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The Athenian Male Gayze: Desire and Spectatorship in Ancient Greek Tragedy

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This article argues that an understanding of male same-sex practices in ancient Greece point towards a queer desirous spectatorship – a male 'gayze'. Ancient tragic scholarship has often omitted discussion of male same-sex practices, despite using marriage and heterosexual social norms to elucidate meaning in text and performance. This article seeks to redress the exclusion of queer histories and perspectives from understanding tragedy in its social context. The article outlines evidence of male same-sex practices, including pederasty; relates ancient understandings of desire to the gaze; and evidences how and where young men, like those who danced in the tragic chorus, were courted and coveted. The article concludes with a case study of the chorus of young huntsmen from Euripides' Hippolytus*, read through the lens of a desirous gayze.*

Introduction

Ancient Greece was a site where male same-sex practices were common, acknowledged aspects of life. And yet male same-sex practices in ancient Greece have been absent from much scholarly consideration of Greek tragedy in its historic performance context. This is particularly true within scholarship targeted towards undergraduate student readerships. Similar to how scholars commonly look to heterosexual practices to elucidate performance histories, this article presumes an ancient audience that participated in male same-sex practices and examines how this informed a desirous spectatorship.

To get there, I first provide an overview of what is known about male same-sex practice in ancient Athens, particularly the cultural institution of pederasty, for which there is the most evidence owing to its formal structure. I then provide a survey of ancient Greek tragic scholarship aimed at students to demonstrate that male same-sex practice in Athens is either mostly or entirely absent from the consideration of tragedy in its social context. I then develop an argument for how this presumed queer spectatorship watched performance through the lens of an erotic, desirous male 'gayze' directed at the dancing young, male bodies of the tragic chorus. I conclude with a brief analysis of the chorus of huntsmen in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, to demonstrate how this gayze might better help us understand meaning in a play about desire and what is sexually attainable.

Throughout I will be using the cumbersome phraseology 'male same-sex practice' to differentiate it from contemporary understandings of homosexuality, which are themselves complex. 'Male same-sex practice' refers to the physical practices around male + male sex and desire, whereas 'homosexuality' contains a strong sense of

contemporary identity related to these practices. In ancient Athens there is no sense of sex practices relating to an identity in this way, although there are other labels based upon sex practices (e.g. 'prostitute', 'promiscuous', 'overly feminine'). The early authority on male same-sex practice, Kenneth Dover's 1978 book *Greek Homosexuality*, explains that Greeks 'assumed that virtually everyone responds at different times both to [what we would call] homosexual and to heterosexual stimuli'.[1] As such, male same-sex desire and practice do not map onto a social identity in the way that 'homosexuality' does.

Because it was tacitly acknowledged that a man would be attracted to both men and women, there was no need for categories or schema to differentiate. Therefore, another reason why I do not use 'homosexuality' is that it might indicate a binary understanding of sex practices, or even placement upon a spectrum. An Athenian male was likely interested in male + male and male + female sex. At the same time, I acknowledge David L. Halperin's point that

> we cannot simply escape from the conceptual tyranny of homosexuality by some feat of scholarly rigour – by an insistent methodological suspension of modern categories, by an austerely historicist determination to identify and bracket our own ideological presuppositions so as to describe earlier phenomena in all their irreducible cultural specificity and time-bound purity.[2]

As 'male same-sex practice' highlights a difference between the notions of contemporary male same-sex practice, including homosexuality, it is also still built upon today's systems of acknowledging a sexual spectrum as it relates to gender and sex.

This places my project within a queer-studies debate of how to engage with queer pasts; either teleologically, as Valerie Traub has advocated, beginning with Michel Foucault and then Halperin,[3] or through unhistorics – the queering of history – which, Madhavi Menon explains, includes 'queering dominant paradigms of methodology'.[4] I am not reading ancient Greek male same-sex practices as queer, but supporting the view that they were normative in their time.[5] I am pointing out that their normativity is not normative today, even though much of the historicizing of tragedy has been through a contemporary normative lens. I do not see an investigation of queer histories as leading up to today's understanding of sexualities, nor do I see our understandings today as the end of said inquiry.

Accordingly, my title 'a male g*ayze*' is intentionally anachronistic. It is a project of erotohistoriography, defined by Elizabeth Freeman in *Time Binds* as that which 'does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid'.[6] I use 'male g*ayze*' as frame for considering the notion of the desirous gaze in a non-heteronormative way and for reading performance history in a way that presumes a queer, desirous spectatorship. As Jill Dolan has challenged the assumption of the contemporary spectator as a white, heterosexual, male, middle-class citizen in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, I challenge the assumption of the Athenian spectator as heterosexual at all.[7] Simultaneously, as I illuminate how the desirous male gaze of ancient Greece made meaning in their world, I too am g*ayz*ing backwards at them. As I try to make meaning of a society

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with no concept of 'homosexuality' as such, I am bringing with me my contemporary understandings of male same-sex desire and practices. For example, contrary to how some classicists have written about male same-sex practice in ancient Greece, this article takes as a starting point that men were interested in, and sought out, pleasurable sex with other men, whether they were the penetrating or penetrated partner. To think otherwise, in my opinion, is to traffic in a homophobic kind of bottom-shaming and a prudish, pearl-clutching aversion to anal pleasure.

