

Beauty and Sex Appeal in Aristophanes*

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From dancing girls, brides and young wives, to naked and flirtatious youths, Aristophanes' plays are full of figures characterized by their beauty, allure and sexual availability. Yet for all the scholarly literature on sex and sexualized language in Aristophanes¹, and for all the interest taken by classicists in human beauty and eroticism in classical art², no study to date has focused exclusively on what Aristophanes' plays can tell us about sexual attractiveness³. This omission is all the more surprising when we consider how potentially valuable comedy is as a source, providing as it does a distinctively open and uninhibited insight into classical sexuality. We may know very little about how beauty was represented visibly on

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1 — E.g. Henderson 1991, McClure 1999, Halliwell 2002, O'Higgins 2003 and Robson 2006.

2 — E.g. Kilmer 1993, Kampen 1996, Stewart, A. 1997, Llewellyn-Jones 2002b and Osborne 2011.

3 — That said, Dover 1978, 135-53, lays some useful groundwork in his survey of comedy and the 'tri-genre' approach to the body beautiful adopted by Hymes 2013 also looks at Old Comedy (the other two genres being Xenophon and oratory). See also Robson 2013a, ch.5, 116-144, which also makes extensive use of comic evidence. Hawley 1998 is a particularly insightful study of notions of beauty in Greek society and literature.

the comic stage⁴, but the plays of Aristophanes abound in sexualized discussions and descriptions of male and female bodies and also provide important glimpses of domestic detail and everyday life that are routinely missing from our non-comic sources. Furthermore, since Old Comedy was written to appeal to audiences much broader than those of most other literary genres, it presumably speaks to popular notions of beauty and sex appeal in a way that, say, Platonic dialogues do not. Non-dramatic literature may serve as useful evidence for elite tastes and those elements of beauty that could be discussed in polite society, but Old Comedy's sexual aesthetics could no doubt boast a far broader and brasher appeal.

In the discussion that follows I shall examine a wide range of issues that for convenience's sake I have gathered together under the headings of beauty and sex appeal, the aim being to use Aristophanes' plays and fragments as a springboard for thinking about notions of attractiveness and body image in the classical era. The questions asked include: which physical features and attributes do we find conceived of as appealing in the plays? What vocabulary is used to describe them? And what other factors such as nudity, clothing or ways of behaving serve to entice and excite the characters in Aristophanic comedy? Whilst much of what emerges from this survey may be familiar to students of the body beautiful in the ancient world – the attention paid to female breasts, for example, or the allure of seductive clothing – other findings perhaps offer more pause for thought. One point of interest, for example, concerns the physical age of those thought to be sexually appealing: in terms of sexual attractiveness, just when was one at one's peak? And this feeds into broader questions concerning the way in which youthful beauty in general is described. To what extent are the ideal male and ideal female body perceived as radically different things or, alternatively, are they two sides of the same coin?

This paper is structured as follows. The beauty and sex appeal of the female body is considered first, with subsequent sections examining female accoutrements, flirtatious behaviour and the presentation of

4 — Aside from the 'mute, nude female characters' in Aristophanes' plays (the representation of whom is discussed below at n.31), there are relatively few characters appearing onstage whose beauty and/or sexual allure are discussed: figures with sex appeal routinely belong to the world of imagination and fantasy. Exceptions include the cross-dressing Agathon and the housewives of *Lysistrata*, discussed below. It is particularly interesting to note that the looks of a youthful figure like Pheidippides in *Clouds* – or even Myrrhine in *Lysistrata* (whose husband, Cinesias, is consumed with passion for her) are not dwelt upon. Whilst comic costumes were typically grotesque, it is perfectly plausible that more youthful and/or alluring characters were clothed and masked in such a way as to signal their *relative* good-looks (a point made by Hymes 2013). Indeed, in her study of costume in Aristophanes, Stone 1984, 270, suggests that '[y]oung adult men tend to be distinguished by longer hair and greater attentiveness to dress and grooming' than older men. She adds that while the clothing of young and old women was probably similar, their masks were radically different, with older women being portrayed as wrinkled, snub-nosed and possessing few teeth (299-301).

prostitute figures. Next, the subject of male sex appeal is explored. Lastly, in the concluding section I draw together a number of points raised in the discussion as a whole and briefly consider what biases Aristophanic comedy displays and how these compare and contrast with the portrayal of beauty and sex appeal in other genres⁵.

Feminine Charms and the Body Beautiful

Let us look first at descriptions of female attractiveness. The most common words used in Aristophanes to describe female beauties are *καλός*, ‘beautiful’, and *ώραῖος*, which derives ultimately from *ώρα* and signifies ‘in the bloom of youth’, ‘in one’s prime’, ‘youthful’, ‘blooming’⁶. Thus when Demos sees the personified Spondai, *Peace* Treaties, in *Knights* he exclaims, ‘how beautiful’ (*ὡς καλαί*, 1390) and Cinesias describes his wife, Myrrhine, as ‘most beautiful’, *καλλίστη*, at *Lysistrata* 955 – a description shared by Peisistratus’ bride, Basileia (*Birds* 1537), whose ‘beauty’, *κάλλος*, is also mentioned more than once (*Birds* 1713 and 1722). *ώραῖος* is regularly found in the superlative form – according to the Chorus of the *Acharnians*, for instance, one of the benefits of Dicaeopolis’ private *peace* will be ‘to sleep with a blooming young girl’ (*καθεύδειν μετὰ παιδίσκης ὠραιότητας*, 1148-9), and in Hades we see Xanthias being tempted into an inn by the prospect of a ‘very attractive girl piper’ (*αὐλητρὶς ... ὠραιότητα*, *Frogs* 513-4), and ‘two or three dancing girls’ (514-5)⁷. The less common, cognate adjective *ὠρικός*, ‘youthful’, ‘blooming’, is found in the *Acharnians*’ phallic song (272) where it is used of the slave girl, Thratta, whom Dicaeopolis fantasizes about assaulting⁸.

There are two further adjectives commonly used to suggest female attractiveness: *λευκός*, ‘pale’, ‘light-skinned’, and *ἀπαλός*, ‘tender’⁹. The

5 — Translations of Aristophanic passages are taken from (or based on) Sommerstein’s Aris & Phillips editions of the plays: Sommerstein 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2001. Translations of fragments are largely taken from (or based on) Henderson 2007 in the case of Aristophanes and Storey 2011a-c in the case of other Old Comic poets.

6 — As Olson notes (2002) on *Ach.* 272 ad loc., *ώραῖος* and *ὠρικός* are ‘used to describe a thing that is caught at the perfect time (*ώρα*) and is thus particularly desirable’; see also his notes on *Ach.* 1147-9 ad loc.

7 — *ώραῖος* is used of females at *Vesp.* 1365, *Av.* 138, *Ra.* 291, *Ec.* 616 and 695; of a boy at *Av.* 138 (see below); and of Dionysus at *Ra.* 395.

8 — The scholiast on this passage informs us that Aristophanes also employed the phrase *ὠρικήν ὑληφόρον* in *Banqueters* (fr. 245).

