

## THE HUNGRY MUSE: CULINARY ASPECTS OF THE POETRY OF HIPPONAX

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The earliest poet in whom food/eating becomes a major thematic motif is the iambic poet Hipponax (middle of the sixth century BC)<sup>1</sup>, whose extant corpus amounts to a mere a few hundred verses<sup>2</sup> and a number of glosses. Even these exiguous remnants, however, reveal that his poetry is distinct from that of his predecessors in that it contains an unprecedented number of culinary and sexual references, often in the context of abuse. The high frequency of these motifs, which at first sight may appear to be simply a personal idiosyncrasy of the poet, is in fact indicative of a more

1. About the chronology of Hipponax, cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 36.4.11-2, Pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 6.1133d, and *Suda* ii665.16.

2. Approximately one hundred fragments survive, none of which is longer than six consecutive lines; many consist of one, frequently incomplete, line. Although popular during the Alexandrian period, Hipponax's work did not survive the Byzantine era, probably because it was deemed morally worthless by both the Church Fathers and the later pagans. Leonidas of Tarentum, for instance, describes Hipponax as *πικρόν σφῆκα* whose words "know how to injure even in Hades" (*πημαίνειν οἶδε καὶ εἰν Ἀΐδῃ*, *Anth. Pal.* 7.408); Philip of Thessalonike: (*ὦ ξεῖνε, φεῦγε τὸν χαλαζεπῆ τάφον / τὸν φοικτὸν Ἰππώνακτος, οὗ τε χά τέφρα / ἱαμβιάξει... ἐς στύγος* (*Anth. Pal.* 7. 405); emperor Julian advises his priests: *ἀγνεύειν δὲ χρὴ τοὺς ἱερέας οὐκ ἔργων μόνον ἀκαθάρτων οὐδὲ ἀσελγῶν πράξεων, ἀλλὰ καὶ δημάτων καὶ ἀκροαμάτων τοιούτων... καὶ ὅπως εἰδέναι ἔχῃς ὁ βούλομαι φράζειν, ἱερωμένος τις μῆτε Ἀρχιλόχον ἀναγιγνωσκέτω μῆτε Ἰππώνακτα μῆτε ἄλλον τινὰ τῶν τὰ τοιαῦτα γροαφόντων* (300 C-D).

In this paper, the fragment numbers for all poets, except Hipponax, reflect the enumeration of M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum cantati Vol. I and II* (Oxford 1971 and 1992). Hipponax's fragment numbers refer to E. Degani's, *Hipponax, Testimonia et Fragmenta* (Stuttgart 1991).

general reorientation of archaic Greek poetry, a reorientation which results, as this paper will suggest, not only in the redefinition of traditional genres but also in the creation of new ones. To understand the significance of Hipponax's focus on food as well as of the nature of his poetry, one must examine the poetic milieu in which he functions, his poetic background, and his influence on subsequent literary developments. The archaic Greek poet works within particular genres which set expectations both in terms of subject matter and its treatment<sup>3</sup>; major disturbance of genre traditions may occur due to exigencies arising either from within (gifted and uncompromising poet) or from outside (change of dynamics in the literary landscape) or from both. In Hipponax, it seems that the third case is operative: an obviously gifted poet finds himself in a genre which is forced by independent literary developments, namely the birth of tragedy, to readjust its ethos and thematography. Since literary context is particularly crucial in our assessment of Hipponax, this paper, in addition to its examination of the poet's culinary references, will include a brief overview of the poetic environment in which the poet finds himself, and, in the later part, an attempt to incorporate him into the larger canvas of archaic Greek poetry.

In the period after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the dominant force in archaic Greek poetry is private lyric<sup>4</sup>, that is, non-epic and non-religious poetry, the major subdivisions or genres of which are two, defined by metric differences: elegy and iambus. These genres flourish side by side and, in fact, some poets, such as Archilochus and Solon, write both. The subject matter of elegy is quite diverse, containing topics which cover from the glory of war to erotic desire and philosophical reflection, presented

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3. A. E. Harvey, "The Classification of Greek Lyric Poetry", *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1955) 157-75; C. O. Pavese, *Tradizioni e Generi Poetici della Grecia Arcaica* (Rome 1971) 249 ff; T. Todorov, *Les genres du discours* (Paris 1978) 44-60; M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V. McGee. Ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin 1986), 60-102.