The aim of this article is to redress the omissions and misrepresentations of male same-sex practice from its place in understanding tragedy in its social context. More specifically, it is my argument that if one considers the idealizing of young male bodies in Athens, it becomes clear how the desirous gaze of the male spectator informs their reading of the Athenian chorus men dancing in the orchestra.

Ancient Athenian male same-sex relations

The most pervasive cultural male same-sex relation in ancient Athens was pederasty, a formal, public relationship between an older lover (*erastes*) and younger lover (*eromenos*). I provide a history of the cultural practice of pederasty, to bring it into conversation later on with theatre history, from which it has been largely absent (see the section 'Tragic scholarship: the absence of male same-sex practice'). For the purpose of my g*ayze* backwards in time, I will translate the younger lover, *eromenos*, and the age class of these young men, *ephebes*, as twink (thanks to the suggestion of my colleague, scholar of Greek theatre and of queer theory David Bullen). 'Twink' is not included in *Merriam Webster's Dictionary*, and while presenting on this topic at conferences, I have been surprised how many times I have been asked what a 'twink' is. According to Wikipedia, '"twink" is gay slang for a gay man who is usually (but not always) in his late teens to twenties whose traits may include a slim to average physique, a youthful appearance that may belie an older age, having little or no body hair, flamboyancy, and general physical attractiveness'.[8] The older lover, *erastes*, I translate as 'daddy'. These translations aim to underscore the sexual roles of these men and to consistently position the ancient twinks as sexualized persons.

James Davidson's *The Greeks and Greek Love* does a good job of explaining the touchy topic of age in relation to Greek pederasty.[9] Davidson puts the age of the twink neatly within what my society today deems a legally acceptable age range for developing a sexual relationship with adults (eighteen to twenty), but Davidson admits that this is an approximation.[10] No evidence squares the age of ancient twinks comfortably against today's spectrum of sexual taboo. In fact, 'pederasty', as a term, brings up many reactions based on contemporary social and sexual norms. For example 'modern pederasty' is defined by Kadji Amin in his book *Disturbing Attachments: Genet, Modern Pederasty, and Queer Futurity* as 'an age-structured coupling between either adult men, boys of different ages, or an adult man and a youth'.[11] Amin evidences how historic pederasty was used by Jean Genet to justify abuses of power or disguise what he terms 'unideal' queer sex practices, while acknowledging that modern pederasty is different from ancient Greek pederasty.[12]

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Even today, age and adulthood do not share a universal connection, as different countries or states will have different age limits for driving, drinking alcohol, having sex or going to war; for example, in the UK the legal minimum age for marriage was increased to eighteen just recently, in 2023. Queer theorist Jack Halberstam has positioned the concept of youth-into-adulthood as a heteronormative perspective in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*.[13] This shows that our contemporary view of age, adulthood and sex is complex, so the g*ayze* backwards at ancient male same-sex practices comes with each of our own particular views on the topic.

Further understanding of age in ancient pederasty comes from artistic convention, where twinks are depicted with an adult body but no beard, whereas adults are depicted with a full beard. This is precisely how younger lovers are presented in artwork depicting pederasty. It can be inferred that twinks as an age class have developing or developed physiques but are not yet able to grow a full beard (the signifier of adulthood). I discuss this in greater detail below, but it is worth noting that this is also how tragic chorus members are artistically depicted, for example on the Pronomos vase. Actors are depicted with full beards and as adults. Both the young pederastic lovers and the chorus boys are depicted as twinks. Twinks were seen as the most beautiful and thereby most desired age class. Davidson and Dover refer to artistic images of twinks as the pin-ups of their time.[14] They were looked at desirously.

The pederastic relationship had many social rules. Being of the appropriate age class is certainly one of them, as evidenced by Aeschines' legal claims in *Against Timarchus*, where he accuses Timarchus of being unfit for public service. Developing a pederastic relationship with a boy (i.e. too young to be a twink) is illegal. Because the quantity of potential daddies vastly outnumbered that of twinks, the twinks were in high demand and thereby had a degree of control over how the relationship developed. And yet a twink must not be too eager to develop the relationship, must not accept any extravagant gift that could be seen as a bribe, and while they may entertain for a while several (or many) daddies courting them, they could only develop a formal relationship with one.

