

JAMES ROBSON : **Beauty and Sex Appeal in Aristophanes**

This article undertakes a survey of the plays of Aristophanes in order to reveal what they tell us about concepts of attractiveness and body image. Old Comedy presents us with a view of beauty from a largely male perspective, and, instructively, the vast majority of comments that male characters make concern the appearance of females rather than boys or youths. Women are regularly discussed in comedy in terms of their body parts, e.g. and especially their breasts, and the ideal woman is, perhaps predictably, youthful. Further characteristics in women such as pale, smooth skin and well-tended pubic hair also attract positive comments. Male beauty is perhaps more complex. One ideal is certainly that of the broad-shouldered, tanned youth with gleaming skin and a small penis who exercises in the gymnasium. But there is also evidence of pale-skinned, effeminate youths being viewed in a positive light. In addition to looks, clothing and scent can add to women's erotic appeal, and actions such as playing with phallic-shaped food are seen as flirtatious in both sexes. This article explores overlaps in the ways in which male and female beauty is described and suggests that these correspondences are partly explicable through the similar ages at which boys and girls are considered to be at their peak. The discussion also reveals the almost complete lack of attention paid to facial features – both in Aristophanes and classical Greek literature as a whole.

Mots-clés :

Sex – sexuality – beauty – body – Old Comedy – youth – flirtation – clothing – prostitutes – pederasty