4. As is increasingly recognized, the place in which the greatest part of non-cultic lyric is performed is the symposium: e.g., W. Rösler, "Die Dichtung des Archilochos und die neue Ktpler Epode", *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 119 (1976), 300ff.; S. Koster, *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur* (Verlag Anton Hain 1980), 60ff; O. Murray, "Symptotic History", *Symptotica*, ed. O. Murray (Oxford 1990), 9; E. Pellizer, "Outlines of a Morphology of Symptotic Entertainment", *Symptotica*, 180; P. Schmitt-Panl, *La cité au banquet: histoire des repas publics dans les cités grecques* (Rome 1992), 27 ff.

always in a serious and contemplative manner. Iambus, on the other hand, is less well understood, primarily because its extant corpus is much smaller and its thematic range much wider.

Frequently iambus is perceived, especially under the influence of Aristotle, as an exclusively humorous, irreverent, abusive and obscene kind of poetry which is incompatible with the serious and dignified character of elegy.<sup>5</sup> Etymologically, “iambus” seems to derive from “Iambe”, the maiden who tried to cheer up Demeter by joking and making gibes when the goddess was distressed over the abduction of her daughter Persephone.<sup>6</sup> This has led many scholars to consider iambus as poetry connected with the worship of Demeter and Dionysus, especially since in their festivals there were ritual comic exchanges and invective.<sup>7</sup> Yet there is good reason to believe that by the time iambus became a literary genre, it had already evolved into a totally secular kind of poetry performed in a non-cultic context.<sup>8</sup> In this light we should understand the verses of the iambic poet Hipponax.

Iambus has its heyday from the mid-seventh to mid-sixth centuries, covering the span of three successive generations of poets: the first generation is represented by Archilochus and Semonides (mid seventh

5. *Poet.* 1448b 32: διό και ἱαμβεῖον καλεῖται νῦν, ὅτι ἐν τῷ μέτρῳ τούτῳ ἱάμβιζον ἀλλήλους; (ἱαμβίζω = λουδοῶ).

6. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 11. 203-4: πολλὰ παρὰ σκάπτουσ' ἐτρέψατο πότινιαν ἀγνήν, / μειδῆσαι γελάσαι τε καὶ ἴλαον σχεῖν θυμόν

7. For the practice of *αἰσχρολογία* and *χλεῦναι* in certain religious festivals (Haloa, Stenia, Thesmophoria, etc.), cf. for instance, N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974), 213 ff.

8. The most vocal supporter of the connection of literary iambus to religious ritual is M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin, New York 1974), 25ff. West's arguments for the connection between literary iambus and cult, among others, are the birthplace and family traditions of Archilochus, the earliest extant iambic poet; the name of the perennially abused Lycambes, which contains the element -amb, just like the words iambus, dithyramb, etc.; also Lycambes' patronymic, which is Δωτάδης, and which seems to be associated with Demeter's assumed names Δώς and Δω-μάτηρ. West's positions caused reaction mainly from W. Rösler (above n.4) and in particular C. Carey, “Archilochus and Lycambes”, *Classical Quarterly* 36 (1986), 65. Carey observed that only the element -mb is common in the name Lycambes and a number of cultic terms (e.g., ithymbus), and the fact need have no special etymological significance; also Lycambes appears to have been not a stock character but a real person of influence, and Dotades to be an actual name.

