

Cross-gendering and cross-dressing in Greek literature: foundations for a textual corpus in Hellenistic and Late Imperial periods (edition, translation, and commentary)

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1. General presentation of the Project and state of the art

Now more than ever, the visibility of cross-gendering is crucial. However, it is not something new, as many would have us believe, but these people have been making themselves visible for decades and claiming rights that they have been deprived of from the beginning.

While it is true that cross-gendering has been around for centuries, becoming “visible” even in ancient times, it should not be forgotten that the concept as we know it today is rather anachronistic, since in Ancient Greece this term was not understood as the partial or total identification of a person with a gender different from the one culturally imposed by their sex and physical appearance. Rather, this term could be applied in Ancient Greece at times when a person transgressed the roles assigned to male or female gender and challenges this binarism of Greek gender. Therefore, we could confirm that gender, for both men and women, was a spectrum of possibilities stretching between the two poles of masculinity and femininity.

In this Research Project we intend to carry out a collection of texts belonging to Greek literature, in which we find descriptions or allusions to mythical, historical, or literary characters that transgress the imposed genders, implicitly or explicitly. Each text will be accompanied by its own translation, as well as a concise contextualisation and literary analysis. This will be accompanied by a preliminary study of the concepts of gender in Ancient Greece, its relation to sexuality and our disengagement to it, and what it meant to transgress those genders, along with tools for doing so, such as cross-dressing.

Most importantly, in exploring these theories we will take into consideration those very readings based on heteronormative and cisgendered views of the Ancient World, because they are erroneous interpretations of the past that represent power, experienced time,

desire and social order in terms of an abstract and anachronistic norm that maintains a strictly hierarchical and naturalised binary gender division of the sexes, which also tends to view instances of diversity as atypical of that supposed norm. In other words, cases of cross-gendering in Greek literature have more than once been marginalized, due not only to heteronormative and cisgender views, but also to the optics that the present brings to the past.

The work we propose is novel, inasmuch as despite the large supply of works on gender in Antiquity, there does not seem to be any compilation of Greek literary texts that includes this subject matter in such a catalogic, systematic and exhaustive manner.

At the end of the last century, numerous works began to be published examining gender in the Ancient World. Nonetheless, the concept of gender ends up being interpolated with that of sexuality, since they are undoubtedly related, although they should not be interposed. Among these is the pioneering work edited by Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin (1990), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of erotic experience in the Ancient Greek World*, as well as the work edited by Koloski-Ostrow and Lyons (1997), *Naked Truths: Women, sexuality, and gender in classical art and archaeology*.

However, although it is true that we find several works in which the dichotomy between sexuality and gender has already been established, it was not until 2020 that Surtees and Dyer edited a comprehensive collection of chapters in *Exploring Gender: Diversity in the Ancient World*, covering Gender Construction, Gender Fluidity, Transgender Identity, and Female Masculinity, with a variety of exemplifications from classical texts, which aim to offer a new understanding of the effect of gender roles in the cultural and social history of Antiquity, as well as to show how it affects our knowledge of gender in contemporary society and thought.

Furthermore, the area where we can most successfully exploit this theme is in the field of theatre, not only as an element of narrative, but also as an extra-narrative feature in the performance of such plays. In fact, in 1998, Bassi published *Acting Like Men: Gender, Drama, and Nostalgia in Ancient Greece*, in which it is contemplated certain gender-specific norms existing in drama.

In addition, this very year, 2023, a manuscript by Winkler has been brought out which contains a thoroughly original interpretation of the development and meaning of theatre in ancient Greece, providing a completely new representation of Greek tragedy and a

vivid portrayal of the cultural poetics of Athenian manhood in *Rehearsals of Manhood: Athenian Drama as Social Practice*.

In this way, we also find a wide variety of articles that focus on drama, or on specific works of both tragedy and comedy. We have authors such as Ormand (2005), with “Oedipus the Queen: Cross-gendering without Drag”, who offers in his work an insight into what the tradition of cross-dressing in the theatre in Athens reveals about notions of gender, or Compton-Engle (2005) and Tsoumpra (2020) whose works revolve around Aristophanes’ play *Ecclesiazusae*.