Daddies would agonize over the correct kind of gift to offer a twink. They would degrade themselves by sleeping in doorways by their beloved's home. While a daddy must be diligent in pursuit, he must also remain respectful of the twink. Courtship was public and daddies would openly declare their love for a twink, follow them around, write them elaborate love songs and make graffiti for them – 'so and so is beautiful' being the most common.[15] There are eighty surviving vases that say 'Leagros in Beautiful'[16] – so he must have made quite an impression. Once the formal partnership was formed, the daddy is socially obliged to remain that twink's continued benefactor, and each man's actions, good or bad, reflect upon the other.[17]

Dover spends much of *Greek Homosexuality* examining Aeschines' case *Against Timarchus* and the speech points to some useful social norms. Timarchus is brought up on charges because it is illegal for an Athenian to prostitute himself and then act like a citizen. That is the only law about male same-sex prostitution in Athens. There is no law that you cannot prostitute yourself if you are a foreigner or a slave. There is

no law that you cannot prostitute yourself if you are an Athenian man. There is only a law that it is illegal to act as a citizen (e.g. serve on a jury, vote at assembly) if you are an Athenian who has prostituted yourself.[18] While prosecuting Timarchus for allegedly breaking this law, Aeschines does not say it is wrong to have same-sex desire or participate in pederasty. On the contrary, he admits that he has been the devotee of twinks, has composed poetry to them, and even got into a brawl over one. Pederastic relationships were common and only censured if conducted in the wrong way.[19] Furthermore, there is no punishment for breaking the coded formalities of pederasty.[20] This starts to paint a picture of how commonplace and accepted most male same-sex practices were at the time.

The *Symposium* of Plato, in which several characters wax philosophical on love, provides interesting evidence about pederasty. Phaedrus' speech claims that 'the greatest benefit, to my mind, that a young man can come by in his youth is a virtuous [daddy], and a virtuous [twink] is just as good for a [daddy] as well'.[21] Phaedrus believes that having a lover causes both parties to behave better, because they do not want to bring shame to each other.[22] Pausanias' speech argues that there are two kinds of love: the love of the body and the love of the mind, and that the latter can only ever be in same-sex couples.[23] In this way, Pausanias explains that pederastic relationships are bad only if built on desire for the body and not the mind as well. He believes the social rules of the chase between daddy and twink are what allows proper love to take hold.[24] This dialogue demonstrates that the desire for same-sex partners was beyond physical intimacy alone.

In *Sex and Sexuality in Classical Athens* James Robson states that 'the pederastic pursuit of boys required leisure time for its realization, money for the purchase of gifts, and no doubt status if a man was to win a noble [twink] round', but that beyond the pederastic institution 'there was also, generally, widespread recognition and acceptance in classical Athens of [male] same-sex attraction as a fact of life'.[25] It has elsewhere been argued that, because the institution of pederasty was an elite venture, and because there is much more evidence of pederasty than of other male same-sex practices, male + male sex and desire were not part of most men's lived experiences. But based on the tacit understanding that men were attracted to both men and women, this rationale is not convincing. In the same way as we have much more evidence about marriage in Athens than about other sexual practices between men and women, so too do we have much more evidence about the cultural practice of pederasty than about male sex-practices more broadly. Furthermore, there is much more surviving evidence from elite (and thereby literate) citizens generally speaking, so it is understandable that little is left to understand about non-elite male same-sex practices.

In a world with such an intricate male same-sex coupling ritual, it is impossible to believe that male same-sex practices were not happening between twinks, between daddies and between citizens and foreigners or slaves. There is written evidence of male same-sex relationships outside pederasty,[26] and there is pictorial evidence that supports the idea that same-sex practices extended beyond the formalities of pederasty (some of which are very imaginative). But also, as Davidson phrases it, 'let's not be

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too prudish about this'.[27] It is doubtless that male same-sex practices have always been happening, whether it was kept quiet by participants, not documented, or the target of queer erasure by historians. To presume that other male same-sex practices were not happening, because there is not as much documentation about them, is illogical. No one is presuming that male + female sex was not commonly happening outside marriage owing to a lack of documentation. This article acknowledges that same-sex desire and practice have historically been part of people's lived experiences.

The nitty-gritty of the down-and-dirty

Two main examples of prudish or homophobic ancient Greek male same-sex scholarship are the notions that men mostly practised intercrural sex (sex between the thighs) and that only the 'active' (by this historians mean 'penetrating') partner found pleasure from the act. That the penetrated partner would not want to have anal sex, would not derive pleasure from sexual activity and was 'passive' during sex acts demonstrates at best a serious misunderstanding of what good sex is,[28] and at worst a prudish, analphobic, bottom-shaming kind of homophobia.

The myths of exclusively intercrural and funless or passive sex stem from the three common images of pederastic relationship artistically depicted on classical pottery. One is of a gift-giving image, where the daddy and twink face each other and the older male, with arm outstretched, hands over a modest gift, such as a cockerel or leg of mutton. The artistry of this image is interpreted as a courtship scene related to virility, because a hunted animal is gifted. It perhaps has educative overtones, as if to say, I will teach you to excel at hunting. The second is an image where the two nude lovers face each other; the older male has both arms outstretched – one caressing the twink's chin, the other his genitals. The artistry of this image is interpreted on the one hand (literally) as the daddy's emotional care and support for the young man and, on the other hand, as the older lover's sexual desires and perhaps sexual guidance.

