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Iambos, Comedy and the Question of Generic Affiliation

Ralph M. Rosen

University of Pennsylvania, rrosen@sas.upenn.edu

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GREEK COMEDY AND THE DISCOURSE OF GENRES

EDITED BY
E. BAKOLA, L. PRAUSCELLO AND M. TELÒ
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inherits to a far greater degree than tragedy or even satyr-play. For this reason comedy can fairly be called a 'genre of genres' and in this respect too it resembles its cultic Dionysian matrix. Old Comedy draws freely upon all musical and speech genres, but Old Comedy mostly draws its form and contents from the cognate Dionysian genres of tragedy, satyr-play, dithyramb, iambos and the sub-literary choral koomoi of the Pompe. In this sense, Aristotle is both deeply insightful and surely wrong, or at least overstating the case, when he derives comedy specifically from the phallika.

CHAPTER 3
Iambos, comedy and the question of generic affiliation
Ralph Rosen

It is a commonplace to note Old Comedy’s many explicit interactions with other literary genres. Indeed, parodic, mocking comedy, in particular — which characterizes much of Aristophanes and probably many of his fragmentary or lost contemporaries — derives much of its appeal, if not its very raison d’être, from its relationship with other genres. In the case of Old Comedy, parody of tragedy is the most famous instance of its self-conscious dialogue of genres, but there are many others as well — its parody of epic and lyric poetry, for example, and even of contemporary prose genres of history, philosophy, medicine and rhetoric. The relationship that Old Comedy fashions for itself with all such genres is one of alterity, by which I mean that its success depends at the most basic level on the fact that these target genres are other than, different from, comedy, and would under ordinary circumstances be out of place within the comic enterprise. Literary parody within comedy, in short, is a process of ‘illusion’, construed in the most traditional sense of the word as indicating a conscious attempt by the poet to play to an audience’s familiarity with a literary tradition that is not comedy (or at least not Aristophanic comedy), and which would be laughable when incorporated into it.¹

¹ See Will 2002: 9–10 (and then passim) on linguistic ‘register variation’ in Aristophanes. Not all register variation in Aristophanes is parody, but most parody involves some sort of register variation to mark it as a language that is different from an expected norm. See Will 2002: 134–69 for an attempt to establish a baseline Aristophanic grammar (and stylistics) which can be helpful in detecting parodic deviations.

² Literary parody (as opposed to parody in other artistic modes, such as music, where the term can be used neutrally to describe thematic borrowing), especially in comic genres, tends to be mocking and ‘negative’, but not necessarily or always so: it does, however, nearly always strive to elicit some form of laughter. See M. A. Rice 1993: 3–53, for the history of terms for parody, and in particular, the relationship between parody and ridicule, for parody in Aristophanes in particular, see Goldhill 1991: 209–11. On the problem of sorting out the different kinds of allusion in Old Comedy — from benign citation to overt parody — see Nagelkerke’s taxonomy of ‘Reflex’ (1996: 3–4) that he uses in discussing how poets of Old Comedy interacted with Greek lyric poetry.
This otherness of a parodied text within comedy makes it fairly easy to spot and to understand in context, and it explains why scholars have often analogized the relationship between a comedy and the texts it parodies to that between parasite and host. But Old Comedy also interacts with other genres in its own more organic ways, where there is no question of parody and quite often no apparent self-consciousness about allusion or authorial intentionality. Sometimes these are instances where texts interact with each other synchronically as a function of cultural forces that a poet may or may not pay any attention to, such as the ways in which Athenian tragedy and comedy share the same stage and are influenced by common production and performance protocols. Other times comic texts interact with previous authors diachronically, reflecting a generic heritage so old and complex that no single poet could possibly trace a comprehensive history of origins. Aristotle himself put his finger on the problem for Old Comedy when he noted at *Poetics* 1448a that the early history of Greek comedy could not really be known because no records were kept before its formal state recognition at the City Dionysia (486 bc). We still, in fact, share Aristotle’s frustration and crave information about how these