9 — On the positive connotations of female pallor, see esp. Thomas 2002, who suggests that the adjective *καλός* (7): ‘carries connotations of youthfulness and desirability as well as the attendant traits of passivity and submission’. Pale skin also marks a woman out as upper-class and worthy of respect (Hawley 1998, 44; Thomas 2002, 7), whereas tanned skin can be the mark of a prostitute (Robson 2013a, 119-20).

two coincide in Peisetaerus' excited reaction to the appearance of Procne, at *Birds* 667-8 'Holy Zeus, what a lovely birdie! How fair, how tender!', ὡς ἀπαλον, ὡς δὲ λευκόν – an episode which is particularly striking since Procne is a bird of the feathered variety. In the *Ecclesiazusae* a combination of beauty and fair skin is presented as having the potential of being a girl's Unique Selling Point, 'really beautiful and really white-skinned' (καὶ καλλίστη καὶ λευκοτάτη, 699) and pale skin is a quality which the older, unattractive women in the play aim to mimic by using white lead¹⁰. However, the play's Young Girl is adamant that, however much effort the old hags put into their make-up and beauty routines, attractiveness is essentially the province of the young (901-5)¹¹:

μὴ φθόνει ταῖσιν νέαισι·
τὸ τρυφερὸν γὰρ ἐμπέφυκε
τοῖς ἀπαλοῖσι μηροῖς
κάπι τοῖς μήλοις ἐπάν-
θει. σὺ δ', ὦ γραῦ, παραλέλεξαι κἀντέτριψαι
τῷ Θανάτῳ μέλημα.

Don't be jealous of the young; for voluptuousness has its natural abode in tender thighs and blooms in firm breasts; while you, old woman, are plucked and plastered to be the darling of death.

The girl's outpouring here raises a number of issues, such as which female body parts are mentioned in Aristophanes in the context of attractiveness. The Young Girl refers to thighs and breasts but other body parts are lighted on in the plays, too. One feature singled out for praise is an attractive face (*Peace* 524: οἶον δ' ἔχεις τὸ πρόσωπον, ὦ Θεωρία, 'What a face you've got, Showtime!'; *Frogs* 409-10: παραβλέψας τι μεираκίσκης νυνδὴ κατεῖδον καὶ μάλ' εὐπροσώπου, '... just now I stole a glance at a girl, and a real nice face she had, too ...')¹². Bottoms are also remarked upon (e.g. by the Spartan delegate at *Lysistrata* 1148, ὁ πρωκτὸς ἄφατον ὡς καλός, 'that bum is unspeakably beautiful!'; by Trygaeus' slave at *Peace* 875-6, ὦ δέσποτα, ὄσσην ἔχει τὴν πρωτοπεντετηρίδα, 'Oh, mas-

10 — For an overview of the variety of make-up available in classical Greece, see Walton 1946 and Glazebrook 2008/9, 235-6.

11 — Firmness of flesh, a good complexion and softness of skin are also mentioned in the comparison of young girls and prostitutes in Timocles, fr. 24 from *The Marathonians*: 'What a big difference there is between spending the night with a young girl (μετὰ κορίσκης) and with a whore (μετὰ χαμαιτύπης). Wow! Her firmness, her complexion, her breath – ye gods! The fact that everything isn't there on a plate – you have to struggle a bit and get slapped in the face and beaten by soft hands (ἀπλαῖσι χερσίν): it's sweet by almighty Zeus!'

12 — In this passage from *Frogs*, the chorus further describe the girl as a 'playmate' (συμπαίστρια) and talk of her torn *chiton*, out through which one of her breasts is poking (*Ra.* 411-12).

ter, what a quadrennial bum she's got!'; and by the Scythian Archer at *Thesmophoriazusae* 1187, καλό γε τὸ πυγή, 'Dat bum, 'e is gorgeous'¹³. The beauty of female sexual organs is commended as well, albeit only once in the plays, by one of the sex-starved Athenians in *Lysistrata* (1157-8)¹⁴:

Λα. οὐπα γυναῖκ' ὄπωπα χαιώτεραν.
 Αθ. ἐγὼ δὲ κύσθον γ' οὐδέπω καλλίονα.

Spartan: I've never seen a nobler woman.
 First Athenian: And I've never seen a prettier pussy.

Topping the list of appealing female attributes are breasts¹⁵. Dicaeopolis is far from reticent where the attractions of two dancing girls are concerned, for example (*Acharnians* 1198-9: ἀτταταῖ ἀτταταῖ τῶν τιθίων, ὡς σκληρὰ καὶ κυδώνια, 'Oh my, oh my! What breasts! how firm, like quinces'), and according to Lampito in *Lysistrata*, the power exerted by the female breast is legendary: 'Menelaus, certainly, when he somehow caught a glimpse of Helen's two little apples bare (τὰ μάλα), let his sword, I reckon, drop out of his hand' (*Lysistrata* 155-6)¹⁶. The food analogies keep coming: breasts are firm like 'turnips' (γογγυλί, *Thesmophoriazusae* 1185) and firmness, as well as smallness, would appear to be indicated by the euphemism 'nuts' in fr. 664 (κάρυα)¹⁷. In fr. 599 we even hear of young girls who 'sprout beans', κυαμίζουσιν (on their chests?)¹⁸. Small

13 — While Pomeroy's claim that 'buttocks, not breasts, were the most attractive feature of a female figure' for Greek men (Pomeroy 1975, 47) probably overstates the case, female buttocks were undoubtedly a focus of erotic interest for men (Robson 2013a, 122-3). *Lys.* 1148 (delivered by a Spartan) also plays on the supposed Laconian predilection for anal intercourse (Henderson 1987a, ad loc.); cf. Ar. frs 97 and 358. On eroticized female buttocks, see also Henderson 1991, 149-50.

14 — Female genitalia are often the focus of attention in vase-painting, however. In erotic scenes, Kilmer (1993, 141-45) points out numerous examples of what he calls 'genital display', that is the deliberate positioning of the female body by the artist so that this region of the body is either on show to the viewer of the pot or an onlooker in the scene on the vase itself. In other vase scenes, clothing sometimes forms dark patches between women's thighs (Sebesta 2002, 129), emphasizing their breasts, too, in what Llewellyn-Jones calls 'genital maps' (Llewellyn-Jones 2002b, 188).

15 — Breasts are often emphasized in art as well: in sex scenes on red-figure vases, for example, men can often be found engaging in breast-play with naked women (Kilmer 1993, 26). Brides, too, are not infrequently depicted with their breasts projecting prominently, with the areola or an erect nipple sometimes in evidence under their clothing (Sebesta 2002, 129-30; Llewellyn-Jones 2002b, 185). In his study of female breasts in Greek erotic literature, Gerber remarks on the general tendency of authors to commend 'smallness, firmness and roundness' (Gerber 1978, 208). On breast exposure in classical sculpture, see Cohen 1997.

16 — Cf. E. *Andr.* 629.

17 — Henderson 1991, 126, also posits that κάρυα was a 'slang term' for male genitalia, citing *Pl.* 1056 alongside *Lys.* 1059 and 1181 and Eubulus fr. 137.

18 — Breasts are also called 'apples' (μήλα) at *Ec.* 903 (quoted above) and in fr. 148, where there is a reference to pre-pubescent girls (ὑποπαρθένους) who are as firm 'salted olives' (ἀλμιάδας ὡς ἐλάας), there is plausibly an allusion to immature breasts. See also Crates fr. 43 where attractive

breasts are also the image conjured up in fr. 338 from *Thesmophoriazusae* II. Here the diminutive τῖθῖδια ('dear little breasts?') appears in the description of an unnamed female figure who was¹⁹:

τὴν πτέρυγα παραλύσασα τοῦ χιτωνίου
καὶ τῶν ἀποδέσμων οἷς ἐνήν τῖθῖδια

loosening the flap of her girlish chiton and the bands that held her titties.

