observe, and so that a terrible and huge issue not catch you off guard.—What is it, boy? For you look like you should be called boy, since you have your cheeks bare like that.