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1 I am thinking here of the many formal devices and structures shared by Athenian tragedy and comedy—e.g., archaic verse, alternations of episodes and lyric passages, and presumably an entire array of stage and consuming practices now largely lost to us. It is likely that in such cases poets were not terribly self-conscious about whether they were interacting with one genre or another. Tafanelli’s 162 just puts the evidence for and against a meaningful generic relationship between Aristophanes and comedy, concluding (87) that ‘on the whole the craft relies... rather than invest overlap’. This is not to say that there were not many self-conscious ‘borrowings’, one from the other, as many scholars have discussed (cf. Tafanelli 162–65), but in terms of what each genre actually borrows, Tafanelli finds them worlds apart. Critio’s fr. 341, which refers to someone as engaging in *‘epideictikai epothenhmat’* or ‘epideikton epothenhmat’, offers a rare moment of self-consciousness about how the two dramatic genres might ‘Inter’. But without that context, it is impossible to know what it all amounts to: it might very well imply that Critio thought of Aristophanic comedy as deeply informed by Euripidean tragedy; or it may only suggest that Aristophanes was capable of posing as an intellectual like Euripides but was not necessarily derivative of him. See Bubelko 24 29, with bibliography, who argues that Critio and Aristophanes to Euripides and the *Elders* (see Tafanelli 162–65) to highlight his own poetic relationship with Antisthenes.

2 This area includes the many questions about ‘origin’: did Old Comedy evolve, e.g., out of forms inherited from other realms of human activity, such as religious ritual, long lost to the consciousness of any individual poet or his audience? Such a claim is often made for passages such as the *Iliad*’s *lyric phailides* at *Ach. 134–70*, even if the passage itself is not felt to replicate such a ritual song exactly (see, e.g., Pickard-Cambridge 1924: 152–60; Rotherham 1964: 66, 71; Halliwell 1968: 207–14, with further bibliography, n. 147); it re-exists, or perhaps parodies, an aspect of a specific religious festival that we suspect had a long past even by the fifth century, it seems to have some bearing on what goes on in *Arist* comedy (its *archeological mockery’), but did Aristophanes put it all together in his mind when he composed this scene? Cf. also Rutter 1377, for a similar argument suggesting a link between Old Comedy and the ritual *gynaikeia*. See Kugelmeier’s third category of lyric ‘refrains’ in Old Comedy (1985: 8), which includes passages that are seen as ‘reminders’ (Dob Rowley, *Klage als ein lyrisches Vorbild*... ), where it is unclear how conscious the author would have been of what we might call an ‘allusion’.


4 The methodological problems with arguments for generic affiliation based on lexical similarities were well presented by E. Bowie 2000, on which see discussion below. Although I find his scepticism at times excessive, his challenge affords us an opportunity to articulate what, in the first instance, we are seeking when we ask how literary genres interact. Other critiques of my argument for generic affiliation tended to fixate unduly on my suggestion that historical figures figured for mockery by comic poets can in some respects be profitably treated as ‘mock characters’ (e.g., Halberg 1971: 41–55 and Kugelmeier 1990: 163–81). I offer some clarification at Rosen 2006: 335 n. 19.


for example? Or to put it another way, when Cratinus wrote a play entitled Archilochus, almost certainly bringing Archilochus on to the stage in some guise, and peppering the play with Archilochean allusions and quotations, was he constructing a parodic relationship — a relationship of mocking otherness, not affiliation — with Archilochus, akin to Aristophanes’ relationship with Euripides? Or was it an attempt on Cratinus’ part to acknowledge an organic generic relationship between his poetry and Archilochus’ that was more knowing hommage than parody? I argued for this latter position in OCIT, but the case can be made even more forcefully that iambus and Old Comedy were powerfully and uniquely affiliated, I believe, if we move beyond the strictly philological approach and consider them — despite their many differences in literary form, performative structures, or even localized social function — as, first and foremost, genres of satire.

The key issue in any discussion of generic affiliation is the question of authorial self-consciousness: if we say that various genres are ‘affiliated’ or ‘connected’, or whatever metaphor we choose, does it matter that the poets whom we think were influenced by others were aware of the processes by which they were influenced? Is this kind of self-consciousness an essential criterion for even speaking of ‘influence’ to begin with? And is ‘influence’ even the appropriate word to use in cases where there seems to be no awareness on the author’s part of how his work interacts with anyone else’s, even when we seem to be able to see a clear case of interaction? These are questions that genre theorists in other literary fields have wrestled with for some time, and, classicists, too, have not been insensitive to the complexity of the problems, but for a variety of reasons comic genres have presented particular challenges to thinking outside of familiar philological parameters. In the specific case of iambus and Old Comedy, this reluctance to theorize about genre has created some confusion about what we are looking for when we come to the question of how the two relate to one another.

Much of the confusion has arisen because scholars have often conflated what are really four distinct questions:

1. How, historically, did a particular genre come into being and develop?
2. How did a given genre represent itself, its origin, and its ‘essence’, and why did it do so in that way?
3. What did the audience think of the genre of Old Comedy?
4. How have critics (and this can include authors themselves, contemplating the provenance of literary genres) understood a given genre’s origin, history, and ‘essence’, and why did they do so in that way, especially if their claims turn out to be historically inaccurate?