To be sure, the emphasis we have seen on soft and especially pale flesh may serve to suggest an ideal of beauty that is compatible with an aristocratic lifestyle²⁰, but mentions of soft skin alongside firm (and small) breasts and tender thighs strongly imply that sexual beauty is essentially to be equated with youthfulness. Indeed, this is the overriding message of the first part of the Young Girl's outburst – 'Don't be jealous of the young ...' – and her subsequent words are presumably to be judged in the same light: that is, the 'plucking and plastering' is performed by older women in an effort to replicate the natural look of the young²¹.

While 'plastering' is a reference to the liberal application of make-up, specifically by the old, 'plucking' – as well as other forms of hair removal – is an activity associated with adult women of all ages in Aristophanic comedy. For example, the followers of Praxagora in *Ecclesiazusae* talk of having grown their armpit and body hair to be more like men (60-7), and as far as the pubic region is concerned, Lysistrata suggests that being 'plucked down below delta-style' will help the women arouse their husbands (*Lysistrata* 151). In addition to plucking (*Lysistrata* 89, 151; *Frogs* 516; Pherecrates fr. 113.29; Plato com. fr. 188.14), the singeing pubic of hair with a lamp is evidently an alternative means of hair removal (*Ecclesiazusae* 13; *Lysistrata* 824-8). There has been a certain amount of scholarly debate concerning attitudes towards female pubic hair in the classical era, the key issue being whether total or just partial depilation was the desired effect²². In Aristophanes, the plucking bare of a 'pussy'

(ὠρική) breasts are compared to apples (μήλα) and arbutus fruit (μυαίκυλα: i.e. the fruit of the strawberry tree); cf. Henderson 1991, 148-9.

19 — A loosened breastband, στρόφιον, is also referred to in Ar. fr. 664. On τῖθῖς and its diminutives, see Robson 2006, 168-9. On breastbands (and their erotic connotations in post-classical literature), see Stafford 2005.

20 — See n.9 above.

21 — The use of white lead can therefore to be seen as a deceptive stratagem (Thomas 2002, 11). On the ideology of make-up in classical Athens, see also Glazebrook 2008/9 and Robson 2013a, 123-6.

22 — When female genitalia are visible in classical statues, there is routinely no pubic hair, whereas on vases, some women are depicted with no pubic hair, whilst others have a neat triangle. Kilmer suggests that pubic hair in red-figure vase-painting acts as an age marker for female figures,

(χοῖρος) is presented as undesirable on at least one occasion, however: this is a threat extended to Euripides' disguised Inlaw in *Thesmophoriazusae* (538; cf. 567)²³.

Sexing it Up: Clothing, Scent and Flirtatious Behaviour

The sexual desirability of youth comes across through the nature of the physical features which are described as attractive and also in vocabulary – not just words like ὠρικός and ὠραίος but also νέος (e.g. *Lysistrata* 885) and νεαλής (fr. 378), 'young', and μεῖραξ (*Ecclesiazusae* 611) and μειρακίσκη, 'young woman' (*Frogs* 409), used of women in a sexual context²⁴. But apart from physical qualities like youth and neat or depilated body hair, what else gets Aristophanes' male characters excited? One rich vein of information here is *Lysistrata*, where the success of the sex strike depends on the women being able to inflame their husbands' desire²⁵. *Lysistrata* names four weapons that the women can employ to enhance their natural assets: clothes, shoes, make-up and perfume. As she says to an incredulous Calonice (*Lysistrata* 46-8):

ταῦτα αὐτὰ γάρ τοι κάσθ' ἄ σώσειν προσδοκῶ,
τὰ κροκωτίδια καὶ τὰ μύρα χαί περιβαρίδες
χῆγγουσα καὶ τὰ διαφανή χιτώνια.

... that's exactly what I'm counting on to save Greece – our pretty saffron gowns and our perfumes and our riverboat slippers and our rouge and our see-through shifts²⁶.

Furthermore, Calonice later swears on behalf of all the women that she (*Lysistrata* 217, 219 and 221):

οἴκοι δ' ἀταυρώτη διάξω τὸν βίον ...
κροκωτοφοροῦσα καὶ κεκαλλωπισμένη ...
ὅπως ἂν ἀνήρ ἐπιτυφῆ μάλιστά μου, ...

with adolescent girls' lack of pubic hair contrasting with the neatly plucked or singed hair of older women (Kilmer 1993, 133-41). In addition to Kilmer, Bonfante 1989, 522 n.50, Stafford 2005, 97, and Robson 2013a, 121-2, all provide brief overviews of scholarship on this topic.

23 — The plucking out of pubic hair was perhaps a punishment fit for a male adulterer: see Sommerstein 2001, ad loc. 168 for discussion.

24 — Μεῖραξ is also used in contexts where an existing or prospective (sexual) relationship is implied at *Th.* 410, *Ec.* 1138 and *Pl.* 1071 and 1079; similarly μειρακίσκη at *Ec.* 696.

25 — On the vocabulary of desire in *Lysistrata*, see Robson 2013b, 258-61.

26 — On the association of transparent garments with prostitutes and professional entertainers, see Dalby 2002, 116-9. Diaphanous (female?) clothing is also mentioned in *Ar.* fr. 8.

will pass my life at home, pure and chaste – ... – in make-up and saffron gown – ... so that my husband may be greatly inflamed with desire for me.

A saffron gown, or κροκωτόν, of the kind that the women are envisaged as wearing is also donned by one of the over-made up old women in *Ecclesiazusae* who is looking to snare a young man for sex (879) – this is a garment which, according to one scholar, marks a woman out as ‘fun-loving’²⁷. It is a different outfit worn by the alluring Fawn, the dancing girl in *Thesmophoriazusae*, however. She appears wearing only a ἱμάτιον and sandals – which she soon removes, much to the Scythian Archer’s delight (1181-5).

As well as clothing, *Lysistrata* also recommends that the women use perfume to increase their allure (τὰ μύρα, *Lysistrata* 947) and scents seem to hold erotic associations for other characters in Aristophanes’ plays, too. In the scene in *Lysistrata* where Myrrhine (whose name itself evokes myrrh) tantalizes her husband Cinesias, she insists not only on having perfume but the right kind for love-making (938-46), and in *Ecclesiazusae* Praxagora claims that she cannot get laid without it (524-6). Furthermore, towards the end of the same play, a Maid claims that the right Thasian perfume used neat can bring pleasure all night long (*Ecclesiazusae* 1118-24). In *Peace*, Theoria, the semi-divine prostitute-figure, is said to smell of myrrh (526) – the same substance with which Trygaeus will anoint himself when he marries Opora (862)²⁸.

