

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

Through the lens of Aristophanes, we catch a glimpse of the life of the ‘effeminate’ man in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens. This ‘effeminate’ man is one who displays feminine or genderqueer behavior and/or has the reputation of such in addition to passive sexual behavior. These behaviors are averse to the normalized Greek male sexuality and gender, and therefore, are often not fully accepted. The stereotypical, yet sometimes accurate, sexual practice of anal submission (*ἐβρωπρωκτία*) is applied to those who deviate from the normalized male sexuality or gender. This observation will be compared to a framework of queer representation in Greek literature and mythology; for, homoerotic themes are common in many authors, as well as there are men in mythology who bend gender with their dress (Dover 1978). In the comic world, sexuality of any kind is put on display for the audience to laugh at, jeer at, or even scorn. By analyzing both the portrayal of ‘effeminate’ men in comedy, and interactions of other characters towards these men, there appears the Greek social construct of an “other” sexuality (and gender), which I will term ‘queer.’ Although Greek society did not have identities or labels of certain sexualities or genders, expressions adverse to the normalized construction of male sexuality and gender were recognized and thus the term ‘queer’ encapsulates this phenomenon. ‘Queer’ is “denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to the established ideas of sexuality and gender” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2014).

Specifically, in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazousae*, three characters express their gender and sexuality, which the other characters and the audience will view and judge accordingly. In this paper, I will analyze the portrayals of the characters Agathon, Kleisthenes, and Euripides’ kinsman to demonstrate characteristics of an ‘effeminate’ or queer man, and thus support

the notion that Greek society recognized a queer sexuality and gender expression. The proclivity to reduce 'effeminate' and queer men as a whole to anal submission may suggest a discomfort with or ignorance of alternate sexual practices. Ultimately, I will argue that queer behavior confuses non-queer men, leading to the assumption of passive sexuality, often accompanied with offensive slurs; thus, in the *Thesmophoriazousae*, the hostility shown towards queer behaviors results in queer men attempting to explain, justify, and even normalize their queer sexuality and gender.

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