century); the second, by Solon, the famous lawgiver of Athens (early sixth century); and the third, by Hipponax (mid sixth century). Since all four poets belong to the same poetic genre, one would expect adherence to similar thematic and artistic principles. Yet a significant change occurs over time: while in the first two generations (Archilochus, Semonides, and Solon) alongside sexual references and abusive remarks we find serious reflection on life, fate, and relationships between gods and mortals, in Hipponax, the latest of all, there is no such duality. In Hipponax almost everything revolves exclusively around food, sex and invective. That this is not an accident of preservation is indicated by the presence of these three themes in numerous fragments, which, although very incomplete, still give us a fairly reliable picture of the nature of the corpus from which they come. While serious contemplation, whether political or philosophical, is an important aspect of iambus down to the early part of the sixth century<sup>9</sup>, by the middle of the sixth century serious subject matter disappears. Later in this paper we will speculate on the causes of this remarkable change. For the moment, let us briefly concentrate on the tradition of the representation of food in archaic poetry, so that we may more clearly see the differences in Hipponax's treatment of the same theme.

In Homer, emphasis on food is noticeably uneven: in the *Iliad*, the heroes function on a plane in which disease, cold, and hunger are irrelevant. In the *Odyssey*, however, there is a new, more down to earth, perception of the world, including attitudes towards eating. A revealing example of this new approach is the passage in which Odysseus pleads with the Phaeacians to give him food:

ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μὲν δορπῆσαι ἐάσατε κηδόμενόν περ·  
οὐ γάρ τι στυγερῇ ἐπὶ γαστέρι κύντερον ἄλλο  
ἔπλετο, ἢ τ' ἐκέλευσεν ἔο μνήσασθαι ἀνάγκη  
καὶ μάλα τειρόμενον καὶ ἐνὶ φρεσὶ πένθος ἔχοντα·  
ὥς καὶ ἐγὼ πένθος μὲν ἔχω φρεσίν, ἡ δὲ μάλα' αἰεὶ  
ἔσθήμεναι κέλεται καὶ πινέμεν, ἐκ δέ με πάντων  
ληθάνει ὅσος' ἔπαθον, καὶ ἐνιπλησθῆναι ἀνώγει. (7.215-21)

9. A number of Archilochus' iambic fragments have a philosophical flavor: in fr. 19 the speaker judges what is really important in life, deeming material wealth and power as negative qualities; in fr. 20 the subject is the painful consequences of civic strife or war. Semonides speaks about the helplessness of the human condition, old age, death (fr. 1); nature of woman (fr. 7); acquisition of virtue (fr. 5). Solon spends most of his energy in discussing issues of the socio-political order.

Lines of this sort would have been unthinkable in the mouth of Achilles. In fact, this passage has given offense to both ancient and modern commentators because it appears incompatible with epic dignity.<sup>10</sup> But Odysseus and the entire world of the *Odyssey* represent a different kind of “heroic” standard, one which is closer to our own sensibilities than to those of the Iliadic figures, who are almost forces of nature rather than men.<sup>11</sup>

In elegy, food appears only in Archilochus and Theognis. The elegies of Archilochus contain two references: in fr. 2 the speaker states that his bread is hanging from his spear (ἐν δορὶ μὲν μοι μᾶζα μεμαγμένη), and in fr. 4, in the first mutilated lines, we can read the word δειπνον, 4. The first fragment has generated a considerable amount of scholarship, particularly in relationship to the use of figurative speech: does the poet literally mean that his food is hanging from his spear or does he use the expression to indicate that his livelihood depends upon soldiery? The second fragment has as its subject the drinking of a group of soldiers on nightwatch, and it seems that the mention of the dinner occurs in passing, perhaps even in a negative form.<sup>12</sup> In Theognis, in line 33, the speaker advises Cymus, his young protégé, to avoid the lowborn and pursue the company of aristocrats; among other activities the young man is urged to drink and eat with them (ἔσθιε). In line 115, Theognis states that true and reliable friends are much scarcer in important situations than at meals and drinking parties (πόσιος καὶ βρώσιος). The limited references to food and eating in archaic elegy, then, indicate that the subject, although admissible, is not one of the thematic motifs.

