Introduction
Greek comedy as a fabric of generic discourse
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> Tragedy is a lucky kind of poetry in every respect (μακάριον . . . ποίημα κατὰ πάντ'). First of all, the plots (οἱ λόγοι) are known to the spectators, even before anyone opens their mouth. The only thing the poet has to do is to refresh their memory (ὑπομνῆσαι). I just need to say Oedipus, and they know the rest . . . When the tragic poets are short of things to say and have completely run out of ideas in their plays (ὅταν . . . κομιδῇ δ' ἀπειρήκωσιν ἐν τοῖς δράμασιν), they just lift the *mechane* like a finger and this is enough for the spectators (καὶ τοῖς θεωμένοισιν ἀποχρώντως ἔχει). But we don't have such an easy life (ἡμῖν δὲ ταῦτ' οὐκ ἔστιν). We need to invent everything (ἀλλὰ πάντα δεῖ εὑρεῖν): new names (ὀνόματα καινά), what happened in the past (τὰ διῳκημένα πρότερον), what's going on now (τὰ νῦν παρόντα), the resolution (τὴν καταστροφήν), the prologue (τὴν εἰσβολήν).
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> (Antiph. fr. 189.1–6, 13–20)

In these few lines from the only extant fragment of Antiphanes' *Poiesis*, an unidentified character (probably a personification of Poetry or Comedy)[1] launches into a tirade on generic unfairness. Tragedy resorts to a pre-packaged repertoire of subject matters and stage devices to release dramatic products that never disappoint the spectators' expectations. Comedy, on the other hand, is always confronted with the challenge of concocting original plots and new theatrical artifices easily liable to audience disapproval. The rhetorical strategy behind this *synkrisis* of tragedy and comedy seems to flip the terms of a *recusatio*. Instead of exposing its 'low' status and lamenting its inability to take up the demanding tasks required of 'high' genres, comedy advertises its artistic superiority and purports to lay bare the injustice of an audience-based hierarchy of genres that devalues the hard-won inventiveness of the comic poets. It is evident that, by approaching

[1] See most recently N. W. Slater 1995: 37–9 and Olson 2007: 172–3.

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genre in such explicit terms, the mouthpiece of comedy speaking in this fragment is adopting the righteous stance of the abject hero, the innocent victim of social abuse and marginalization that comic poets assume as a favourite mode of authorial self-positioning.[2]

In this respect Antiphanes' fragment, even if narrowly focused on tragedy, offers a privileged entry point into some of the distinctive features of Greek comedy's interactions with the whole generic landscape of archaic and classical literature. The high degree of self-awareness that the surviving comic texts bring to their dialogues with this wide range of traditions turns Greek comedy into a fabric of generic discourse that sets the terms of the theory and practice of genre in antiquity.[3] This book considers Greek comedy's interactions with different traditions, both literary and non-literary, by situating them within a unified interpretative framework. It explores some of the ways in which Greek, especially Aristophanic, comedy employs the self-reflexive discourse of genre, turning it into a primary imaginative force and an essential tool of poetic self-representation. By absorbing diverse strands of tradition, which are made to confront and comment on each other, Greek comedy constructs and projects its literary existence.[4]

Although, as is well known, the first explicit theoretical reflections on literary genre date back to Plato and Aristotle,[5] Greek comedy prefigures these concerns in many ways. Over the entire chronological arc of Greek comedy, generic issues are raised and made the subject of poetic discourse. As the Antiphanes fragment eloquently shows, confrontation between genres can infiltrate even dramatic dialogue. It can also morph into an overarching plot device, casting actors in the role of individual genres, or operate as a pervasive subtext, investing characters with parallel metaliterary identities.[6] In other words, Greek comedy engages in a programmatic 'theatralisation

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[2] On this characteristic stance of the comic voice cf. esp. Rosen and Baines 2002: 115–26 and Rosen 2007, *passim.*

[3] On the connections between 'genre' and (intertextual) 'dialogue' see Bakhtin 1981. On the relevance of Bakhtinian dialogism to the ancient practice and theory of genre cf. Farrell 2003: 391–2, Branham 2002, Whitmarsh 2006: 106–9; on the application of Bakhtinian theory to Old Comedy see Dobrov 2001 and Platter 2007.