In terms of actions that might be found erotic, a number of examples of potentially arousing behaviour have already been mentioned: the image of the women in *Lysistrata*, sitting idly at home in their sexy clothes²⁹, and Myrrhine’s teasing of her husband as she constantly puts off the act of sex by asking for a string of accoutrements (e.g. a bed, mattress, pillow, perfume, 914-51) while gradually undressing (920, 950). Fawn, the dancing girl in *Thesmophoriazusae*, also acts seductively as she drives the Scythian Archer wild by dancing, stripping, sitting on his knees, removing her sandals³⁰, letting herself be fondled and kissing him (*Thesmophoriazusae*

27 — Dalby 2002, 114. ‘Saffron’ is also mentioned in an erotic context at *Nu.* 51 (possibly an allusion to a saffron gown), cf. *Lys.* 645, where the κροκωτόν is referred to in the context of the Arkteia (see Sommerstein 1990, ad loc.). This is also the garment worn by Bleparys at *Ec.* 332 (whose own clothes have been taken by his wife, Praxagora). Further female accoutrements (some with erotic potential, others not) are listed at *Tb.* 249-63 and fr. 332 (cf. fr. 337).

28 — The groom’s (and bride’s) anointment with perfume was a traditional feature of the wedding: Oakley and Sinos 1993, 16; cf. *Pl.* 529. Scent and sex are also mentioned in the same breath in *Ar.* fr. 715; cf. *Eq.* 1332, *Pax* 526, *Pl.* 1020 and frs 210, 546 and 549.

29 — On the link between idleness and (destructive) female beauty and beautification, see Hawley 1998, esp. 40-2 and 46-7, and Glazebrook 2008/9, 244-6. Cf. Simonides 57-70.

30 — On the eroticism of shoes in vase-painting, esp. the taking off, putting on, and adjusting of a sandal, see Oakley and Sinos 1993, 18, and Blundell 2002, 150-1; cf. *Lys.* 414-9.

1172-1201). Food-play has erotic potential, too, it seems, since *Lysistrata* tantalizes Cinesias with descriptions of his wife's handling of an egg and an apple (both phallic objects, in Greek terms). She says to him (*Lysistrata* 854-7):

ἀεὶ γὰρ ἡ γυνή σ' ἔχει διὰ στόμα,
κἂν ᾧδὸν ἢ μῆλον λάβῃ, “Κινησίᾳ
τουτὶ γένοιτο” φησίιν.

Your wife always has you on her lips; and if she's having an egg or an apple, she says, 'Let this be for Cinesias!'

The Silent Slapper and Other Sexual Fantasies

Clothing may be predicted to have a devastating effect on the women's husbands in *Lysistrata*, but as we have seen, its removal and absence is also found arousing by men³¹. The potency of nudity can be seen in the series of what Bella Zweig has called 'mute, nude female characters' in Aristophanes who never fail to arouse men³². The list of such pieces of blatant totty include the two dancing girls in *Acharnians* (1198-1232); Spondai (*Peace Treaties*) in *Knights* (1389-1408); Dardanis the flute girl in *Wasps* (1326-85); Opora (Harvest) and Theoria (Festival) in *Peace* (520-728, 819-908 and 1329-59); Diallage (Reconciliation) in *Lysistrata* (1114-88; and perhaps the Scythian girl who appears at 184), and Fawn (also called Artemisia), the dancing girl in *Thesmophoriazusae* (1160-1203). All of these elicit explicit comment from male characters – explicit often being the operative word. Some of these reactions were quoted earlier, such as Dicaeopolis' remarks about the dancing girls' breasts (*Acharnians* 1198-9) or the Athenian's and Spartan's excited appreciation of Reconciliation's various attributes (*Lysistrata* 1136, 1148, 1157-8; cf. 1162-88). What is more, these girls are routinely discussed in terms of the sex they may be able to offer. In *Knights*, for instance, when Demos sees Spondai he asks, 'Am I allowed to satisfy my thirty-year itch with them?'

31 — There is debate as to whether the naked women who appear in Aristophanes plays were represented in performance by costumed male actors or by naked slaves/prostitutes: see e.g. Zweig 1992, 78-81 and 85. Stone 1984, 302-3, discusses how these figures may have been dressed, positing the use of a transparent *chiton* or *nebris* over body padding (her thesis being that these characters were played by padded male actors: 147-50). Nudity regularly features in descriptions of brothels in comedy, e.g. Eubulus fr. 67 and 82; Philemon fr. 3 and Xenarchus fr. 4, and naked women also appear in sexual scenes in vase-painting, of course (whether women thus depicted should be assumed to be prostitutes has been increasingly questioned: see e.g. Kilmer 1993, 159-63, Llewellyn-Jones 2002b, 176, and Blazeby 2011 for discussion). Dalby 2002 discusses how not just nudity but also opulent and showy clothing is associated with prostitutes in Greek texts. On nudity in life and art, see also Bonfante 1989 and Sebesta 2002.

32 — Zweig 1992.

(ἔξεστιν αὐτῶν κατατριακοντουτίσαι; 1391) and in *Wasps* Philocleon makes a particularly direct request to the flute-girl Dardanis for sexual favours as payment in kind for taking her away from a symposium (1345-7):

ὄρᾳς ἐγὼ σ' ὡς δεξιῶς ὑφειλόμην
 μέλλουσαν ἤδη λεσβιεῖν τοὺς ξυμπότας·
 ὦν οὐνεκ' ἀπόδος τῷ πέει τῷδι χάριν.

You see how cleverly I stole you away when you were just about to have to suck people at the party? Do this prick of mine a favour in return for that.

So, as Zweig has pointed out, the objectification of these female figures could hardly be greater: they are eyed up – felt up too³³ – and discussed as sex objects, whilst remaining mute throughout. They are sometimes even discussed as if they were inanimate objects rather than living women: thus Reconciliation's body is conceived of as a map of Greece (*Lysistrata* 1162-72) and Dardanis in *Wasps* is talked about as if she were a torch – her genitalia being a split in the wood, her pubic hair being oozing pitch and her arse a knot in the wood (1373-7).

Yet as sex objects, these figures represent everything that gets the Aristophanic male hot and horny. And in this regard it is interesting to note that when we do learn anything of the girls' backgrounds it is routinely the case that they are not virginal figures by any stretch of the imagination, but rather envisaged as professional 'entertainers'³⁴. We have already met Dardanis, the fellatrix flute-girl, whom Philocleon addresses as 'my little pussy' (ὦ χοιρίον, *Wasps* 1353); the dancing girls whose breasts Dicaeopolis so admires³⁵; and Fawn who seduces the Scythian Archer in *Thesmophoriazusae*. Revealingly, too, Trygaeus' sidekick slave in *Peace* starts to express particular interest in Theoria when he learns her name and discovers who she is (871) – namely a prostitute 'who we used to screw on our way to Brauron after a few drinks' (873-4). In addition to her requisite attractiveness, presumably the appeal of a working girl is partly her availability, partly her expertise³⁶. It is noteworthy in this regard that heterosexual fellatio is only explicitly mentioned in Aristophanes in the context of prostitutes: it is professional sex-workers, and not 'respect-

33 — E.g. *Pax* 879 and *Th.* 1185.

34 — On flute-girls, other *musicianes* and dancers, see Davidson 1997, 80-3, and Robson 2013a, 75-6.

35 — Dancing itself can at times carry erotic overtones, e.g. *Ra.* 414-5.

36 — Sex with a prostitute was also free of the legal consequences that a man might face for having illicit sex with a 'respectable' woman (whether citizen or, presumably, metic) – or, indeed, for having sex with another man's slave, unless as part of a commercial transaction.

able' women, who are considered the most appropriate and, no doubt, the most skilled providers of this particular sexual service³⁷.