The third image is the most sexual in nature. The two men face away from each other; the twink is upright and his gaze is downcast while the daddy is slightly crouched behind him, with erect penis poking out from between the young lover's thighs. The artistry of this image is commonly not interpreted at all; rather, it is taken to be tantamount to photographic evidence of male + male sex: that because the twink has a neutral expression he is motionless during sex and derives no pleasure from the activity and that because the daddy's penis is not inside the twink, they were exclusively having intercrural sex. The second image I described is never interpreted as a literal motion where a daddy would stand holding chin and genitals. Rather, it is always artistically interpreted. That the more sexual image has no such artistic interpretation leads me to argue that the interpreter is presuming that male + male sex and/or anal sex are not pleasurable.

In *Images of Ancient Greek Pederasty* Andrew Lear and Eva Cantarella suggest that intercrual sex was most likely a 'kind of visual euphemism' used by vase painters.[29] As pederasty was a cultural institution, it was important to distinguish it artistically from pornographic images not related to this kind of formal coupling. While pederastic

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pots depict an erect penis between youthful thighs, other pots depict all kinds of male + male sex acts. In Aristophanic comedy, anal sex is often the butt of the joke. Robson asserts that 'anal sex – and not intercrural – was the norm among real-life couples'.[30] It is as if some historians have made the pederastic relationship more complex in an attempt to make what they see an aberrant practice understandable and palatable to an imagined homophobic and analphobic readership.

When researching my case study, Euripides' *Hippolytus*, I read George Devereux's *The Character of the Euripidean Hippolytos: An Ethno-psychoanalytic Study*. Devereux, a practising psychiatrist and academic, claims that Euripides is certainly not 'addicted to homosexuality' and that Hippolytus' downfall comes from his latent homosexuality.[31] No evidence is provided to support this claim. More troubling, in a footnote demonstrating his knowledge of homosexuality, he announces that in his capacity as a psychiatrist he once cured someone of their homosexuality.[32] This was published in 1985. Devereux has also written two deeply homophobic articles on the topic of ancient Greek male same-sex practice, which use similarly offensive language. While scholars today may not pay much heed to Devereux's work, that does not mean that he was not influential on scholars whose work is still respected today, as Davidson has argued,[33] nor that it does not have an impact on students and scholars encountering it today. On a scholarly level, Devereux's work is fundamentally flawed in its logic because heteronormativity is positioned as a default position from which to examine sex and desire. Gay conversion 'therapy' is a form of torture. This footnote in an insouciant admission to the torture of at least two queer people. Encountering this kind of work today could be difficult for a queer student, could provide false verification to closed-minded persons, and contributes to a model of examining the past in anachronistically heteronormative ways.

Tragic scholarship: the absence of male same-sex practice

Scholarship on ancient Greek tragedy, specifically introductory texts examining ancient theatre in its social context, has greatly omitted male same-sex practice from its investigations of tragedy in Athens. Without exception, these very same works examine marriage and male + female relationships and desire as a way of understanding plot, considering how spectators might read performances, gender roles, males playing female roles and so on. These works do so while ignoring any such consideration of male same-sex relationships and practices.

A survey of twenty prominent books in the field of Greek tragedy – some written as introductions to the topic (aimed at students), some compilations of essays (also aimed at students), and some written for advanced scholars – demonstrates the significant omission of queer histories. Eleven of these books have no mention of male same-sex practice, homosexuality or pederasty whatsoever. This includes *Oxford Readings in Greek Tragedy* and the *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, prominent edited collections targeted at students which many libraries own print and electronic copies of. Despite claiming to contextualize ancient tragedy within a social context, these texts do not include male + male desires or practices as a way of understanding Athenian society.

One of the books has one line mentioning the biographical detail that Agathon was in a long-term relationship with Pausanias. Four of the books mention homosexuality once, in one line, simply to describe a plot point: in Euripides' *Ion*, *Cyclops* (a satyr play) and *Chrysippus* (lost), and in Aristophanes' *Knights* (a comedy). None of these plot descriptions includes a contextualization of male same-sex practices in Greek society – sometimes problematically so. For example, in *Greek Tragic Theatre* Rush Rehm writes, 'to Ion, however, the affection of the older man seems like the homosexual advances of a pederast, advances that are forcefully – and humorously – repulsed'.[34] Devoid of an explanation of male same-sex practice in ancient Athens or the cultural institution of pederasty, this reading of the *Ion* implies that pederasty is somehow aberrant – something to be repulsed with force, resulting in humour derived from the fact that anyone would possibly think that kind of interest or affection was acceptable.