Sometimes scholars will assume that the one will necessarily follow from the other but, in fact, as I would like to argue here, actual historical dependence between, or affiliation of, genres need hardly imply self-consciousness of such a relationship, nor need we always assume that what an author tells us about generic history is historically ‘accurate’.

The argument of OCIT illustrates well the need to clarify which questions we are seeking to answer, and the evidence that can be brought to bear on them. Everyone would agree that Old Comedy and iambus share some literary features: both can employ invective, obscenity, episodic narrative structures, and so forth. I wanted to argue that these shared features suggested that the later genre, Athenian Old Comedy, in some sense descended from the earlier one, and that the comic poets were both aware of the generic affiliation they had with iambographers and self-consciously indebted to those earlier poets for many of the stylistic features for which they were famous in their own time, especially obscenity and political

10 For my use of the term ‘satire’, see Rosen 2007: 2–4, esp. 27–30.
11 See e.g. Fawell 2003; Rosen 2007: 14–17, and now Rosenstein 2010 (esp. 23–24), for a lucid discussion, with bibliography, of the major theoretical challenges of genre criticism as practised both in antiquity and by theorist of our own time.
12 Among other things, comedy, and in particular satirical strands of comic literature, tend to construct themselves a historically specific reality that exists primarily in the here and now, enrolling its audiences into thinking that there must be some relation between their lived reality and reality of the comic performance. Mynatt became even more complicated when authors speak in their own voice in their works, especially when they mock other people who would be known to the audience and make claims for themselves that have the verisimilitude of a verbal truth. One can find even the most sophisticated critics, for example, being drawn into a satire’s insinuante (a conventional trope in itself) that his work must be taken at face value and as representative of a historical reality. See Rosen 2007: 13–15, 443–7.
13 Rosenstein 2010 addresses some of these questions as well, passim, and explicitly at 2–16, although in her study of the genre of iambus she is mostly concerned with my question 4 below, i.e. she is less interested in an answer to the question of what iambus is, an answer that would take the form of a definition . . . (But rather) the history of the conceptualization of iambus as a literary genre’ (24). She focuses on what she calls the ‘received iambus’, which focuses on authors who were ‘received into’ the tradition by ancient authors and scholars themselves (cf. 24–25, 24–7).
14 Few people today conceptualize genres as natural categories in the way we think of objects in the world (e.g. birds, cars, water), and most would agree with the three descriptions of genres as ‘category concepts’, ‘metaphorical representations of abstract entities’ and ‘cultural products’ suggested by Rosenstein 2010. Rosenstein’s synthesis of current approaches drawn from cognitive science is illuminating (Chomsky, ‘embedding’, ‘scripting’, ‘11–13), and helpful for explaining why it is often so difficult for original audiences as well as for us who study them — to pin down the generic identity of a literary work. I do think, however, that the generic identity of iambus in antiquity (indeed, even the possibility for ancient audiences to define it) was more stable than Rosenstein’s 2010 and E. Bowie 2002 would allow. Bowie’s (97) characterizations of iambus as an ‘à la carte menu’, for example, seems overstated. See further discussions below.
mockery. Let us say, however, that the philology, and even the testimonia, are not strong enough to sustain the position that Attic comedy ‘descended’ from the *iambus* or that Athenian comic poets knowingly modelled their plays on iambic poetry. What would this actually mean for the question of generic affiliation? How self-aware of their literary forebears must poets be before we can legitimately speak in terms of generic ‘descent’, ‘affiliation’ or ‘influence’? Other criteria have been invoked to downplay or even deny a meaningful affiliation between *iambus* and comedy: ‘social conditions’, length of work, composition of the audience, modes of performance – each of these categories looks quite different for *iambus* and Old Comedy. Another way of putting this might be to say that although Archilochus composed a humorous, obscene *pogo* against Lycambes in the seventh century BCE, and Aristophanes composed a humorous, obscene *pogo* against Cleon in the fifth, the date and conditions of performance, audience composition and reception were so different that any similarities between them were more likely coincidental than indicative of any sort of lineal relationship.