Unlike fellatio, one activity which is associated with all forms of erotic object is kissing: Dicaeopolis asks for kisses from his dancing girls (*Acharnians* 1200-1; cf. *Thesmophoriazusae* 1191 and *Frogs* 543); Strepsiades' wife smelt of 'deep kisses' on their wedding night (*Clouds* 51)³⁸; and Euelpides fantasizes about kissing an attractive boy (*Birds* 141)³⁹. Another recurring erotic theme in Aristophanes is that of stolen pleasures – some more innocent than others. These range from glimpsing a woman peeping out of a window (*Thesmophoriazusae* 797-9), to exchanging a glance with a girl whose breast is poking out of her torn dress (*Frogs* 409-12), kissing a slave girl while the wife is in the bath (*Peace* 1138-9; cf. fr. 376), and even the full-scale sexual assault of a slave girl caught stealing wood in a remote location (*Acharnians* 271-5). As I have discussed elsewhere, these rape fantasies are particularly fascinating for the way in which Aristophanes paints them in a positive, celebratory light in the plays with rape is 'always projected, never accomplished'⁴⁰. Indeed, it is not just forced sex that is routinely envisaged rather than actually performed in Aristophanes. Only once does a sex act occur during a play: the Scythian Archer's off-stage fumbblings with the dancing girl, briefly acknowledged at *Thesmophoriazusae* 1210-11⁴¹. Even in *Lysistrata*, it would appear, the sex-starved men are still to satisfy their urges at the end of the play.

Sexy Boys and the (Future) Citizen Body

Men and boys are discussed far less than females in terms of their looks, but what descriptions we do find in Aristophanes reveal positive attributes such as youth, fitness – and, of course, the possession of a small penis⁴². A particularly full description of male attractiveness and unat-

37 — In his study of erotica on red-figure pottery Kilmer observes a link between (heterosexual) fellatio and coercion (Kilmer 1993, 58, 71-2, 114 and 123). One much-discussed vase image of group sex (a red-figure kylix by the Pedieus Painter: Musée du Louvre, Paris G13) depicts three women either engaged or about to engage in oral sex, all subject to different levels of force. The shorn hair of one of these might well imply that she at least is to be considered a prostitute.

38 — On the (increased) eroticization of the figure of the bride in the fifth-century, see e.g. Sutton 1992, 19-20, and n.15 above.

39 — On the eroticism of kissing, see Henderson 1991, 181-2 and Hawley 2007, 5-8.

40 — Robson, forthcoming.

41 — Pace Walin 2009, 33, who moots the possibility that Trygaeus' slave is to be imagined as engaging in sex with Opora during Trygaeus' sung exchange with the chorus at *Peace* 856-67.

42 — In vase-painting, large penises are associated with the kind of lack of control displayed by sexually voracious satyrs or with old or ugly men (see Bonfante 1989, 551; Lear and Cantarella 2008, 64-5, and Stafford 2011, 346). As for small penises, not only boys but adult men, too, are often depicted on vases with idealised immature genitalia (Beazley 1950, 321; Lear and Cantarella 2008,

tractiveness is to be found at *Clouds* 1010-19, where the old-fashioned, yet somewhat prurient Better Argument praises the physical rewards of a traditional education:

ἦν ταῦτα ποιῆς ἀγῶ φράζω
καὶ πρὸς τούτοισιν ἔξης τὸν νοῦν,
ἔξεις ἀεὶ
στήθος λιπαρόν, χροιάν λαμπράν,
ῶμους μεγάλους, γλώτταν βαιάν,
πυγὴν μεγάλην, πόσθην μικράν.
ἦν δ' ἄπερ οἱ νῦν ἐπιτηδεύης,
πρῶτα μὲν ἔξεις
χροιάν ὠχράν, ῶμους μικρούς,
στήθος λεπτόν, γλώτταν μεγάλην,
πυγὴν μικράν, κωλῆν μεγάλην,
ψήφισμα μακρόν.

If you do these things I tell you, and bend your efforts to them, you will always have a shining breast, a bright skin, big shoulders, a minute tongue, a big rump and a small prick. But if you follow the practices of today, for a start you'll have a pale skin, small shoulders, a skinny chest, a big tongue, a small rump, a big ham and a long ... winded decree.

The benefits of traditional education, then, even extend to having a small tongue, that is, one which has not grown thick and muscular through 'chatter and babble' – a practice which Aeschylus also complains has emptied the wrestling schools and worn down young men's buttocks in *Frogs* (i.e. through lack of physical exercise, 1069-71)⁴³. The mention here of a 'shining breast', στήθος λιπαρόν, and a 'bright skin', χροιάν λαμπράν (1012), also chimes with terms used earlier by Better Argument to describe gym-fit boys: λιπαρός, 'gleaming' and εὐανθής, 'blooming' (1002)⁴⁴. This glowing complexion is evidently achieved through physical exertion (and, in the context of the gymnasium, presumably enhanced by olive oil and sweat)⁴⁵.

64-5). For Aristotle, penis size even has a biological dimension: at *Generation of Animals* 718a23, a large penis is linked with male infertility.

43 — Osborne 2011 argues that it is not muscles *per se* that are developed in the gymnasium and admired by ancient Greeks. Instead, he suggests, classical Greek viewers saw (41): 'flesh that was soft or hard', and judged bodies according to their '[c]olour, consistency of flesh and clarity of joints'.

44 — Cf. also Achaeus fr. 4 where the combination in males of strength, youth and gleaming skin are also praised.

45 — Physical exertion is prescribed as a means of acquiring a good complexion for both men and women in Xen. *Oec.* 10.5 and 11; the smell of olive oil (mixed with sweat) is also specifically praised at Xen. *Symp.* 2.3-4. On the emphasis in classical texts on the colour and consistency of male flesh, see Osborne 2011, 32-7 and 41; cf. also Hymes 2013, 192-4, who discusses the use of the term εὐσαρκός, 'well-fleshed', in a variety of authors (in Aristophanes this term occurs in fr. 728). On the positive connotations of radiance and its association with youth, see D'Angour 2011, 141-8.

As far as other passages are concerned, it is interesting to see a number of adjectives used of Aristophanic males that we have also met in the context of female beauty. In *Birds*, for example, Euelpides fanatsizes about making a pass at a boy who is *ώραίος* (138), ‘youthful’, ‘blooming’, and in the *Ecclesiazusae* we find a number of words used of men and women alike, such as *καλός*, ‘beautiful’, and *νεός*, ‘young’, on the positive side and *αίσχρός*, ‘ugly’, *φαῦλος*, ‘plain’, and *σιμός*, ‘flat-nosed’ on the negative⁴⁶.

Just how far does this list of adjectives which can apply to either sex extend? An instructive passage to consider in this regard is the Agathon scene in *Thesmophoriazusae*, where the white-haired Euripides is attempting to persuade the youthful, cross-dressing tragedian to attend the all-female festival of the Thesmophoria on his behalf disguised as woman. Remarking on the effeminate Agathon’s appearance, Euripides says (191-2):

σὺ δ’ εὐπρόσωπος, λευκός, ἐξυρημένος,
γυναικόφωνος, ἀπαλός, εὐπρεπής ιδεῖν.

... you’re fresh-faced, fair-complexioned, clean-shaven, you’ve a woman’s voice, soft cheeks, attractive looks ...