On the other hand, in 2013, Cawthorn publishes *Becoming Female: The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*, a seemingly striking work, but one that seems not to offer enough exemplification, and which does not extrapolate from the evidence as much as its title might suggest, as Elder (2015) argues in “Cross-dressing in Greek Drama: Ancient Perspectives on Gender Performance”.

Likewise, due to the relationship between drama and religion, we find works focusing on rites in which unconventional practices were carried out, such as the thesis presented by Lucker (2005), *The Gallae: Transgender priests of Ancient Greece, Rome, and the Near East*, which presents a group of priests in the cult of Kybele, and which has attracted the special attention of scholars on account of their peculiar dressing, speech, and behaviour, labelled as “feminine” by their contemporaries despite being born with male genitals.

Nevertheless, we are aware of many other cases of cross-gendering in social events, such as the case of sport and the instance of Pherenice in Pausanias, in which the woman cross-dresses in order to take part in sporting events dressed as a man, thus “usurping” the roles expected in the male gender spectrum; or even in the fascinating case of Pentheus and Dionysus in the *Bacchae*; or “the Feasts of Insolence” (τὰ Ὑβριστικά), quoted by Plutarch, *Virt. mul.* 4 (*Mor.* 245e-f), in which Argive women and men used also to cross-dress.

2. Research objectives

This future research project is linked to the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) that are integrated in the 2030 agenda, as well as being attached to the R&D Project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness “La Historia como materia

poética en la consolidación y desarrollo de la poesía helenística” (“History as poetic matter in the consolidation and development of Hellenistic poetry”; ref. PID2021-123138NB-I00), headed by Dr. Rafael J. Gallé Cejudo.

In addition, my project will proceed to establish a textual corpus which will include those texts that contain a case of cross-gendering, either explicitly or implicitly. Likewise, each component of this corpus will be supported by its corresponding translation and a literary analysis in which the text will be presented in context and presented with a concise commentary on the transgressive element of the passage.

At the same time, the concepts of gender in Ancient Greece will be delimited through a theoretical framework, the relationship that this concept implies with that of sexuality and the necessary dissociation from it, as well as what is understood by transgressing the gender binary of masculine and feminine, in addition to certain ways of carrying it out, as occurs on many occasions with cross-dressing, which will also be defined and discussed. This will also be limited to the Hellenistic and Imperial periods, given that this is a less explored field of research, although the earlier periods of Greek literature will always be present as the thematic basis of the study.

3. Methodology and Expected Results

The methodology employed for this Research Project will be the practice of a philological and literary analysis of an integral nature with the aim of covering the most wide-ranging spectrum of application.

To begin with, a search will be made of the texts that present cases of cross-gendering from the selected bibliography, in order to establish the final corpus. From a linguistic point of view, we will proceed to translate the various passages, paying special attention to those expressions or terms that concretely specify a situation of cross-gendering.

In second place, from a theoretical point of view, we will introduce ourselves in the interdisciplinary theories of gender identity, queer, trans and feminism together with those of classical Greek literature studies, in order to establish and maintain the necessary theoretical concepts around these theories, not only to provide context and delimit the grounds of the Research Project, but also to have a basis for the literary commentary of the texts of the final corpus.

Ultimately, on the basis of the texts and the theoretical contextualisation, we will undertake the literary analysis and commentary, starting from the established groundwork with the help of the bibliographical material from the framework, and observing, through the exemplification of the texts, the processes of cross-gendering and the tools that are used for the transgression of the established genders.

4. Description of the research in the three-year period

The first phase of this Research Project will be devoted to reading and compiling the necessary bibliographical material, not only to keep abreast of the current state of the art, but also to trace the various passages that will constitute part of our final textual corpus.

In a second phase of development, the translation of all the selected passages and texts will be carried out, always bearing in mind the main editions of the different authors collated.

The third and last phase of the Project will be dedicated to the configuration of the conceptual foundations that will delimit the research, which will be of particular interest for the subsequent analysis and literary commentary of the selected texts, paying attention to the explicit or implicit way in which cross-gendering is portrayed in these passages.

5. Basic bibliography

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