The major premise behind this statement is that because both *iambus* and Old Comedy can be shown to involve many other things besides abuse and political mockery, these elements themselves cannot be regarded as definitional of either genre. As a basic principle, this seems unobjectionable enough; just because we can find similar phenomena in two genres does not necessarily mean that they are related in anything more than a coincidental way. As Farrell has pointed out, Pindar’s *Odes* may have been commissioned to *praise victors*, but they could on occasion include blame and criticism as well; the mere appearance of ‘blame’ in his *Odes* does not, however, suddenly turn Pindar into a ‘blame poet’, and he even famously goes out of his way to distance himself from such an association, at *Pythian* 2.52–7, where he repudiates the iambic poet Archilochus for being *pogoer*. With Pindar, there is never any question of what his

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81 As L. Bowe 2003, who concludes that we should not think of Attic comedy as ‘descended’ from, or even ‘strongly influenced’ by, *iambus*. See also Willi 2002: 7–10. The real issue, it seems, is the use of ‘descent’, which again returns us to the question of authorial self-consciousness: is a modern pop-love lyric ‘descended from’ ancient examples of similar usage? In *Death of a Sublime* (‘descended from’) Greek tragedy? A case could be made for either position in both examples, depending on whether one uses the word ‘descent’ to imply that authors were aware of their literary antecedents. Burstein 2000: 85–8 distinguishes between genres that develop ‘out of’ other genres, and those that are ‘similar to but not deriving from’ other genres. This distinction highlights well the problems inherent in the terms we use to discuss influences on, and relationships between, genres, since the actual difference between the two options is not always easy to pinpoint. (See further discussion below, n. 40.)


83 This is the central question that Bowe’s remark (2003: 77) calls to mind: ‘If my argument for a multiplicity of “identifying features” of *iambus* were to be correct, their relevance . . . would be to diminish the importance within *iambus* of that element which has most often been seen as linking it closely with comedy, *aboria*’ (my emphasis).

84 As Freudenburg 2001: 88 succinctly put it: ‘The lines are fraught with misinformation that caricatures not only the poets of Greek Old Comedy, but Lucillius as well.’ See Rosen 2007: 6–40 for discussion and further bibliography.
Comedy. If Horace had never written these lines, or if they were lost to us, how willing would we be to think of Roman satire and Old Comedy as affiliated genres? A strict historicist would probably conclude that any resemblance between Roman satire and Old Comedy was coincidental or arose, one might say, "independently." Certainly no one, ancient or modern, would claim that the relationship between Roman satire and Old Comedy was anything like that between Roman comic drama and Greek New Comedy, where it can be easily shown both that the relationship was historical and that the Roman comic poets were well aware of that fact. Horace's statement in "Satires" 1.4 about satire's provenance in Old Comedy is by all measures eccentric, in fact, at least when considered as a piece of literary history. But what might we imagine prompted it? What kind of relationship between the two genres did Horace perceive—despite whatever a historian might think—that could be both "valid" and yet unhistorical at the same time? These are questions that can be applied equally to the problem of how Old Comedy was related to iambos, where the historicity of a generic relationship—which is to say, clear evidence that the former descended organically and formally from the latter—cannot be well established. We are left, instead, with impressions from the poets of Old Comedy, as I discussed in "OCTT," that remind us of Horace on satire: they sensed that what they were doing with their comedies was somehow "like" an antecedent genre, even if they would have been unable to make a historically legitimate argument for lineage and descent. Their clear interest in iambos, however, like Horace's interest in Old Comedy, ought to be sufficient to prompt us, in turn, at the very least to consider what inspired this interest in the first place. To answer this question, it is helpful for us to think in terms of a genre's "dynamics" rather than any static qualities of form or language. What distinguishes one genre from another, to rephrase my earlier question, becomes more a matter of what they do than of what they are. This approach allows us to reframe our search for a genre's defining features by asking what it is about a given literary work that no other genre would be able to replicate in quite the same way, and with the same effect. In the case of iambos, Old Comedy and even Roman satire, I have argued elsewhere that the concept of "satire" is a reasonably good start, for "satire" is a broad term that is not defined by specific literary elements—metres, or structures or performance protocols—but rather by its dynamics, the way it sets out to construct a particular relationship between an author and an audience over against some other person or abstract thing. Satirical authors may draw on a common arsenal of tropes or devices (obscenity, low diction, parody and personal mockery, just to name a few), but none of these itself defines satire, and most of them can be found in any number of other genres. Greek orators, lyric poets and even tragedians mock individuals, use obscenity or engage in parody, and in such moments we may even say that these authors are being "satirical." But to use that adjective is to imply that there is something we consider "true satire," different from the examples that we label "satirical." What distinguishes genres of satire from genres that may merely incorporate satire, is that the work of the former—the "ergon" or "telos" of satire, to borrow terms that Aristotle uses for the function and aim of tragedy—is understood by audiences, authors and critics to be laughable. This is laughter of a rather specific kind, of course, but it always lurks behind the mockery and ridicule found in this kind of literary work, and there usually is no further telos, despite an author's occasional (and equally humorous) claims to the contrary. Aeschylus may pepper a forensic or persuasive speech, for example, and elicit laughter from its audience at that moment, but laughter is hardly that work's telos; it functions more as rhetorical spice—strategically deploying humour in a work that is not otherwise generically characterized as comic. Even the...
frequent didactic claims one associates with satirical authors, disingenuous or not, are subservient to the work's goal of humouring an audience.66