In iambus, on the other hand, food and eating appear in all four poets; yet its distribution between the earlier and later representatives of the genre is dramatically varied: in Archilochus there are only two references: δαῖτα in fr. 48.2 possibly appears in a sympotic setting, as conjectured from the presence of perfumes, and probably women, but the text is

10. Athenaeus: “for even if he were hungry, he should have waited.. not even Sardanapallus ever dared to say such things” (10.412b). For disapproval among modern editors, cf. V. Birard, *L’Odyssie* (Paris 1924-5) and A. Giusti, *Antologia Omerica: Odissea* (Milan 1935), *ad loc.*

11. There are passages in the *Odyssey* in which hunger is mentioned even in a heroic setting, cf., for instance, Menelaus’ soldiers in Egypt roaming the shore fishing, “their bellies cramped with hunger” (ἔτειρε δὲ γαστέρα λιμός, 4.369).

12. The immediately preceding mutilated lines (δειπνον δ’ οὐ[ οὔτ’ ἐμοὶ ωσαί] suggest a negative expression: e.g., “although we had little or no dinner, let us drink.”

uncertain, *ῥῖα* (food for travelers) in fr. 79 has no context at all. In Semonides, there are three references. In the one case in which some context is preserved, the setting is not a meal; *τυρός* in fr. 23 is a gift which a shepherd brings to the addressee. Fr. 32 is a gloss (*ῥῖα*), and so is fr. 38 (*νήστης*, “a person with an empty stomach”). Solon, the representative of the second iambic generation, is more difficult to assess: although his corpus contains 10 references to different kinds of dishes or utensils (*ἴτρυα*, *ἄρτον*, *γούρους φακοῖσι*, *πεμμάτων*, 38; *ἰγδιν*, *σίλφιον*, *ὄξος*, 39; *κόκκωνας*, *σήσαμα*, 40), all of them appear in three short fragments (38-40), amounting to fewer than 8 lines altogether, and in all likelihood coming from the same poem.<sup>13</sup> The context of frs. 38-40 remains obscure.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast, Hipponax contains 40 references to food or meals spread throughout his corpus. The poet transforms the working class *dramatis personae* of his iambic predecessors into an underclass: slaves, incompetent men who do not measure up to the standards of their profession, suspicious characters, tramps, prostitutes, and thieves create an environment considerably different from that which is found in Archilochus and Semonides. Not that there are no thieves or prostitutes in the latter; but, as a whole, the characters are presented as members of a healthy and productive class. There is a sense of pride in them. In Hipponax, on the other hand, the entire number of the characters are dirty, hungry, lacking adequate clothing, and wishfully dreaming of extravagant amounts of money. In a poetic milieu marked by such poverty and material deprivation, eating or searching for food is predictably one of the most persistent motifs. There is such diligence in depicting meals (real or imaginary) in detail that, on occasion, certain fragments give the impression of a menu, cf, for instance, fr. 36:

13. Sesame-cakes, bread, cake, lentils, pastries (fr. 38); mortar, silphium, vinegar (fr. 39); pomegranate-seeds, sesame (fr. 40).

14. The poet perhaps takes pride in the beneficial outcome of his legislative actions and refers in detail to the plentitude of food as reflecting the new good fortunes of the people. A. Masaracchia, *Solone* (Firenze 1958), 360, gives a list of different interpretations: Hartung suggests that the fragments come from a satire against the gluttony of the rich; others suspect that the fragments depict an imaginary situation similar to those appearing in the comedies; and still others think that the lines describe a curious custom which the poet witnessed during his trips (ethnographic *excursi* are typical of the Ionian culture, cf. Hecataeus and Herodotus).