Blackwell's *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, comprising thirty-one chapters by as many authors, has no reference to pederasty and one mention of homosexuality: a citation from Plato's *Republic* where Platonic Socrates suggests that the Ionian and Lydian modes of music induce male same-sex practice.[35] This passage from the *Republic* is not couched in historic discourse around male same-sex practice, nor does it suggest that Plato's utopian project in the *Republic* might be approaching the topic from a unique angle. In a similar vein, the seminal edited collection on tragedy in its social context, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context*, contains only one reference to male same-sex practice: a citation from Plato's *Symposium*, in Froma I. Zeitlin's chapter about gender and otherness.[36] This reference too is not contextualized within a discourse around pederasty or male same-sex practices in Athens.

Though written between 1972 and 1978 (and last reprinted in 1990), Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet's 506-page tome (excluding bibliography, appendices and so on) *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* is still a hulking presence on library shelves. None of these pages mentions pederasty and there is one reference to homosexuality, in recounting the myth of Laius, who was prophesied to be killed by his own child. They write, 'Laius' sexual relations with his wife are deviant, in the homosexual manner, to avoid producing children'.[37] Here 'homosexual' is used as a euphemism for anal sex – both homosexuality and anal sex are presented as deviant. Like the work mentioned above, it positions hetero love as a default and male same-sex practice as aberrant.

The exception in this survey is David Wiles's 2000 book *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction*. This work, geared towards students, has a brief overview of pederasty and male same-sex practice,[38] as well as an explanation of a joke from the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, which goes part of the way in relating contemporaneous male same-sex practice to spectatorship – in this case of a comedy.[39] Wiles spends more time examining male + female relationships than male + male ones and a fuller picture of male same-sex practice could have been discussed, but this is still much more on the topic than most give. That said, 'homosexuality' is tagged in the index, once indicating a page where the word 'homosexuality' does not

appear. The only thing that might be related to it is the description of a male-on-male rape.[40] Elsewhere in the book male-on-female rape plots are described;[41] these are not tagged as 'heterosexuality' in the index.

The aim of bringing to light some of these particular cases is not to shame the authors for their omissions. My own previous writings on the topic of ancient Greek tragedy in Athens have also dedicated little to no space to the consideration of male same-sex practice in Athens qua cultural norm. The ways in which male same-sex practice related to tragedy never really occurred to me. This is likely because it has not been part of the conversation or because new work on ancient Greek sexuality has yet to permeate the discipline of theatre studies. The lens of my and other scholarly writing has taken male + female desire as the default position and male + male love as other, despite the accepted understanding of both forms of attraction being the standard in ancient Greece.

In addition to these books on tragedy in Athenian society being largely silent about the topic of male same-sex practice, the scholarship on sexuality in Greece largely omits the topic of tragedy as well. *Greek Homosexuality* foregrounds an examination of the legal speech *Against Timarchus*. *The Greeks and Greek Love* spends much time on epics, poetry, philosophy and constellations, but only sparse references to tragedy. *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* suggests that the public portrayal of love in tragic performance is both 'intriguing' and beyond the scope of the edited collection.[42] Sourcebooks mostly cite comedy in relation to understanding sexuality in Greece, for many sensible reasons, and omit tragedy, even in their introductions. None read the plays through the lens of a queer spectatorship.

Recent works have done more to read tragedy through lenses of queer theory. In *Archive Feelings: A Theory of Greek Tragedy* (2020) Mario Teló employs queer theory to read tragic aesthetics from an anti-cathartic perspective.[43] His collection *Queer Euripides: Re-Readings in Greek Tragedy* (2022), co-edited with Sarah Olsen, includes a range of critical works which investigate finding the queer in classical reception.[44] The most recent collection, *The Routledge Handbook of Classics and Queer Theory*, edited by Ella Haselswerdt, Sara H. Lindheim and Kirk Ormand (2024), outlines both what about Graeco-Roman antiquity can be unpacked as queer in relation to our social norms and what about the past is read as queer because of our relation to it.[45] While some chapters engage with tragedies, they do not read historic performance of ancient Greek tragedy through the lens of a desirous same-sex spectatorship, as I suggest in this article and expand upon below.

I also note that translations of the ancient texts themselves play a large part in how tragedy and its scholarship have been subjected to queer erasure and general prudishness. In *100 Years of Homosexuality*, Halperin evidences that ancient lexicons often define *Greek sex acts with Latin terms*.[46] Furthermore, the Loeb series, presented as literal and authoritative translations for academic study, will sometimes only transliterate words of a sexual nature or wholly omit the passage.[47] Thorough consideration of the impact that prudish translations have had on tragic pedagogic

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history is best left to philologists (i.e. not me). But it is worth noting that in the sourcebook *Greek and Roman Sexualities* Jennifer Larson writes,

> Students often rely on translation freely available via the internet for reasons of cost and convenience, but because of copyright issues, these are likely to be older versions and to reflect the prudish sensibilities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In some cases, sections that contain sexual content are simply omitted from these translations.[48]

Larson goes on to stress the importance for future translations of ancient texts to 'make no attempt to conceal the role of pederasty and other homosexual behaviours in ancient cultures' that has previously been so commonplace.[49]