To be sure, Agathon’s female voice (*γυναικόφωνος*) and shaved cheeks (*ἐξυρημένος*) are hardly manly attributes, but what is interesting to note is that all the other adjectives found here seem to find use elsewhere of (younger) males in a largely positive light. Indeed, *εὐπρόσωπος*, ‘fresh-faced’, is used in the plays of both sexes⁴⁷, whereas the less common *εὐπρεπής*, ‘good-looking’ is used to describe ‘good-looking young men’, *εὐπρεπέσιν* ... *μειρακίους* at *Ecclesiazusae* 701. Perhaps more surprising is that *ἀπαλός* is elsewhere used positively of a man – and a strapping one at that: one of the sturdy and tall fellows (*ἄνδρες μεγάλοι καὶ τετραπήχεις*) who meet Philocleon at the court railings (*Wasps* 552-8). This man has a ‘soft hand’ (*χεῖρ’ ἀπαλήν*, 554) which, together with the man’s height, probably marks him out as aristocratic rather than as effeminate per se⁴⁸.

46 — In *Ecclesiazusae*, *καλός* is used of men at 626, 627 and 629, and of women at 730 and 1080; *νεός* of men at 1015, and of women at 900 and 938 (cf. *μείραξ*, 695, and *μειρακίον*, 702); *αίσχρός* of men at 626 and 705, and of women at 618, 619 and 1078; *φαῦλος* of men at 627, 629 and 702, and of women at 617; *σιμός* of men at 705 and of women at 617 (cf. *ἀνάσιμος*, ‘with turned up nose’, which describes an imaginary, unattractive woman at 940). Shortness is envisaged as another unattractive feature in men: *Ec.* 629.

47 — *Pax* 617 of a woman; *Pl.* 976 of a young man.

48 — Sommerstein 1983, ad loc. 552-3 comments on the link between ‘high stature and ... high status’.

λευκός is more intriguing still. As we have seen, this adjective is used approvingly in the context of female looks, but can evidently have negative associations in the male realm: at *Frogs* 1092, for example, an unfit man is described as λευκός and πίων, ‘pale and fat’⁴⁹ – the opposite to the gym-fit ideal lauded by *Better Argument*. Likewise, the pallor of the inhabitants of the Thinkery in *Clouds* certainly qualifies as a negative characteristic, associated as it is with sickliness and a life (mis)spent indoors⁵⁰. Yet there are suggestions elsewhere that pallor was not always a negative quality for males. At *Ecclesiazusae* 427-8 ‘a certain good-looking, pale young man’, εὐπρεπῆς νεανίας λευκός τις, is a phrase used by Chremylus’ neighbour to describe the disguised Praxagora whom he has seen speaking at the Assembly. Of course, Praxagora is a feminine male if there ever was one, but the fact that a ‘pale’ (λευκός) male can be described as ‘good-looking’ (εὐπρεπῆς) is nevertheless suggestive, as is the association of pallor with youth (i.e. the fact that Praxagora is characterized as a νεανίας, ‘young man’). More importantly, in a fragment from Cratinus’ *Wine-Flask*, we encounter a character (perhaps the supposedly bibulous ‘Cratinus’ himself) eyeing up some Mendaeian wine, which he personifies as a pubescent boy. The whole fragment runs as follows (fr. 195):

νῦν δ’ ἦν ἴδη Μενδαῖον ἠβῶντ’ ἀρτίως
οἰνίσκον, ἔπεται κάκολουθεῖ καὶ λέγει,
‘οἴμι’ ὡς ἀπαλὸς καὶ λευκός. ἄρ’ οἶσει τρία’.

But now if he sees a little bit of Mendaeian wine just come to adolescence, he follows after it and says, ‘Oh my, how soft and fair! Will it handle three?’⁵¹.

The suggestion here seems to be that softness and pallor could be seen as attractive qualities when found in an adolescent youth – an alternative aesthetic to the gym-fit and non-‘pale’ look extolled by *Better Argument* (*Clouds* 1012 and 1016), to be sure, and one which Hymes calls ‘effemi-

49 — At *Pl.* 559-60 (unattractive) rich men are described as ‘gouty’ (ποδαγρῶντες), ‘pot-bellied’ (γαστρῶδεις), ‘thick-calved’ (παχύκνημοί) and ‘obscenely fat’ (πίονες ... ἀσελγῶς). In *Ar.* fr. 728 we find men referred to as πολύσαρκος, ‘very fleshy’, and σάρκινον, ‘as fleshy as they come’. Cf. Socrates’ condemnation of Epigenes for being out-of-shape at *Xen. Mem.* 3.12.1 and the contrast between the pale and flabby Persian soldiers and the tanned and fit Greeks at *Xen. Ages.* 1.28. For discussion of the latter passage, see Bonfante 1989, 555.

50 — *Nu.* 103, 185-6, 718 and 1112.

51 — Henderson 2007, ad loc., comments that ‘[t]he descriptive adjectives fit both wine and attractive young boys’. The reference to ‘three’ is obscure: in the context of the wine, the proportion of wine to the water with which it will be mixed is probably implied; in the context of a boy, perhaps three lovers?

nate male beauty'⁵². Notwithstanding the fact that Agathon has to shave to achieve his smooth cheeks, then, perhaps what we have in the brief description of the poet in *Thesmophoriazusae* is an ideal of beauty appropriate to a boy or youth – albeit a look which can at the same time be cast as womanish and, as befits the humour of the play, utterly inappropriate for Agathon to emulate as a grown man.

In addition to Agathon's smooth cheeks and pretty face, we have already seen a number of physical features of boys and youths singled out for praise by Better Argument: namely a big chest, shoulders, buttocks, and a small penis. This interest in male genitalia is echoed elsewhere in Aristophanes, too. At *Birds* 137-42, for example, there is talk of fingering a boy's balls in a passage that shares the element of fantasy with some of the (male-on-female heterosexual) passages discussed earlier⁵³. When Tereus asks him what kind of city he would like to live in, Euelpides replies:

ὅπου ξυναντῶν μοι ταδί τις μέμψεται
ὥσπερ ἀδικηθεὶς παιδὸς ὠραίου πατήρ.
“καλῶς γέ μου τὸν υἱόν, ὡ στυλβωνίδη,
εὐρῶν ἀπίοντ' ἀπὸ γυμνασίου λελουμένον
οὐκ ἔκυσας, οὐ προσεῖπας, οὐ προσηγάγου,
οὐκ ὠρχιπέδισας, ὧν ἐμοὶ πατρικὸς φίλος”.

A place where the father of a blooming boy would meet me and complain to me like this, as if I'd done him wrong: 'A fine thing you did to my son, old sparkler! You met him coming away from the gymnasium after bathing, and you didn't kiss him, you didn't greet him, and you didn't draw him close, you didn't finger his balls – and you an old family friend of mine!'

In addition to this 'blooming' (ὠραῖος) boy, there is mention of a 'good-bollocked boy' at *Knights* 1385 (if this is how we are to understand the adjective ἐνόρχης)⁵⁴, and in *Wasps* Philocleon explains that one of the benefits of jury service is that one gets to look at boys' 'private parts' (αἰδοῖα) when they're being examined for registration (*Wasps* 578). A more protracted eulogy of male genitalia comes once again from Better Argument, who explains the modest ways in which boys used to act at the gymnastic trainer's (*Clouds* 973-78; 981-3).

52 — See Hymes 2013, 72-9.