[4] For a theoretical discussion of this function of genre, see Depew and Obbink 2000: 2–3.

[5] Depew and Obbink 2000: 3 remark that 'theorizing about genre rose quite apart from conceptualizations of genre that were production- and performance-based'.

[6] The most emblematic instances of this tendency are Aristophanes' *Frogs* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*, but many other plays of Old Comedy must have featured scenes of intergeneric confrontation. In Cratinus' *Archilochoi*, for example, epic was probably pitted against *iambos* in the course of the *agon* (cf. Bakola 2010: 71–2). See also Wright and Telò in this volume.

of genre.'[7] While doing so, it also appropriates, manipulates and ridicules ancient discourse on literary criticism.[8]

Commenting on *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Helene Foley has observed that in this play 'comedy moves closer than before to intertwining as well as competing with tragedy'.[9] Foley's observation fits in well with scholarly approaches to other Aristophanic comedies (such as *Knights*, *Clouds*, *Peace* and *Frogs*) which have also shown that in its obsessive process of self-definition comedy tends not only to antagonize but also to absorb other genres.[10] Foley's use of the verb 'intertwining', however, is particularly apt for comedy's systematic incorporation of elements from other literary forms. 'Intertwining' builds on a metaphor that evokes the ideas of crossbreeding and hybridization, which are associated with the concept of *Kreuzung der Gattungen*.[11] The biological paradigm of the *Kreuzung*, which positivistic scholarship recognized as the driving force behind the Hellenistic literary system, relies on the belief in the existence of pure and uncontaminated poetic forms, which allegedly second-rate (or at least epigonal) authors commingle as a remedy for their dearth of originality. Yet, as scholars have pointed out, the implausibility of this model of 'generic engineering'[12] is demonstrated precisely by the flexible, anti-essentialist idea of genre[13] reflected in Cratinus' famous coinage Εὐριπιδαριστοφανίζειν (fr. 342).[14] Old Comedy paves the way for later enterprises of generic codification and classification,[15] but even before the rise of such enterprises it undermines any essentialist position about genre by presenting genre-intertwining not as artificial crossbreeding, but as the necessary condition of literary self-consciousness and definition.

The postmodernist revaluation of *Kreuzung* in Hellenistic and Roman literature has shifted attention from 'genres as begetting genres to texts

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[7] Barchiesi 2000: 167, who applies this concept to the generic system of Augustan literature.

[8] On this point see N. O'Sullivan 1992 and Hubbard 2007; on comedy's role in ancient literary criticism see Hunter 2009a: 10–52.

[9] Foley 2008: 24.

[10] See, for instance, Hall 2006: 321–52 (on *Peace*); Rosen 2004 (on *Frogs*) and 1988: 59–84 (on *Knights*); Silk 1993 (on *Clouds*). See also Vetta 1983, Zanetto 2001, Biles 2011: 12–55.

[11] For a stimulating reassessment of this concept see Barchiesi 2001.

[12] We borrow this expression from Barchiesi 2001: 145.

[13] On generic anti-essentialism cf. Bakhtin 1981, Derrida 1980 and, with particular reference to ancient literature, Hinds 2000; Barchiesi 2001: 153–5; Farrell 2003: 391–6; Harrison 2007: 11–18; Rotstein 2010: 1–16.

[14] On Cratin. fr. 342 see most recently Bakola 2010: 24–9. For the loosening of generic boundaries in late fifth-century Athens see Gibert 1999–2000, Revermann 2006b and Foley 2008.

[15] Foley 2008: 26: 'it seems likely that comedy played, because it could and needed to defend itself, the critical public role . . . in popularizing generic aims and differences'.

as mobilizing genres', laying emphasis on 'how texts construct and invoke
genres, and re-create a genealogy, not on how literary species transmute and
survive.'[16] This concern with genealogy holds a central position in Greek
comedy's own negotiations with other literary traditions, which constantly
foreground a 'kinship versus otherness' dialectic. The antagonistic attitude
of Antiphanes' fragment does not exhaust the range of stances that the
Greek comic texts adopt in engaging with these literary and non-literary
traditions. Comedy sets its voice not only *against*, but also *alongside* that of
other genres, putting on a 'drama of appropriation and legitimization'[17] that
unfolds through the reconstruction of its origins and the impersonation of
its ancestors.[18]