ὁ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἡσυχῇ τε καὶ ῥύδην  
 θύνναν τε καὶ μυσσωτὸν ἡμέρας πάσας  
 δαινύμενος ὥσπερ Λαμψακηνὸς εὐνοῦχος  
 κατέφαγε δὴ τὸν κλῆρον· ὥστε χρὴ σκάπτειν  
 πέτρας ὁρείας σῦκα μέτρια τρώγων  
 καὶ κρίθινον κόλλικα, δούλιον χόρτον<sup>15</sup>

Or fr. 37:

οὐκ ἄτταγᾶς τε καὶ λαγούς καταβρύκων,  
 οὐ τηγανίτας σησάμοισι φαρμάσσων  
 οὐδ' ἄττανίτας κηρίοισιν ἐμβάπτων<sup>16</sup>

In fr. 48 the speaker makes a dramatic plea, probably to a god, to save him from starvation, and in fr. 107 there is even an oath sworn on a cabbage (*τὴν κράμβην*)<sup>17</sup>! In general, when the characters are depicted eating, there is mention of the specific dishes they are consuming. The emphasis on food is reflected in the extensive variety of terms used. Hipponax employs no fewer than 10 different verbs for “eat” (*ἔσθιονσι*, 28, *δαινύμενος*, *κατέφαγε*, *τρώγων* 36; *καταβρύκων*, *φαρμάσσων*, *ἐμβάπτων*, 37; *δειπνήσας*, *ἐδέψατ'*, 78; *περιτρώγων*, 88). Likewise, in dozens of fragments there are references to numerous kinds of food in addition to those already mentioned: dried figs (*ἰσχάδας*), 28, 123; barley (*κριθέων*), 48; cake and cheese (*μᾶζαν καὶ τυρόν*), 28; bread (*ἄρτον* 20, 124; soup (*ἔτνεος*), 118; barley drink (*κυκεῶνα*), 48<sup>18</sup>; wheat (*λέκος πυροῦ*), 60, 124; mulberries (*συνάμινα*), 78; sausage (*ἀλλᾶντα*), 86; roasted fat (*κνίσην*), 107; meat of a young pig (*κρέας ἐκ σνός*), 134. Elsewhere occur references to utensils: cooking pot (*κύθρος*), 118; generic utensils (*ἄπαρτίην*), 15.

Hipponax's preoccupation with food is not limited to its consumption alone but also to its evacuation. There is a remarkable number of

15. Fr. 36 For one of them, dining at his ease and lavishly day after day on tuna and sauce like a eunuch from Lampsacus, devoured all his inheritance; so he has to dig rocks on the mountainside, eating modest figs and barley bread, fodder for slaves.

16. Fr. 37 Not chewing on partridges and hares  
 Not seasoning pancakes with sesame,  
 And not dipping cakes in honey.

17. For the use of oaths by the cabbage in comic poetry, cf. Ath. 9.370b.

18. The term, as R. M. Rosen explains (*American Journal of Philology* 108, 1987, 416-26), can be understood in various ways: food to ward off hunger, medicine, and even as an allusion to the ritual activities associated with the worship of Demeter, in which *κυκεῶν* used.



scatological references, most of which seem to appear in a context of abuse and invective. Fr. 171 is a gloss for the innovative term *μεσσηγυδορποχέστης*, that is “one who goes to the bathroom many times during the meal” – so that after each evacuation he has space for more food. In fr. 63, a character is “croaking like an owl in a privy” (*ἔκρωζεν <\_x\_> κύμινδης ἐν λαύρῃ*), and in fr. 40 someone “drank like a lizard in a privy (*κατέπιεν ὥσπερ κερκύδιλος ἐν λαύρῃ*).” Frr. 73, 79, and 88 all mention defecation; in the second case, defecation seems to be the direct result of fear. Perhaps the most intriguing scatological passage appears in fr. 95:

ἡῦδα δὲ λυδίζουσα· βασκ...κρολεα',  
 πυγιστὶ 'τόν πυγεῶνα παρ[  
 καί μοι τὸν ὄρχιν τῆς φαλ[  
 κ]ράδη<i> <\_x\_> συνηλοίησεν ὥσπ[ερ] φαρμακῶι  
 .].ποις διοξίοισιν ἐμπεδ[  
 καὶ δὴ δυοῖσιν ἐν πόνοισι  
 ἦ τε κράδη με τοῦτέρωθ[εν  
 ἄνωθεν ἐμπίπτουσα, κ[  
 παραψι{δ}άζων βολβίτωι  
 ὦξεν δὲ λαύρη· κάνθαροι δὲ ῥοιζέοντες  
 ἦλθον κατ' ὁδμήν πλέονες ἢ πεντήκοντα.<sup>19</sup>

D. Gerber<sup>20</sup> suggests that the Lydian woman is treating the speaker for some kind of malady, perhaps impotence, by administering blows with a fig branch and inserting something into his anus, which causes him to defecate. The fragment is reminiscent of Petronius' *Satyricon* (138).<sup>21</sup> The precise context of fr. 95, however, remains uncertain.