53 — A rare textual correspondence, perhaps, to Beazley's 'up and down' position commonly adopted in same-sex courtship scenes on vases, where the *erastes* reaches for the *eromenos*' genitalia with one hand (and the chin with the other): Beazley 1947, 219.

54 — A rare example of a young boy appearing onstage who is expressly spoken of as a potential sexual partner. Instructively, like the mute, nude female figures, he does not speak. Unfortunately we gain no insight into how he might have been costumed or masked to signal his attractiveness.

[ἐν παιδοτρίβου δὲ] καθίζοντας τὸν μηρὸν ἔδει προβαλέσθαι
 τοὺς παῖδας, ὅπως τοῖς ἔξωθεν μηδὲν δείξειαν ἀπνήδες·
 εἴτ' αὖ πάλιν αὐθις ἀνισταμένους συμφήσαι, καὶ προνοεῖσθαι
 εἶδωλον τοῖσιν ἐρασταῖσιν τῆς ἥβης μὴ καταλείπειν.
 ἠλείψατο δ' ἂν τοῦμφαλοῦ οὐδεὶς παῖς ὑπένερθεν τότε ἂν, ὥστε
 τοῖς αἰδοίοισι δρόσος καὶ χνοὺς ὡσπερ μήλοισιν ἐπήνθει·

...
 οὐδ' ἀνελέσθαι δειπνοῦντ' ἐξῆν κεφάλαιον τῆς ῥαφανίδος,
 οὐδ' ἄνηθον τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀρπάζειν οὐδὲ σέλινον,
 οὐδ' ὄσοφαγεῖν, οὐδὲ κιχλίζειν, οὐδ' ἴσχειν τῷ πόδι ἑναλλάξ.

... the boys, when they sat down, had to cover themselves with their thighs, so as not to expose to the onlookers anything that was – cruel; and then, when they stood up again, they had to smooth the sand down, and take care not to leave behind for their lovers the impress of their manhood. In those days, too, no boy would anoint himself below the navel, and so there was a coat of dewy down like on quinces⁵⁵... Nor was he allowed when dining to pick up a head of the radish, nor to snatch his elders' dill or celery, nor to eat dainties, nor to giggle, nor to have his legs crossed⁵⁶.

Not only does this passage convey the attraction of boys' balls and penises but also actions which men find sexually alluring. The boys' handling of phallic objects – radishes, dill and celery – and the eating of dainties is reminiscent of the erotic handling of an egg and an apple described at *Lysistrata* 856-7. Evidently playing with the right food in the right way is a turn-on – regardless of whether this is done by boys or by women. Giggling is also, perhaps, to be considered flirtatious⁵⁷.

The bulk of comments about male beauty in Aristophanes are to be found in the mouths of men rather than women⁵⁸. The most opinionated women we find when it comes to men's looks are the old hags in *Ecclesiazusae*, who focus on men's youth as a positive attribute (e.g. 1008 and 1015), whereas the Young Girl in the same play mentions the appeal

55 — As Sommerstein (1982, ad loc. 977) states, the reference to δρόσος καὶ χνοὺς ('dew and down') 'has been variously interpreted' and he proposes that Henderson's suggestion (1991, 145 n.194), that 'early pubic hair bedewed with sweat' is meant, is 'the least unsatisfactory explanation'. Cf. e.g. Dover 1968, ad loc., who posits that the image evoked is the contrast between matt surface of penis and its dewy head, moist with Cowper's secretion (i.e. pre-cum): 'the same kind of contrast as is obtained by taking a small bite out of a peach'.

56 — Dover comments (1968, ad loc. 983): 'presumably this was too relaxed and confident a posture in the presence of one's elders'.

57 — Giggling is evidently considered flirtatious behaviour in Strato of Sardis, P.A. 12.205, where the giggler is a boy of 'not more than twelve years' in age.

58 — This is perhaps surprising, given the comic stereotype of younger, married women as libidinous.

of her lover's locks (βοτρήχων, 955)⁵⁹. The Old Woman in *Wealth*, whose toy-boy abandons her, says that he is 'handsome' (καλός) and 'good-looking' (εὐπρόσωπος, 976). In a different vein, in *Thesmophoriazusae* Critylla exclaims that the Inlaw has a 'nice-coloured' penis (εὐχρωον, 644).

Conclusions

There are perhaps few surprises as to what sex appeal comprises in Aristophanes. The ideal woman is 'blooming' or 'youthful' (ὠραῖος, ὠρικός) with a good complexion and soft skin; she has pert breasts and is slender, with firm flesh and well-tended pubic hair⁶⁰. Whilst citizen wives can use clothes, make-up and scent to devastating effect, the real objects of fantasy in the plays are ever-willing and sexually compliant women – so often conceived of as working girls – who neither charge a fee nor answer back. There are fewer indications of what passes for an ideal boy, but in addition to youth, a physically fit body developed by exercise, gleaming skin, and a small penis are all characteristics which attract praise. While paleness and softness are often characterized negatively in men, there is nevertheless evidence of these qualities occasionally attracting praise when possessed by males who are youthful, aristocratic and/or womanish. And perhaps we can also detect a hint of tension in Aristophanes' plays between the ideal of the modest youth (the kind that a citizen man might want his own son to be) and the flirtatious and sexually available youth of fantasy (the kind that a citizen man might want someone else's son to be).

Some further points are worth stressing. The first of these is the overlap between many of the terms used to describe attractiveness in both sexes: adjectives like καλός, εὐπρεπής and εὐπρόσωπος can be used of either sex in a positive light. The 'womanish male' aesthetic also leads to some striking correspondences between the physical descriptions of males and females, such as the seemingly positive way in which not just a girl's flesh, but also a strapping youth's hand may be described as 'soft' (at *Wasps* 554)⁶¹. The similarity between male and female flirtation (e.g. by eating

59 — Elsewhere, long hair on men can be a sign of aristocratic or anti-democratic leanings, e.g. *Eq.* 580, *Nu.* 14, *Vesp.* 463-70, *Lys.* 561, and can hold (other) negative connotations, e.g. *Nu.* 332.

60 — Cf. Llewellyn-Jones 2002b, 177, on the idealization of the female form in vase-painting, who comments that '[w]omen in Attic art ... are well-groomed, exquisitely dressed, perfect and desirable beings with slim figures, full breasts, pale skins, languid gestures, and straight noses'.

61 — I am hardly the first to observe that traditionally feminine attributes are praised in notionally attractive Athenian youths, a tendency which, Hawley suggests, grows in the classical era (1998, 50) when 'bodily attractiveness seems to have shifted to become a characteristic of the feminine gender or of boys, whose beautiful characteristics are often suspiciously feminine (e.g. smooth skin)'. This said, it is easy enough to find examples of boys praised for feminine attributes in sixth- and early fifth-century lyric poetry, too, such as a boy's 'maidenish glance' (Anacreon 360, παρθένον βλέπυ) or 'smooth cheek' (Theognis 1327-34, λείαν γένυ).

phallic shaped foods: *Clouds* 981-3 and *Lysistrata* 856-7) and the comparison of both breasts and testicles to quinces (*Acharnians* 1199; *Clouds* 997) provide further interesting points of overlap between the sexes.