This volume sets out to enhance our appreciation of Greek comedy's
generic receptivity by following in the footsteps of recent scholarship that
has illuminated the sophisticated strategies of self-positioning at work in
comic texts' exchanges with other genres.[19] We have now come to the
point where generic interaction in comedy is not understood as amount-
ing only (or mainly) to its engagement with tragedy. On the contrary,
it is gradually entering scholarly consciousness that the comic genre is
voracious and multifarious in its interactions with generic discourse. The
present collection, therefore, shifts the focus from tragedy as the privileged
or even exclusive object of intertextual investigation to a wider spectrum
of genres.[20] Although in articulating its generic identity Greek comedy
assigns to tragedy the role of an obligatory point of reference, as the frag-
ment of Antiphanes' *Poiesis* indicates, the interactions with tragedy need
to be understood within the wider fabric of comedy's generic discourse.
Through a more comprehensive (and less tragedy-centred) approach to
comic texts' 'echoes of genre', we aim to show that in incorporating and
manipulating other traditions comedy displays the same degree of self-
consciousness and creativity that it deploys when it confronts its dramatic
sister-genre.

Consequently, the chapters of this volume attempt to reach beyond
comedy's favourite self-definition as τρυγῳδία and to examine how its

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[16] Barchiesi 2001: 155.   [17] Barchiesi 2001: 157.
[18] Platter 2007 conceptualizes Old Comedy's intergeneric dialogism through the Bakhtinian opposition
between 'high' and 'low'. But Old Comedy thrives on staging its generic kinship with *iambos* – as
the emblematic case of Cratinus' *Archilochoi* shows (see Rosen in this volume) – and high traditions
as well. On Aristophanes' affiliations with Odyssean epic and Hesiodic didactic see Telò in this
volume.
[19] For comedy and tragedy, see in particular Foley 1988; Sfyroeras 1995; Zeitlin 1996: 375–416; D. P.
Fowler 1997: 28–9; Gibert 1999–2000; Dobrov 2001: 37–53; Bakola 2010: 118–79; Telò 2010. For
comedy and other genres, see nn. 10 and 21.
[20] Even Platter's most recent investigation of Aristophanes' 'carnival of genres' (Platter 2007) is mainly
focused on tragedy (on his approach see above, n. 18).

'kinship versus otherness' dialectic plays into the interactions with other traditions, literary and non-literary. In other words, the individual chapters try to determine by what means and with what results comedy projects its *trugedic* stance even when it sets itself against other generic matrices. In this way, this volume hopes to enrich the picture of comedy's generic self-awareness and to open up new avenues for interpreting the ways in which comic texts construct their identity by thematizing genre.

Our attempt to reconstruct comedy's fabric of generic discourse proceeds along three main trajectories. The first part of the volume ('Comedy and genre: self-definition and development') endeavours to recover some of the governing principles of this fabric by addressing the questions of generic self-definition and evolution from a theoretical standpoint (Silk) and through exemplary case studies (Csapo; Rosen). Key to this section is the ever-changing relationship between context and text: in particular the contributions of this section all discuss, from complementary perspectives, how and in what degree contextual determination affects the generic identity of the comic text. To what extent does *context*, understood both as a socio-cultural background and the material conditions of the performance, shape and condition the generic identity of the comic *text*? How does comic poetry's inclusion of non-literary forms influence the textual configuration of literary identity and foster generic development? Finally, what criteria define comedy's notions of generic dependence and affiliation? Within this framework, Silk's paper ('The Greek dramatic genres: theoretical perspectives') provides an important starting point by drawing attention to three essential factors for a proper understanding of the generic system of classical drama and, in particular, comedy's self-positioning: (1) the interplay between *context* and *text*; (2) the impact of non-literary or sub-literary culture on the historical development of dramatic genres, with special attention paid to comedy; (3) the role played by value judgements in the ancient and modern assessments of tragedy, comedy and satyr drama. These hermeneutic conundrums are central to the interpretation of the surviving, never staged version of *Clouds*, whose lack of 'contextual authority' evinces, as the paper suggests, Aristophanes' intention to present the play as a generic hybrid (a 'tragicomedy' or a 'comitragedy').