On a number of occasions, food or cooking utensils are used figuratively: in a textually problematic line (20.3) the speaker predicts that

19. “She spoke in Lydian: “Faskati krolel”, in Arshish, “your arse...” and my balls... she thrashed with a fig branch as though I was a scapegoat... fastened securely by forked pieces of wood(?)...and (I was caught?) between torments.. On the one side the fig branch.. me, descending from above, (and on the other side of my arse?) spattering with shit.. and my arse-hole stank. Dung beetles came buzzing at the smell, more than fifty of them...” Translated by D. E. Gerber, *Greek Iambic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass. 1999), 421-3.

20. *Ibid.*, 423.

21. Cf: “*Profert Oenothera scortum fascinum, quod ut oleo et minuto pipere atque urticae trito circumdedit semine, paulatim coepit inserere ano meo... Hoc crudelissima anus spargit subinde umore femina mea... Nasturcii sucum cum habrotono miscet perfusisque inguinibus meis viridis urticae fascem comprehendit omniaque infra umbilicum coepit lenta manu caedere.*”



his nemesis, Bupalus, will feed on “cursed bread” (*δυσώνυμον ἄρτον*), and in fr. 118 someone’s sound is likened to the burbling of boiling soup (*κύθρος ἔτνεος*). In fr. 86 the male genital is called “sausage.” Frequently the abuse is centered on sexual themes through the use of food imagery or imagery of food-producing plants: in fr. 50 someone is threatening to make the speaker *σύκινον*, that is, to make him similar to the wood of the fig-tree; the well-known porous quality of the fig-tree’s wood suggests pathic sexual promiscuity.<sup>22</sup> In fr. 36, the man who has foolishly devoured all his inheritance in luxurious meals is compared to a eunuch who is now forced to a much humbler fare. *εὐνοῦχος* here carries derogatory connotations associated with oriental luxury and softness, and there may be a hint in it of lack of maleness.<sup>23</sup> Fr. 69 has as its subject “a man, enemy of the gods, who used to despoil his sleeping mother’s sea urchin” (*τὸν θεοῖσιν ἐχθρὸν τοῦτον, ὃς κατευδόσης τῆς μητρὸς ἐσκύλευε τὸν βρύσσον*). The term *βρύσσο*s denotes not only a seafood delicacy but also female genitals.<sup>24</sup> In fr. 123 we read “and not to suck on a... dried fig” (*μηδὲ μοιμύλλειν... ἰσχάδ*): the context is missing but the reference is clearly sexual, indicating again female genitals.<sup>25</sup>

The motif of food is used even as a literary parody. Fr. 126 is a hexameter fragment consisting of 4 lines which satirize the gluttony of a boorish man in a way which consciously inverts the epic models.<sup>26</sup> Both the *Hiadand* the *Odyssey* begin with an invocation to the Muse to sing or tell the facts of the story, and so does Hipponax’s parody. Fr. 126 is particularly faithful to the structure of the opening lines of the *Odyssey*, in which: a) the Muse is invoked to tell the story, and b) the hero is identified through the explanatory force of a relative clause (“Tell me, Muse, about the man... who suffered much...”). In Hipponax the Muse is invoked to sing not of a heroic figure but of an atrocious gourmand:

*Μοῦσά μοι Εὐρυμεδοντιάδεω τὴν ποντοχάρυβδιν,  
τὴν ἐγγαστριμάχαιραν, ὃς ἐσθίει οὐ κατὰ κόσμον,*

22. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New York, Oxford 1991), 22.