In considering the relationship between iambos and comedy, therefore, we can more easily lay aside the many formal or contextual differences between the two that scholars have legitimately pointed out and instead look at the work each is trying to accomplish. What we find, I think, are strikingly parallel dynamics in play – an author singles out another person for ridicule, usually indifferent over that person's behaviour or some other abstract issue of the day in which that person is implicated; he speaks to, or in front of, any audience of people who are supposed to be sympathetic listeners; and in the course of his attacks, he makes an audience laugh. It is easy to anticipate objections that such a formulation is simplistic and incomplete – surely not every iambic or comic poet at every moment in a given work is engaged in this very enterprise; and there are, of course, many other aspects of their works that seem to have nothing to do with invective or mockery.67 But if we start with the (almost tautologous) fact that both iambic and Old Comedy are comic genres, and consider what the preponderant nature of that comedy is – namely, what kind of humour these genres most rely on to distinguish themselves from other comic forms – it is clear that this would be the comedy of personal mockery. It is worth noting, moreover, that iambic and Old Comedy are the only literary genres (certainly the only poetic genres) of Greek antiquity about which this can be said.68

66 Satire is a constant and, well known, but such claims tend to be complicated, if not undermined, by their heavy use of (generically indicated) humour and irony. See Roesen (2012).

67 This notion is what seems to have persuaded E. Bowie 2002, 2007 that iambos has been wrongly conceptualised as, at root, a genre of mockery and blame: 'Iambos was a genre of poetry in which a number of identifying features regularly appeared' (2002: 57), and mockery was simply one of these features. 'No one of these features', he continues, 'needed to be present for a poem to be recognized as (an) iambos.' Here we confront again the vexated question of what we think we are describing – a historical phenomenon that would have been recognizable to contemporary audiences, or a conceptual construct that only crystallized as a genre over time (Rostovtzeff's much smaller 'received iambos', see above n. 13). The problem is knowing when to consider that a genre has 'come into being' in the first place. If there really were archaic performances of iambos that could be completely devoid of anything we might consider, broadly construed, satirical (which I very much doubt, but here our evidence is too incomplete to judge for sure either way), we are even justified in referring to such performances as 'iambos' to begin with, especially in light of the fact that later antiquity almost universally came to regard blame and mockery as `identifying features' of iambos and would not readily refer to something as 'iambos' that did not include mockery. See Roesen 2002, 2007: 50–51, 55–56, a chapter with the revealing title, 'Inevitable or the Dominant Feature of iambos'.

68 Roesen, 2002: 96–7. In her analysis of Aristotle's use of the terms pagan and iambos, lars an Aristotle's varying stances on the matter clearly but, like Bowie, she focuses on the issue of individual iambos that may not actually contain abuse; the different forms of abuse figure only in part of the works by poets of the 'received iambos', while they are found in other genres of poetry as well (97). See above, p. 89, on the difference between satire at a genre and genres that merely incorporate satirical elements but do nothing else, generically speaking. To put it another way, if we find a poem with no abuse by a poet who otherwise has a predilection for abuse, does that mean that the poet cannot be considered, in terms of generic connotations, a poet of abuse? It seems more profitable to identify an author's genre as a function of his entire known oeuvre, and of what we can know about what this oeuvre is supposed to be, by authors and audiences alike – to be doing. No one would ever say, for example, that Euripides is not a tragic poet because his plays sometimes include scenes that play like love lyrics, pastoral or comedy. Rostovtzeff 2002: 343 is right to say that 'invective is not a literary genre', but 'invective' is not synonymous with 'satire', which, even if we are unwilling to regard it as a bona fide genre as such, is certainly a literary mode that can define certain authors and the genres they work in. In this is surely what Rostovtzeff, 251–5, 259, had in mind in his complaint about Archilochus as pagon (e.g. 'a blamer', but in the context of Archilochus' comic aim, not so far from our term 'satirical'), whether or not we should assume that Pindar had Archilochus' iambos specifically in mind here (cf. Roesen 2001: 187). Pedlar's insight into Archilochus is not that everything Archilochus composed was blame poetry, but that so much 'blaming' could be found in his work that he can legitimately be characterised with an adjective that reflects this (pagon). See also Nagy 1979: 224–4; Roesen 2002: 71, 240. That term, in other words, would be still have meaning even in the context of a non-invitective, non-satirical poem. Of course, in the end, one has to concede that not enough Archilochus poetry survives to make any very certain judgement about the variations in generic character across his different works; which is why the testimony of a witness relatively close in time to Archilochus, such as Pindar, is all the more revealing. 69 See above, nos. 12, 13.

