Given the well known tendency of Hellenistic poets to situate their work in relation to poets and literary traditions of the past, it should come as no surprise to find a popular category of epigrams explicitly concerned with the poets of a by-gone era who had by the third century B.C. become classicized and canonical. Such epigrams could take a variety of forms, but broadly fell into two common types: those pretending to be tombstone epitaphs for famous poets now long dead, and those written in the form of inscriptions intended to accompany a statue of the poet.\(^1\) The epitaphic epigrams are often witty, finely polished literary \textit{jeux}, in keeping with contemporary aesthetics, and almost certainly not intended to elicit from the reader much in the way of funereal melancholy or wistful reflections on mortality, as certain sepulchral epigrams, both literary and inscribed, often did. Epigrams posing as subscriptions to statues of famous poets, as well, seem intended to raise a smile in the reader rather than to inspire any particularly deep reflection about their subject. But although slight in form and light in spirit, epigrams for famous dead poets reveal much not only about the literary tastes of the age, but also about the ways in which contemporary critics and readers conceptualized and evaluated the poetic genres that they had appropriated from distinguished practitioners of an earlier era.

As part of this \textit{hommage} to a grand literary past, we should expect to find, as indeed we do, epigrams about poets who had become classics by the Hellenistic period—Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, to name just a few. Hellenistic scholars had begun to organize and assess the works of such classic poets, establishing canons and hierarchies of aesthetic value, and reifying poetic genres into increasingly fixed categories. In the wake of all this philological activity, it is no wonder that contemporary poets felt self-conscious about their own place within

a literary tradition that now had acquired an articulable history. The reverence shown for the poets judged to be the best within this history bears some similarity to modern attitudes toward Shakespeare or Dickens or Joyce—all towering literary figures whose legacy any serious writer in English must confront in one way or another, much as any Hellenistic poet who chose to write epic, for example, would have to confront Homer.

Somewhat more curious, however, are those epigrams that concerned two poets, Archilochus (seventh century B.C.) and Hipponax (sixth century B.C.), who composed _iamboi_, an essentially comedic genre, famous in antiquity for its predilection for obscenity, mockery and often aggressive satire, for its frequent amalgamation of high and low diction, and its fondness for parody of more “elevated” literature. It is not so much that these poets had become particularly obscure by the Hellenistic period—Archilochus, in fact, had become in some circles, at least, a revered, canonical author even by the fifth century, and even the more pervasively rakish Hipponax enjoyed unbroken notoriety into the third century—but their roguish posturing and playful irreverence might make them seem at first glance an odd subject for epigrammatic celebration. Were the epigrams on iambographic poets written out of admiration for this type of poetry? Were they intended themselves to mock such poets, or perhaps to offer serious commentary on the iambus? What aspects of the iambus were these epigrams trying to capture within their brief compass? As we shall see in this chapter, while the number of extant epigrams on Archilochus and Hipponax is relatively small, when taken together they offer a fairly consistent pattern of responses to the iambus, which accords well with the aesthetic sensibilities that we have come to associate with this period.

It is somewhat artificial, of course, to speak of Archilochus and Hipponax in the same breath as if they were almost interchangeable representatives of a uniform literary tradition. Aside from the fact that they were chronologically separated from each other by a century and came from different places (Archilochus was from Paros, Hipponax from Ephesus), their surviving fragments make it clear that the character of

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2 The fragments of Archilochus and Hipponax are collected in West (1989: vol. 1). For the text of Archilochus, see also Tarditi (1968); for Hipponax, see Degani (1991), with Degani (1984).
4 See Degani (1973) and (1995).