23. In fr. 161 a eunuch is called *ἡμίανδρος*, that is, “half-male.”

24. There is an explicit charge of incest here, just as in fr. 20, in which Bupalus is accused of sleeping with his own mother (*μητροκοίτης*).

25. For the sexual connotations of *ἰσχάς*, cf. Henderson, 134 (above n.22); for *βρύσσο*s, *ibid*, 184.

26. Athenaeus (15.698b), who quotes the fragment, actually tells us that Hipponax is the inventor of parody.

ἐννεφ', ὅπως ψηφίδι <κακῇ> κακὸν οἶτον ὄληται  
βουλήι δημοσίηι παρὰ θιν' ἄλός ἀτρυνέτοιο.

A closer examination reveals other echoes from the *Odyssey* as well: Eurymedon is mentioned in the *Od.* 7.58ff. as the king of the Giants, but it seems unlikely that the topic here is mythological, since elsewhere Hipponax uses mythological references as derogatory remarks against enemies.<sup>27</sup> Charybdis is the monster which sucks the water of the sea (*Od.* 12.104), the connotation here being that the son of Eurymedon drinks excessively.<sup>28</sup> A third allusion is the arrival of Odysseus at the shore of the Phaeacians: but while the Phaeacian shore is a place marking the beginning of the restoration of the hero, here it becomes a dire place of destruction and death.

Taking into account the fact that Hipponax's corpus is very limited, the number of culinary references is stunning. To put it another way: the frequency of references to food in Hipponax is nine times higher than that in Archilochus and fourteen times higher than that in Semonides. Solon's poetry presents a more problematic case because, although it contains a substantial number of references to food, these are not ubiquitous, i.e., they occur in three fragments only. Hipponax, on the other hand, constitutes good evidence that, by the middle of the sixth century BC, food/eating has become one of the most pointed motifs of iambus.

The elimination of serious subject matter in the poetry of Hipponax and, at the same time, the emphasis on food, sex, and invective are not isolated incidents, the idiosyncratic thematic choice of an individual poet. There are strong indications that during the time of Hipponax there is serious reconsideration of the use of the traditional poetic genres and meters. The archaic metrical epitaphs and dedications, that is, epigraphic

27. Fr. 72 has as its subject the death of Rhesus on a chariot carried by Thracian horses near the towers of Troy. In fr. 105.10 we read ὕδρον ἐν Λέρνῃ which probably refers to the well-known Labor of Heracles. In the extremity mutilated fr. 108.6, we can still see the name Βάραγχος (soothsayer inspired by Apollo, ancestor of the Branchidai who were the guardians of the oracle of Didyma near Miletus).

28. There may be even a further negative connotation, since the Greeks make a distinction between civilized, measured drinking and unrestrained drinking, often associated with the barbarians. Cf., Archilochus fr. 42, in which the *fellatio* of a prostitute is likened to the eagerness with which the Thracians and Phrygians drink ale; in Archilochus fr. 124b, the addressee is chided, among other things, for drinking large amounts of wine, which, in addition, is undiluted.

material with strong elegiac tendencies (serious subject matter), which up to the middle of the sixth century appear rather frequently in iambic meter, almost cease to exist in that meter after that point, as if the iambic meter is no longer appropriate. In a similar way, the exiguous fragments of the later poets Ananius (sixth century), Hermippus (fifth century), and Euclides (fifth century) suggest that after the mid sixth century, iambs as a whole are dissociated from serious themes. On the other hand, there persists the same repeated use of culinary language and the other topics emphasized by Hipponax: Ananius in fr. 3, mentions figs (*σῦκα*) twice, the point being that a full stomach is to be preferred to gold; in fr. 4 the speaker swears by a cabbage (*ναὶ μὰ τὴν κρόμβην*; cf. Hipponax fr. 107); in fr. 5 he offers us a nine-line list of foods (fruits, meats, fish) some of which are identical to those appearing in fr. 36 of Hipponax.<sup>29</sup> Hermippus in fr. 2 makes a reference to a fig tree without figs. A scatological reference probably appears in Hermippus fr. 6 (text uncertain, but cf. Hartung's emendation *κοπρῶνος*). Sexual and abusive language occurs in almost all poets, and also occasional references to low class or profession.