There are, of course, notable differences, too, between male and female qualities singled out for praise. A youth might gain praise for frequenting the gymnasium, for example, whereas there was, of course, no such expectation for Athenian women to do so (cf. *Lysistrata* 78-82, where Lampito is physically fit, however, as per the stereotype for Spartan women). Interestingly, Aristophanes is fairly typical of Greek authors in that he tends to tell us precious little about the facial features of individuals: eye-colour, eye-shape, mouth-shape are seemingly never mentioned⁶². In the plays, attention is more often directed towards body parts: women's breasts in particular, but also male and female productive organs. Unlike the unisex adjectives used to describe both men and women, then, the focus on these anatomical features serves to draw the clearest of distinctions between the sexes. The bottom probably deserves a case study all of its own: while the hind quarters of women are occasionally mentioned in a positive light, male bottoms routinely have a negative association, namely with sexual passivity⁶³.

One important quality that is praised in both males and females is youth. Again, no surprises here, especially in the case of boys whose brief window of optimum attractiveness has been much discussed (i.e. during their pubescence, but before facial and body hair begins to grow in earnest)⁶⁴. Yet the point is nevertheless worth making that boys and girls are essentially presented as being at their most attractive at the same stage of life. Breasts which are firm like apples, quinces or olives; pubic hair which is neat; skin which is soft: these are attributes at least as likely to be possessed by a pubescent girl as a full-grown woman – indeed, probably more so⁶⁵. Do we know enough about the age of puberty in ancient

62 — The 'beauty contest' between Critobulus and Socrates at Xen. *Symp.* 5 allows a rare insight into the attractiveness and ugliness of various facial features for classical Athenians. Unlike his handsome opponent, Socrates has bulging eyes, a snub (rather than a straight and high-bridged) nose, and a big mouth with fleshy lips. See also Hymes 2013, 139-46.

63 — See n.13 above.

64 — See Lear and Cantarella 2008, 4-6, for a useful, succinct discussion the typical age range of *eromenoi*: their conclusions essentially chime with the much quoted poem by Strato of Sardis (P.A. 12.4), who gives the ages of 12-16 as the period during which a boy both grows increasingly attractive and is fit to be pursued by a mortal man. Davidson 2008, 68-98, suggests that puberty took place far later in the classical world than today, but his (controversial) reassessment of the ages at which males were at their most attractive still relies on the notion of the arrival of facial and body hair as marking a terminus.

65 — The fact that girls have only recently attained womanhood seems to add to their appeal in Pherecrates fr. 113.29; similarly in the case of boys in Cratinus fr. 195. Cf. Ar. fr. 599, where girls whose breasts are only just developing are described as 'just about ready to fly off to men' and n.18 above.

Greece to infer that the age at which Athenian girls were married (perhaps fourteen to eighteen) roughly coincided, then, with a time of life at which they were considered to be at their physical peak⁶⁶? If so, the sexualized teen – the younger partner who attracts an older lover – might usefully be seen as a feature of classical Athenian culture in general rather than as a specific feature of pederastic relationships, and the parallels between male and female sexiness become all the more resonant.

There remain two further points to note. The first concerns the gendered perspective on beauty that Aristophanic drama offers us. Despite the presence in a number of plays of female characters, beauty and sex appeal are presented almost exclusively from a male viewpoint. Females talk about male looks only rarely, and those who do make comments are generally older women, such as the old hags of *Ecclesiazusae* or the woman in *Wealth* who has been abandoned by her younger lover⁶⁷.

Secondly, since the vast bulk of comments that men in Aristophanes' plays make about beauty and sexiness concern females rather than males, this survey usefully bears out Dover's comment that 'comedy is fundamentally heterosexual'⁶⁸. But this 'heterosexual' bias (for want of a better word) is certainly not shared by all classical authors and is therefore an interesting phenomenon to try to account for. To what extent might Aristophanic comedy, by focusing on women as objects of sexual desire, simply be reflecting a social reality, i.e. that men in the city more usually pursued sexual relations with women than boys? The fact that female prostitutes were both numerous in the city and far outnumbered their male counterparts could, after all, plausibly be used to support the notion of a more rather than less heterosexually-orientated culture of sexual activity in Aristophanes' Athens⁶⁹. Related to this point are debates about popular perceptions of pederasty in classical Athens – an institution which is more characteristic of the elite than the masses. Indeed, Hubbard has even argued (not uncontroversially) that pederasty 'was probably practiced by only a minority' of the upper classes and that 'any practitioner, whether man or boy, was suspect in the eyes of the masses'⁷⁰.

66 — Most scholars plump for 14 as the standard age of marriage for girls in classical Athens, though some allow more leeway, e.g. Lacey 1968, 117, who suggests that girls were married 'not later than 16' with a tendency 'to be earlier than this rather than later', and Blundell 1995, 119, who suggests that 'girls were probably married for the first time between fourteen and eighteen' (Blundell 1995, 119). The classic study of female puberty in antiquity remains Amundsen and Diers 1969.

67 — This outspokenness concerning the physical appearance of the opposite sex chimes with the 'forthrightness of speech' which Henderson identifies as a characteristic of older women in comedy (Henderson 1987b, 120).

68 — Dover 1978, 148.

69 — For an overview of prostitution in classical Athens, see Robson 2013a, 67-89.

70 — Hubbard 1998, 71; see esp. Lear, forthcoming, for discussion. This is not to say that pederasty is to be equated with same-sex relationships, however: see e.g. Robson 2013a, 65-6.

Significant, too, no doubt, are the generic conventions of Old Comedy. The nexus of *peace*, countryside, food, wine and sex which features so strongly as a positive motif in Aristophanes is linked to ideas of fertility and fecundity – and this in turn provides a heterosexual (i.e. reproductive) momentum to the plays⁷¹. Indeed, the resolutions of Aristophanes' comedies not infrequently involve marriage (*Peace*, *Birds*) and/or the promise of heterosexual sex, either marital (*Lysistrata*) or extra-marital (*Acharnians*)⁷². This positive leitmotif of heterosexuality also contrasts with the negative use of the motif of penetration and sexual passivity so often associated with politicians and other public figures in the plays' personal attacks. Thematically, then, heterosexual relations signal celebration in Aristophanic comedy, whilst same-sex relations generate a more complex set of associations.

Lastly, it should also be said that while a study like this is useful for mapping broad tendencies in the realm of sexual attraction and notions of beauty, there are always exceptions to the general rules. Counter-cultural tastes no doubt existed in Classical Athens just as they do in the modern world. Indeed, we get occasional tantalizing glimpses in Old Comedy of the possibility that some men were interested in older women, for example, and also in pre-pubescent girls (e.g. frs 148 and 599)⁷³. The precise nature of sexual preferences will inevitably have differed from individual to individual and we can hardly expect Old Comedy to capture the full range of sexual proclivities in the city of Athens. To be sure, the complete story of sex appeal in classical Athens is yet to be told, but as I hope to have shown, a study of Aristophanes' plays affords us an important view of how this key author received and represented notions of beauty and sexiness to a broad audience of his fellow Athenians.

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71 — For a brief discussion of this nexus, see Robson 2009, 171-2.

72 — See further Dover 1978, 149-50.

73 — These age-types are mentioned elsewhere in comedy in a sexual context, too: Xenarchus fr. 4 lists older women as one of the varieties of prostitutes of different ages and body-types from which men are able to choose in a brothel, while Metagenes fr. 4 alludes to prostitute flute-girls who are 'just getting their downy hair'.

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