Spectatorship and the Athenian male g*ayze*

There is a common ancient Greek connection between sight and eros.[50] Barbara Goff writes that 'the eye was for the Greeks the seat of desire, and the gaze was always responsible for the instant of erotic capitulation'.[51] For example, in Thucydides' famous funeral oration, he urges citizens of Athens 'to gaze, day after day, upon the power of the city and become her [daddy]'.[52] Twinks, in their prime, courted by adult suitors, the subjects of poetry, graffiti and the occasional brawl, are also gazed at and watched over by potential daddies. Dover writes that '"following" a boy is recognized as overt erotic behavior in a law cited by Aeschines, which he interprets as permitting the daddy, even encouraging him, to *watch* over the object of his eros in silence from a discreet distance'.[53] Among young men, gazing was also common. The beautiful young Critobulus in Xenophon's *Symposium* says,

> I would rather gaze at Cleinias than at all other beautiful objects in the world. I would rather be blind to all things else than to Cleinias alone. I chafe at both night and sleep because I do not see him. I feel the deepest gratitude to the day and the sun because they reveal Cleinias to me.[54]

The gaze is essential to love and desire, including pederasty and male same-sex desire more broadly.

Where might one go to demonstrate the dutiful worship of their beloved? To watch over him? A popular place is the gymnasium with attached wrestling school (*palaistra*), where the twink hones his physique and, as the name suggests (*gymós* being the Greek for 'naked'), where one can see these young men from toe to tip.[55] The gymnasium is a common locale for pederastic courtship scenes as depicted on red-figure vases. The watching of young men could get a bit rowdy, as Aeschines admits to 'making myself a nuisance in the gymnasium'.[56] In this way, the watching of these young men was not discrete, but rather overt and social.

A sense of the social gazing at young men in Athens comes from Plato's *Charmides*. Set in the wrestling school, Platonic Socrates relates,

> I wanted to know what was happening at the moment in the field of education, and whether there were any [twinks] who had come to stand out from the rest for their

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> intelligence or beauty or both. Critias said: 'I don't think you're going to have to wait long to find out which boys are beautiful, Socrates. This lot coming in now are the advance guard, the admirers of the one who is widely held – at the moment, anyway – to be the most beautiful boy in town.'
>
> I got the impression that everyone else was in love with him, because they became all flustered and agitated when he came in. And he was followed by another crowd of admirers too. Now, although this reaction was hardly surprising among us men, I was watching the boys too, and I noticed that none of them, not even the youngest, was looking elsewhere: they were all gazing at him as if he were a statue.
>
> 'If he can be induced to strip,' [Chaerephon said] 'he has such a fantastic body that you won't even notice his features.' Everyone else expressed their agreement with Chaerephon on this.[57]

In setting the scene for this dialogue, Plato describes the crowd drawn by the beauty of Charmides. He is 'at the moment' the most desired, which hints at the temporality of the twink qua ideal and also at an ever-changing 'it-boy', what has been referred to in today's society as 'Twink Death' on Gay Twitter. The public and social aspects of this admiration include gazing at him and persuading him to strip. This is practised not just to the men but to boys as well, evidencing again that male same-sex desire extended beyond the structures of pederasty.[58]

While it is germane to this dialogue that Charmides is vain and full of himself, the description of his admirers is crafted as a way of proving this point. We can therefore take the description of Charmides' entrance and attendants to be, though perhaps hyperbolic, within the realm of plausible social practice. By the end of the dialogue Charmides is flirtatiously talking of forcing himself onto the older Socrates and commanding him not to resist.[59] Again, this evidence refutes the myth of the passive twink.

The *Lysis* and *Euthydemus* of Plato also involve men shifting their positions to get a better look at their beloved. It is almost as if these descriptions of beautiful twinks are intended to lure the listener into the world of the interlocutors, inviting Plato's audience to conjure Charmides with their mind's eye. In fact, the *Charmides* is believed to be an early Platonic dialogue, likely delivered before he had his Academy and would teach in gymnasiums. As such, one would not have to be too creative in the imagining of the scene or of the fabulous twink.

Charmides basks in the attention he receives. Twinks derived some pleasure from the experience of getting cooed after, being the subject of their would-be daddy's gaze, and perhaps the incidental touching while wrestling with their fellow twinks, slippery with sweat and olive oil.[60] Davidson writes that 'the practice of covering oneself with olive oil in the gymnasium was a symbolic act, making the body shine with brilliance and beauty, "anointed", "olive-smeared", *christos*'.[61] Socrates in Xenophon's symposium says, 'the odour of the olive oil … that is used in the gymnasium is more delightful when you have it on your flesh than perfume is to women'.[62] Davidson explains: 'even the mixture of oil, sweat and dust scraped off beautiful boys with the strigils was considered special, and gymnasia seem to have

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collected and sold it'.[63] *Paidikos gloios*, roughly translated as 'boy gunk', was supposedly an ingredient in beauty treatments and thought to have medicinal values.

