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The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy

Jeffrey Henderson

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The pervasive and unrestrained use of obscenity has long been acknowledged as a major feature of fifth-century Attic Comedy; no other Western art form relies so heavily on the sexual and scatological dimensions of language. This acclaimed book, now in a new edition, offers both a comprehensive discussion of the dynamics of Greek obscenity and a detailed commentary on the terminology itself.

After contrasting the peculiar characteristics of the Greek notion of obscenity to modern-day ideas, Henderson discusses obscenity's role in the development of Attic Comedy, its historical origins, varieties, and dramatic function. His analysis of obscene terminology sheds new light on Greek culture, and his discussion of Greek homosexuality offers a refreshing corrective to the idealized Platonic view. He also looks in detail at the part obscenity plays in each of Aristophanes' eleven surviving plays. The latter part of the book identifies all the obscene terminology found in the extant examples of Attic Comedy, both complete plays and fragments. Although these terminological entries are arranged in numbered paragraphs resembling a glossary, they can also be read as independent essays on the various aspects of comic obscenity. Terms are explained as they occur in each individual context and in relation to typologically similar terminology. With newly corrected and updated philological material, this second edition of *Maculate Muse* will serve as an invaluable reference work for the study of Greek drama.

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