Both the shift in epigraphical practice and the thematography of the later poets suggests that the absence of serious themes in Hipponax as well as his focus on food, sex, and abuse is the expression of a more general narrowing of iambus in the middle of the sixth century. It seems that it is this change in the character of iambus which is reflected in Aristotle's claim that iambus is abusive poetry: Aristotle describes the genre as it appears in its later stages, in his own day (fourth century), downplaying the fact that before the middle of the sixth century iambus is quite diverse in terms of thematic motifs and not unduly focused on food, invective, and such.

29. Ananius fr. 5:

*ἔαρι μὲν χρόμιος ἄριστος, ἀνθίης δὲ χειμῶνι·  
τῶν καλῶν δ' ὄψων ἄριστον καρίς ἐκ συκῆς φύλλου.  
ἦδ' ὃς ἐσθίειν χιμαίρης +φθινοπωρισμῶι κρέας·  
δέλφακος δ' ὅταν τραπέωσιν καὶ πατέωσιν ἐσθίειν,  
καὶ κυνῶν αὐτὴ τόθ' ὥρη καὶ λαγῶν κάλωπέκων.  
οἶός αὐθ', ὅταν θέρος τ' ἦι κῆχέται βαβράζωσιν·  
εἴτα δ' ἐστὶν ἐκ θαλάσσης θύννος οὐ κακὸν βρώμα,  
ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν ἰχθύεσσιν ἐμπρεπὴς ἐν μυσσωτῶι.  
βοῦς δὲ πιανθείς, δοκέω μὲν, καὶ μεσέων νυκτῶν ἦδ' ὅς  
κῆμέρης.*

*Χρόμιος* and *ἀνθίης* are kinds of fish not clearly identified, *καρίς* is a kind of shrimp.

The important question is, why this narrowing in the character of iambus, and why at this particular point of time? A confident answer eludes us, but a likely cause or contributing factor seems to be the invention of tragedy, a genre which from the beginning uses iambic meters. We know from the *Marmor Parium*, a long inscription from the third century BC, that the first official production of tragedy by Thespis took place in the context of the City Dionysia, a spring religious festival of Athens, ca. 535 BC. This date is slightly later than the dates we have for the *floruit* of Hipponax, the poet whose corpus makes it clear that iambus no longer contains serious subject matter. Allowing some time for rudimentary development before the first official performance, the birth of tragedy could be placed approximately at the same time as the thematic narrowing of iambus. Tragedy may have well absorbed the energy of the serious side of iambus. While down to the middle of the sixth century the archaic iambus is a Janus-like kind of poetry, with the appearance of tragedy one of its faces is lost. The reasons for its disappearance remain obscure, but perhaps the iambic poets felt that the space traditionally occupied by serious iambus was now taken by the new genre; either they adopted tragedy or, if they continued to write non-dramatic iambic verses, they focused on its “low” aspects. The energy of the narrowed iambus later fuels comedy, as is well recognized. Reading the plays of Aristophanes we have a sense of *déjà vu*, since we recognize again the culinary, sexual, and abusive motifs so familiar from the poetry of Hipponax.<sup>30</sup>

To summarize: the constant mention in Hipponax of food and eating is a symptom of his focus on the habits of a hungry underclass also given to promiscuity and invective - this to the exclusion of high reflections, either political or philosophical. Hipponax's narrowed thematography is not merely idiosyncratic, but reflects a sudden constriction of theme that is permanent and genre-wide - one that coincides with and is probably explained by the development of a new serious format, namely tragedy.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Cf., R. M. Rosen, *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition*, Atlanta 1988.

31. I would like to thank Niki Holmes Kantzios for her editorial eye. A version of this paper was presented at the 2nd Interdisciplinary Conference on Food Representation in Literature, Film, and the other Arts, at the University of Texas at San Antonio in February 2002.