There is no evidence of Athenians using it as lube, so any claim that twink-gunk was used for erotic purposes would be my own conjecture. My own, sleazy conjecture. And by 'sleaze', I refer to madison moore's definition of the term in his project on queer nightlife as 'queer ephemeral traces or acts that are not concerned with or invested in respectability politics' and function 'as a kind of purposefully anti-rigorous anti-evidence that calls to questions the archive's claim to "rigour"'.[64] There is no evidence that this twink-gunk was used as lube. But also, like, come on.

So pervasive was the desire for these twinks that their dirt and sweat, their boy-gunk, was a commodity. In fact, so pervasive was the desire for these young men that legislative action was required to keep them safe. In *Against Timarchus*, Aeschines quotes a law which states that it is illegal to begin wrestling training before sunrise or after sunset. This law also applied to choral training, like that of tragic performance, which also took place in the gymnasium.[65] It was physically unsafe for these young men to travel to and from the gymnasium in the dark because they could be sexually assaulted. The chorus performers of tragedies are both twinks and Athenian citizens. If this is the commonplace desire in Athens, how then, does the ga*y*ze of the spectator inform the reading of the dancing chorus men in the theatre, the *teatron*, literally the 'watching place'?

The exceptional chorus of the *Hippolytus*

To consider this question, I provide a reading of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, not as textual analysis, but considering the experience of an ancient spectator ga*y*zing at the dancing twinks. The *Hippolytus* of Euripides begins with Aphrodite setting the scene: we are in Troezen, where the Athenian king Theseus' bastard son, Hippolytus, has sworn off Aphrodite, sex and marriage. Instead Hippolytus devotes himself solely to the virgin goddess of the hunt, Artemis. Aphrodite is not pleased that Hippolytus spurns her in favour of the company of his huntsmen friends. Her prologue outlines the entire plot of revenge which the action of the play reveals: Phaedra's and Hippolytus' deaths, as well as Theseus' complicity in the latter. Before exiting, she introduces the chorus and Hippolytus' entrance thus:

> But now I see Hippolytus coming,
> finished with the toil of the hunt,
> and so I shall leave this place.
> A great throng of his servants treads close at his heels
> and shouts, hymning the praises of the goddess Artemis.
> Clearly he does not know that the gates of the Underworld stand open for him
> and that this day's light is the last he shall ever look upon.[66]

This throng of followers echoes Plato's description of Charmides' entrance to the wrestling school, and could conjure up a familiar kind of spatial entrance akin to the

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attended *ephebe* in the gymnasium. The chorus and Hippolytus enter singing and dancing, as choruses were wont to do. They only have a short ode to Artemis, but remain in the orchestra for fifty-five lines while Hippolytus talks to a servant. At line 108 they all exit upon Hippolytus' command:

> Go, servants, enter the house and prepare the meal.
> After the hunt a full table is a pleasure
> And you must rub down my horses
> So that when I am sated with meat
> I can yoke them to my chariot
> And give them their proper exercise.[67]

They dance off together.

This chorus of young huntsmen in the *Hippolytus* is exceptional in tragedy for two reasons. First, it is one of two different choruses in the tragedy, which is very uncommon.[68] The main chorus of the tragedy enters a few lines later as women from Troezen, and the performers remain in this role throughout the rest of the tragedy. Because of the sparse number of lines between the huntsmen's exit and the women's entrance it is unlikely, though not impossible, that the same performers took both roles. Second, it is the only extant chorus of young servant men (though some translators position them as friends using 'men' instead of 'servant' for *opaedos*: attendant, follower). Most commonly, those in a chorus perform as women, female slaves and old men, with the extant exceptions of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* having choruses of sailors or soldiers, who would be free adult men. How, then, does the Attic spectator view this exceptional chorus? Appreciating how sought-after Athenian twinks were at this time allows for an understanding of the spectator's desirous gaze onto the dancing bodies.

Barabara Goff and Richard Hawley have written about how the audience might gaze upon the characters of a Greek tragedy. Hawley reminds us that 'a gaze is detached; it can delimit and define its object; it exerts power and can control'.[69] In considering ancient Greek sexuality alongside sociologists John Gagnon and Bill Simon's idea that narrative relates to sexual desire, Alastair Blanchard writes that 'intercourse is often much more of an intellectual activity than a physical one. Desire mixes with the imagination to produce a narrative … the study of sex is really the study of storytelling.'[70] As such, an element of the Athenian spectator's reading of tragedy as it relates to desire involves, to some degree, the aspect of whom they are playing.

This, however, is layered when it comes to the chorus, who are themselves the most desired men in Athens. The men of Xenophon's *Symposium*, while discussing what it is to be beautiful and the power of beautiful people, comment on how especially enticing it is to see beautiful bodies in motion: 'at this point the boy performed a dance, eliciting from Socrates the remark "did you notice that, handsome as the boy is, he appears even handsomer in the poses of dance than when he is at rest?"'.[71] There is for Xenophonian Socrates an especial allure to watching the beautiful, desired body in motion. This is how ancient spectators watched tragic twinks: not at rest, but dancing.

