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Comedic Portrayals of Greek Homosexuality: Ridicule on the Borders of Tolerance.

It has become something of a commonplace in contemporary scholarship to argue that Classical Greece was relatively accepting of homosexuality, particularly male homosexuality. Though there is an element of truth in this position, recent scholarship has added important nuance to our understanding of the Classical judgments of homosexuality. In particular, James Davidson's *The Greeks and Greek Love* has argued for a more complex view of Greek culture's encounter with sexual difference. This essay furthers Davidson's project by focusing on the satire of same-sex relations contained within the work of Aristophanes. In Aristophanes' comedies homosexual orientation and behavior is often made the subject of ridicule and mockery. Though comedy, and particularly comedy as hyperbolic as Aristophanes', cannot be read as a direct indicator of cultural norms, the comic frame requires reflection and recognition of cultural norms sufficient to create laughter. Passages from all the major Aristophanic comedies are examined in this essay. In my oral presentation I will not have, of course, time to explain every instance in Aristophanes. Accordingly, I will present several passages from my strongest source of homosexual ridicule—Aristophanes' *The Knights*. Because this play bases its jokes upon both same-sex relations and their connection to political indignity, *The Knights* is written to make a statement about the society Aristophanes inhabited. The example of Agoracritus, aptly dubbed a “sausage seller,” and his induction into politics regardless of his previous experience maintains the stereotype of homosexuality being “practiced” indecently or as a power move. Though Davidson argues against the focus on lust when it comes to male relationships, the dialogue between the two men competing for the political position becomes that of contending for the dominant sexual position in *The Knights*. Due to this parallel, Aristophanes links the immorality of political corruption to the reasons for which men pursued other men in his time. The play places these homosexual puns and references as a comedic relief. In conclusion, this essay argues for a more nuanced view of Greek acceptance of homosexuality, one that incorporates Athenian and democratic suspicion of homosexuality as an aristocratic and alien practice within an otherwise relatively tolerant sexual culture.