

Andrea ROTSTEIN, *The Idea of Iambos*, Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, XVII, 388 pp., ISBN 9780199286270, hb., £ 79.00.

The key point of this book can be summed up in the claim that the invective as a defining feature of *iambos* is a question of reception, not of any essence of this literary genre. So we have a *zetema* centered on the dismissal of a generic connection between personal attack and *iamboi* in their mother context. This connection is – as ROTSTEIN (hereafter R.) asserts – a later invention made up by ancient scholars who began to solidify the abuse of an individual as one of the most representative characteristics of this genre.

I do not find it convincing. R. declares Aristotle guilty of linking the term *iambos* with vituperation or lampoons and assumes that he played an important role in shifting the significance of it from the metrical to the dominantly abusive content. R. argues against the historical validity of Aristotle's explanation of the origins of the term *iambos*. While her doubts (shared with many other scholars) concerning the Aristotelian linguistic derivation of *iambeios*, and by implication also of *iambos*, from *iambizein* are fully justifiable, her hypothesis (pp. 101 f.) of Aristotle projecting “backwards the exchange of abuse he could find in contemporary ritual, festive, komastic, and sympotic contexts” is less satisfactory. The ritual aischronology and personal insult, detected in the cult-background of *iambos*, and confirmed by the weight of the early evidence (e.g. associated with *Iambe*, the eponym of *iambos*) proves that as early as the initial stage of literary *iambos* invective and abuse constituted prominent features of the genre. Literary *iambos*, which developed under the influence of ritual conditions, underwent a transformation of the character and function of the invective – from cultic abuse between symmetrical parties to entertaining and paraenetically oriented abuse of targets in front of an audience.

The title of R.'s book, alluding to the famous phrase of Aristotle, *he iambike idea*, exposes – as R. declares on p. 105 – her main intent of suggesting that the ancient and modern ‘misinterpretations’ of the phrase place it within the pole of meaning that can be called the “abusive or invective category”. R. adopts Malcolm HEATH's interpretation of the *iambike idea* and refers it to the construction of plot. She does not go beyond HEATH's analysis of Aristotle's passages from the *Poetics*, which seems to me vulnerable on at least one point. The difference between *iamboi* and comedy which – as HEATH rightly argues – lies in using respectively the narrative and dramatic form of presenting plots, does *not* exclude the presence of *psogos* (abuse/attack) in both types of poetry. I am tempted to accept Keith SIDWELL's persuasive arguments about the nature of this difference (*From Old to Middle to New? Aristotle's "Poetics" and the History of Athenian Comedy*, in: D. HARVEY, J. WILKINS (eds.), *The Rivals of Aristophanes. Studies in Athenian Old Comedy*, London 2000, pp. 247–258, esp. 251–254); I would wish that R. had done justice to his conclusions regarding the question she is interested in.

It is also noticeable that R. incorrectly estimates the possibility of our understanding of the meaning of *iambikos* itself because – as she rightly points out (p. 105) – it does not occur in surviving Greek literature before Aristotle, as also is the case with the whole phrase *he iambike idea* since this expression employs the adjective instead of the standard use of an adnominal genitive to qualify the term *idea*. Both reservations are unimportant: examples of suffixal formations in *-ikos* are richly attested before Aristotle (e.g. in Plato's writings) and the intelligent reader may be expected to understand the meaning of such forms. On this matter it should be profitable to consult Adolf AMMAN's work (*-IKOS bei Platon. Ableitung und Bedeutung mit Materialsammlung*, Freiburg 1953) containing a useful collection of passages with adjectives in *-ikos*, and providing convincing arguments that the adjective with the suffix *-ikos* plus abstract noun combinations and the usage of an abstract noun with an adnominal genitive are always interchangeable.

There are some sections of the book which are more persuasive than R.'s setting out of the arguments for treating the invective as a historical judgment of the later theorists. The book makes a valuable contribution to the discussion of the general problems associated with the classification of early Greek poetry, defining the different types of poetry and the conceptualization of the genre itself (the real achievement of this study is Chapter 1 where R. opens our eyes to the profits a modern specialist in ancient literature can have from employing principles deriving from the cognitive sciences). R. also comes up with discussions, which are really satisfying in depth, of the individual texts, although some of her interpretative proposals are not new, being revised or enlarged versions of her essays published elsewhere (e.g. those devoted to the analysis of Archilochus, fr. 215 W. and *Poetics* 4). My expectations were also fulfilled while reading the section of the book where Hellenistic genre theories were discussed, especially as the contribution of some Pergamene scholars to the field of iambic poetics, as well as the Stoic and Epicurean paradigms, has not yet been the subject of serious scholarly attention. So R. fills in this void with judicious assessment of Hellenistic testimonia.

I was, however, rather disappointed in the examination provided in Part Four of the available evidence dealing with the performance of the *iambos*. Generally speaking, I find the results of R.'s debate convincing, especially as other scholars have exhaustively examined the problem and I reached the same conclusions myself in my book of 1993. R. does not, however, sufficiently indicate reasons for her reassessment of the problem and is more summarizing what has been done hitherto than rather innovative in her investigations.

On the whole, the bibliography is accurate. It has, however, some omissions, e.g. of the recent book on the *Margites* (Omero, *Margite*, introduzione, testimonianze, testo critico, traduzione e commento a cura di Antonietta GOSTOLI, Pisa–Roma 2007). The acquaintance with the results of GOSTOLI's studies, especially on the problem of the authorship of the *Margites*, would oblige R. to modify her interpretations at some points.

Finally, there is one constant irritation which invites comment, namely the omnipresence of cross-references incorporated into the main text. The incessant announcements of what will be done in the next or in one of subsequent sections or chapters, as well as the frequent recapitulations of what has just been done at times make the reading of the book unbearably annoying. Instead, one could wish that the material itself had been rather more systematically ordered, and not meta-textually commented on in so many places of the book.

In sum, none of the five parts of this book should remain unnoticed¹. The work merits the attention of all those who have an interest in genre theory (including all aspects of generic indeterminacy) and in reapplying the ancient categories to the extant textual material, but first of all in "iambic ambiguity". This book with its audacious hypotheses will certainly serve those readers well who are familiar with the complexity and nuances of modern scholarship on early *iambos*. A newcomer may be lead astray by it.

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¹ Let me list the titles of these parts with the aim of making potential readers acquainted with the arrangement of the material: Part One: *Greek Iambos (7th–4th Cent. BCE: Genre and Corpus*, pp. 3–67; Part Two: *Ways of Seeing*, pp. 61–147; Part Three: *Imbos and Iambeion: A Study of Terms in Context*, pp. 151–225; Part Four: *The Performance of Iambos*, pp. 229–278; Part Five: *Perceptions of Iambos*, pp. 281–246; *Final Remarks*, pp. 347–352.