90 E. Bowie 2002: 48, whose firm denial that Aristotle could have had any notion of 'decency' in mind when he noted similarities between iambos and comedy seems overconfident, based as it is on an argument e identico 'that Aristotle did not [think Old Comedy was descended from iambos] is further demonstrated by his total silence on iambos... While he alludes to... the origins...
question is just how Aristotle conceived of their relationship. The case I would like to make on this point is this: even though Aristotle imagines a more or less conventional diegetic history of tragedy at the beginning of Poetics, he is not really concerned with trajectories of influence or authorial self-consciousness. His notions of literary evolution derive rather from a phenomenological analysis and taxonomizing of literary forms and dynamics, and from an attempt to extrapolate from this commonalities among different works. This is why Bowie imagines a false problem when he voices scepticism that Aristotle saw Old Comedy as a ‘direct descendent’ of iambus, since Aristotle does not seem especially concerned to make an argument for direct descent here.

The relevant passage from Poetics (1448b24–1449a1) is worth considering here with these issues in mind:

diastasieis de katata tis olape eis aipheis: ois eno kóro smýnemerais tis kalon eimou evidence prepirws kai tis tis toun toun, ois eno oivnepirws tis tis phulon, prwtwv phugousi, eisxev ouvoun kai eikovma. tis eno on ois ois Oýmpos oútheis eixou eipw v las toun toun, eisxev elais, ois eis kata tis drwptwn kai tis lambrwv eis xprois metrwv - dia kai lambrwv kalwos kai eivgevneto, tis eno tis toun toun, eisxev, ois eno phugousi, ois eno tis lambrwv eisxev, dia kai tis pote thekean tis lambrwv.

In discussing this passage, Bowie concludes that Aristotle ‘writes as if [comedy] had related features’ rather than that the one was ‘descended from or strongly influenced by the other’ (my emphasis). Even if Aristotle were interested in making this specific point, which is hardly clear from the text, Bowie’s scepticism raises an interesting methodological question - if one acknowledges that two genres have ‘related features’, as Bowie does, does it take to transform these features into sufficient evidence for generic affiliation? Philosophers might recognize here a variation of the sortes-problem (how many individual grains of wheat does it take to make a heap?), and the stakes are far from trivial. For establishing affiliation between literary genres brings us back to our original concern for discovering what each genre is actually trying to do. Put more concretely: if we think we understand what Hippokles is doing when he mocks Bupalus and we think that, when Ariophantesmocks his targets, we can detect in him similar goals, formal structures, diction, and so on, a case for affiliation, if not descent, seems assured. Some might object, as Will and Bowie have done, that historical contingencies colour the nature of each poet’s mockery too much to argue for anything but the most casual or coincidental affiliation. Why, for example, should we assume that a poet mocking a target in sixth-century BC Clazomenes should be after the same effect as a poet mocking a target in the fifth, when political structures and social relationships were different? Because, I think we can say, each poet would have the same answer to the following question: what are you really trying to do when you make fun of your targets - not at the localized, specific level, but at the most conceptual, poetic one? To this

33 Here and elsewhere I reproduce the translations of Aristotle’s Poetics by Hallowell 1985 (my emphasis.
34 E. Bowie 2002: 49. See above, n. 30.
35 E. Bowie 2002: 49. See above, n. 15.

of Aris comedy in phallic choral performances. Again, it would have been very easy to say that pre-Crates comedy was a direct descendent of iambus... . In fact, Aristotle does not have to mention iambus at 1448a1, because he had already dealt with it in the preceding section, where he had made it clear that iambic writers were precisely the ones who became writers of comedy (post Aristoteles 1438a 8): ois eno on tis tis lambrwv eisxev, ois eno ois ois Oýmpos eisxev (so some become poets of comedy instead of iambic verse)
Comedy and iambos

When poets began to see, through their experience with Homer, what tragedy and comedy were all about, they cathered to one or the other (οἰκέται) in accordance with their φύσεως. In the lines immediately preceding these Aristotle had already established that comedy, as he conceptualized it, was not identical to the iambos, but he still could say that epic and iambic poets of an earlier age (καὶ ἑγένοτα τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ μὲν ἀποστόλικον οὐ καί ἱμάμβρον τοιοῦτον) could map on, by analogy, to the tragedy and comedy of his own day. The kind of person whose φύσις would have drawn him to iambos, in other words, would have had the same character as the person who in classical Athens would have been drawn to comedy.