The singing, dancing, young huntsmen of the *Hippolytus*, in their ode to the virgin goddess, may well be performing a choreography to show their hunting prowess. Choral movements were often reminiscent of military manoeuvres and thereby may be evocative of their manliness and power.[72] As they dance and sing, the spectator can focus their attention on the twinks' moving bodies, as they might in the gymnasium. The masks hide their faces, further objectifiying their bodies. They sing a promise to both remain dedicated virgins and maintain each other's company.

But also consider that these are Athenian twinks pretending to be servant boys. Slaves of the same age class, stripling slaves, would not be subject to the same laws in Athens as citizens. There is no law that says they cannot be paid for sex and there is no law that protects them from walking home in the dark. By having the *ephebes* perform as servants, the audiences of potential *erastai* would be ga*y*zing at these idealized male bodies, only attainable through rigorous social customs, pretending to be male bodies that were much more vulnerable in society, and thereby sexually obtainable. Seeing these dancing, ideal bodies might create an understanding of why Hippolytus is inclined to spend his time with them. That these boys appear so early in the tragedy titillates the audience, drawing them into the world of the play just as Plato does with the alluring Charmides.

As I stated, this chorus of huntsmen is exceptional in that they are young male servants and only in the orchestra for a brief period of time. The chorus of women from Troezen is onstage for the remainder of the tragedy, still performed by *ephebes*. Stephen Orgel has written about the blur in desire between Shakespearean boy actors and the female roles they play in his book *Impersonations*.[73] Furthermore, it is understood that famous nineteenth-century actresses Sarah Bernhard and Eleanora Duse's most titillating performances were in breeches roles, where a male's costume allowed the shape of the leg to be gazed upon. This blur between desire for male and female bodies is not an oddity. Plutarch recounts elsewhere in Greece women cutting their hair and being dressed as a man on their wedding night.[74] Furthermore, Robson explains how 'feminine' aspects of young men were seen as beautiful.[75] Beyond the scope of this essay, there is space for further study of how the desirous ga*y*ze is at work while *ephebes* perform as women – after all, it was tacitly understood that men would be attracted to both men and women. In relation to the desirous ga*y*ze, there is work to be done on asexual histories, particularly as the myth of Hippolytus' disavowal of Aphrodite has been examined qua notions of compulsory sexuality.[76] Further work might also examine the desirous ga*y*ze in satyr choruses, where twinks would be wearing erect phalli as part of their costumes.

But I would argue that an understanding of the Athenian male ga*y*ze provides a rationale for Euripides' inclusion of this tantalizingly brief chorus. Twinks dancing as Hippolytus' serving men and jaunty huntsmen would certainly pique the interest of a would-be *erastes*. Their brief presence plays with the audience's desirous gaze, in a tragedy otherwise about taboo desire, lust and abstinence.

Going astray: there is no such thing as heteronormative Greek tragedy

I see this work as important for two reasons related to understanding the past in ways which hopefully influence the future. The first relates to the performance of Greek tragedy today. My approach to understanding Greek tragic performance in antiquity is with a mind towards considering contemporary performances of these plays. Practitioners making Greek tragedies today might mine aspects of the tragic performance in Athens as a source for making creative decisions. Desire is not an uncommon aspect of how contemporary tragedies are staged, but more could be done to play with ways in which a queer kind of spectatorship might be foregrounded. This might, for example, include thinking about the male g*ayze* at all-male choruses in relation to Sue-Ellen Case's argument for the feminist scholar/director/actor to play Greek theatre within the contemporary burlesque or drag traditions.[77]

The second relates to where Greek tragic investigations can fit with a discourse of queer histories and futures. Jose Esteban Muñoz sees queer art of the past as useful in better understanding work made today.[78] In a similar spirit, Sarah Ahmed's spatial investigation of queer orientations, *Queer Phenomenology*, suggests that 'in looking back we also look a different way … looking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray. This glance also means an openness to the future, as the imperfect translation of what is behind us.'[79] David Halperin suggests that 'a radical reinterpretation of sexual life in ancient Greece has the potential to transform our own cultural and sexual self-understanding'.[80] It is my hope that my g*ayze* back at the desirous aspects of male spectatorship in ancient Athens might serve just these functions for future students, scholars and performance-makers. This is a reminder that there have always been queer members of every theatre audience, and historic and theatrical interpretations of these performances should not presume a heteronormative spectatorship – especially with all them ancient Greek twinks and daddies.

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18 Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 23.

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20 Ibid., p. 64.

21 Plato, *Symposium*, 178a.

22 Ibid., 178d–e; cf. Xenophon, *Symposium*, trans. Carleton L. Brownson (London: William Heinemann, 1947); and Plutarch, *Lycurus*, in Plutarch, *Greek Lives*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 3–41.

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