Aristotle is grasping here for that certain something in both iambos and comedy that would appeal to a person with such a φύσις, their ‘natural bent’, irrespective of any arguments about how these genres might be interrelated from a diachronic perspective. In fact, it is striking that Aristotle makes a point of saying a few sections later (1449b) that there is no real memory of what came before comedy. The history of comedy’s formal aspects – for example its masks, prologues, number of actors – was unknown because there were no records and no explicit cultural memory, at least none that he had recourse to (τις δὲ πρόσωπα ἀπεξερωθεὶς ή προλόγους ή πληθυντὶ ὑποκριτῶν καὶ δακτύλων, 1449b). Even so, however, Aristotle has no trouble in positing a clear generic link between iambos and comedy based on his argument that each genre attracted practitioners whose temperaments were themselves linked by their predilection for satiric invective, whether or not they thought very much about how other genres deployed similar literary strategies.

In short, for Aristotle, the many types of poetry that exist can be categorized according to the kinds of things that each purports to do or what others (audiences, critics) claim that they do. This is an inevitably imprecise procedure, and it is never quite clear what Aristotle regards as


32. See Rosen and Markes 1995, and Rosen and Baines 2002 for comparative studies of satirical poetry beyond classical authors. For Aristotle, the scaffolding seems to be what lies behind his use of the word (for the first time in recent Greek literature) in the 1400b, now well discussed at Bostrom 2001: 100–4, who dwells on the meaning of the verb as to do what is typical of iambos as it was conceived in the fourth century BC, namely, at the enumerates, humorous, sometimes scabrous, contexts, archetypal and ad hominem ridicule. Bostrom would say that the idea of iambos as ‘dominantly abusive’ (102) was a conception that was developing in the fourth century, and then applied ‘backwards’ to the Homeric age. Why she asserts so categorically-along with Bostrom, the idea that early iambos might also have been ‘dominantly abusive’ (or at least, to use a phrase with broader connotations, ‘dominantly satirical’) in its own day eludes me, especially given the paucity of actual fragments from the period that would allow us to make definitive judgements either way.

33. There has been some dispute as to whether oikéteis ὑφή refers here to poets or poetry, but see Lucas 1968: 75 ad loc.

34. Aristotle notes that Homer’s Margene, for example, was a form (οἰκέται) of comedy that dramatized the ‘laughable’ (τὸ γελάμενον), which included inverse (ὑγιές), but not exclusively so. In 1449b he cites Homer as the first known composer of ψεύδης in this Margene, so it is curious that a few lines later, he says that Margene dramatized the laughable, but not inverse (ὑγιές). This seems to show that Aristotle thought of ψεύδης as a prominent component of a larger work of comedy, but that not all the comic aspects of the work had to be invasive. See now Bostrom 2001: 98–104. For Aristotle the ψεύδης seems to be an item on the margins of the broad category of ψεύδης that builds τὸ γελάμενον into a prose-dramatic essay (ὑγιεστατοποιηθέν). (102)

35. See above, n. 28, on Pind. Pith. 1.51–7, which anticipates Aristotle’s correlation between a type of poetry and the poet’s character. For in calling Archilochos ψευδής there, he imparts to the personality of the poet a quality that he would identify as lying at the heart of Archilochos poetry, namely its faultless for ψεύδης. People who are naturally drawn to invasive ‘real life’ will just as naturally be drawn to poetry that features invasive if they decide to become poets.
the actual criteria for establishing generic categories. But when he says
that certain personality types 'rush' (διψάω·ντες) to compose in one genre,
these poets are rushing towards something, and that something is both
real and specific in his mind. Iambos, for example, is for Aristotle a dis-

tinct subspecies of comedy, which is itself a subcategory of what he calls
the non-serious (ημητάλεξ). It is, moreover, a form of comic poetry distinguished
from others by its predilection for pogo - invercite and mockery: it likes to
make one set of people laugh by exposing others to mockery. Aristotle
is not concerned if individual examples of iambos can be found that might
not feature a pogo; it is enough for him to know that this is the type of
poem where a pogo could be right at home and, equally important, that its
author is the type of person who could be characterized as pogoer. When
we arrive at Old Comedy, it is obvious, and often noted, that not every
episode of every Aristophanic play is satirical or inventive. But if we were to
ask Aristotle what sort of person a poet of Old Comedy would be, there can
be little doubt that he would say it was someone who loved a good pogo
himself - someone who by nature (i.e. in keeping with his physis) revelled
in being funny through personal mockery and who deployed the many
literary tropes associated with such an enterprise. Such tropes themselves
were not necessarily stable and could vary in detail from poet to poet, but
on this point too Aristotle would doubtless have found unifying generic
categories for them, if only by characterizing them all as low (phulede)
and non-serious (cf. Poet. 1448b25-8, quoted above).
Aristotle's basic position on the relationship between iambos and Old
Comedy, therefore, is not, in the end, especially complicated: he did think
they were related, in ways that I have discussed, and he did imagine some
sort of historical relationship between them, although he had to remain
agnostic about the details.\footnote{Routlein's distinction (2010: 86-8) between Aristotle's 'theoretical' and 'empirical'
approaches to the history of poetry makes good sense up to a point, but I suspect the lines between each approach were
considerably more blurred for Aristotle: ... In the theoretical approach dirhmi and phallic songs are
historical' (out of which?) instruments of tragedy and comedy ... In the theoretical approach, iambos appear as the conceptual
(similar to but not deriving from) counterpart of pogo, which I argue is Aristotle's construct, and the conceptual instrument of comedy. It is not clear to me why the
two approaches need be mutually exclusive, either for Aristotle or for ourselves. If Aristotle thought
that comic comedy was historically and most directly 'out of' phallic songs, and phallic songs would
have featured the kind of pogo associated with iambos, why would he have had any trouble in
thinking that phallic songs themselves had a historical - not only a conceptual - relationship with
iambos, that they arose 'out of' iambos (in comedy and phallic songs see Carri in this volume).
In Aristotle's speculative literary history, after all, all comic forms ultimately derive from the split
between the poets of 'the serious' and the poets 'non-serious' (of μη χρη συμπτωματων των κομι
λογον πραξιν και των νουκονων, οι δε ενδημενοι των φαιλον, 1448a15). It is
generic affiliation, but it is clear that he is willing, unlike many scholars, to
lay aside the many contingencies that individual works exhibit within the
contexts of their production in favour of thinking in terms of a work's ergon,
and that this kind of thinking encourages a consideration of how different
generes interact with one another. Aristotle's insight about iambos was merely
a first step in the generic analysis of iambos, but its significance lay in the way
it articulated a literary dynamic - what we would call satire or mockery -
that could serve as a meaningful criterion for generic classification without
relying on specific authorial practices or self-consciousness. The question of
a deliberate, authorially self-conscious, historically verifiable affiliation
between iambos and Old Comedy is impossible to answer with much
uncertainty in the current state of our evidence; but denying that there was
one or remaining agnostic on the issue does not mean that the two could
not be affiliated according to a different set of criteria that have more to
do with how humans interact with each other in the world than how aware
they always are of what they are actually doing.

true that he had no real evidence on which to base this statement, but he seems to have imagined
that all those people with 'pogetic' \(\psi\)\(ω\)\(γ\)\(ε\)\(ν\)s, driven to compose in comic forms that involved what
we would call 'saine', were people who had really existed. See Rutter 2006b, for the diversity of
comic forms in Greek poetry that seem to have been around in the sixth century BC, as potential
antecedents to elements found in fifth-century Aric comedy.}
a way of reading that denounced the premise of polis-based civic utility in favour of a programme of scholarly inquiry which would neutralize comedy politically and subordinate it to the courtly project of ordering the literary universe under a divine monarch, the Pleiad tragedians made what would turn out to be a decisive contribution to the generational struggle of poetry and philosophy, comedy and tragedy, and finally Athens and Alexandria for ownership of the discourses of criticism: asserting an anti-Peripatetic model of how comedy should be read which deprecated anecdote, prosopography, and rhetorical and formalist theory in favour of a new kind of philologically informed close reading of the texts, and canonizing the comedians of tragedy's own golden age as the masters of the genre, in defiance of contemporary taste and practice. The absence of practising comedians from the early Museum may itself have been an essentially political fact; at any rate it left the field free for tragedians to claim critical ownership and canonization rights over comedy, after a century and a half of one-sided dialogue in which comedy had asserted its own unchallengeable entitlement to discursive mastery of other genres and tragedy in particular. It seems clear enough that what we thought we knew about Lycophron is as wrong as what we once thought we knew about Euphorion, and that the real story of the founding fathers of scholarship on comedy is still waiting to be told. But their ultimate triumph in the contest to determine which comedies would be read and how was not merely a decisive episode in the history of literary scholarship and critical practice: it was also tragedy's final revenge for the *Prose*.

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