The importance of comedy's interaction with non-literary genres and the need to extend our definition of its context to include the other Dionysiac choruses contemporary with the comic performances held at the Athenian Dionysia are at the heart of Csapo's contribution ('Comedy and the *Pompe*: Dionysian genre-crossing'). Nine Attic vase-paintings (some of them previously unpublished), which date from *c.* 480 to *c.* 380 BC, are shown to

represent choruses of phallic entertainers at the *Pompe* of the Dionysia. This identification is a springboard for re-examining how the phallic processions may have influenced the evolution of the comic genre and how comedy in its turn may have contributed to shaping the form of these phallic performances. Finally, Rosen ('*Iambos*, comedy and the question of generic affiliation') revisits the topic of his book *Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition*. Building on recent scholarship on iambography, Rosen addresses the thorny questions of what generic dependence really entails and what kind of 'work' (as in Aristotle's *ergon*) a genre is supposed to do. Approaching the two genres, comedy and *iambos*, with these questions in mind allows us to conceptualize a close generic relationship between them that relies less on lexical similarities than on the literary dynamics that govern all forms of comedy rooted in satire. Despite obvious differences between *iambos* and Old Comedy in literary form, performative structures or even localized social function, they remain powerfully and uniquely affiliated as genres of satire in ways that go well beyond whatever surface similarities we may detect in them.

The second part of the volume ('Comedy and genres in dialogue') scrutinizes comedy's interactions with some specific traditions (epic, lyric, tragedy, fable, ethnography) through new or hitherto underexplored approaches. Scholars have long acknowledged comedy's intertextual engagement with the two major genres of archaic Greek literature, namely epic and lyric. Yet the investigation of such an engagement has rarely moved beyond the survey of isolated verbal borrowings and the mere recognition of their parodic valence.[21] Recent studies on paratragedy have brought to the fore the complexity of comedy's intertextual referentiality and elucidated the forms of detailed and intense allusiveness that comic dramatists put to use in their plays.[22] Building on this sophisticated model of comic dialogism, the chapters of this section that are focused on epic (Revermann; Telò) and lyric (Carey; Rawles) highlight the appropriative gestures foregrounded by the comic exchanges with these traditions. In particular, they analyse significant examples of the strategies by which

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[21] The investigation of Old Comedy's engagement with lyric poetry that is offered in the helpful study of Kugelmeier 1996 is emblematic of this approach; Platter 2007: 108–42 examines significant aspects of Aristophanes' appropriation of epic but without detailed intertextual analysis. See, on the other hand, Rosen 1988 (on comedy and *iambos*), Biles 2002 (on Cratinus and Archilochus, in particular), Hall 2006: 341–52 (on comedy, lyric and epic), Bakola 2008 (on comedy and the poetic 'I' of archaic lyric). See also Biles 2011: 12–55.

[22] As remarked by D. P. Fowler 1997: 29 n. 25, Aristophanic comedy is 'significantly intertextual with its tragic source-text down to the level of the marked use of particles'. On the study of paratragedy in Old Comedy see the bibliography quoted above, n. 19.

comedy conjures different strands of epic and lyric tradition, mobilizes
and distorts their techniques of generic self-representation. This approach
has important bearings on our understanding of epic and lyric as well, as it
casts retrospective light on their modes of textual self-construction, brings
out their manipulation of generic boundaries and discloses the implicit dia-
logues between different strands of tradition that lie behind the evolution
of the literary system.

In particular, Revermann's and Telò's chapters both investigate the vari-
ety of ways in which comedy, ever the self-interested and self-promoting
genre, capitalizes on the specific cultural valence of epic poetry (Homer and
Hesiod). Revermann's chapter ('Paraepic comedy: point(s) and practices')
analyses comedy's relationship with Homer and the Epic Cycle, and seeks
to situate it relative to comedy's dialogue with tragedy and satyr-play. Two
claims are at the core of Revermann's argument: (1) comedy exploits the
specific cultural valence of epic poetry, which is higher and of a differ-
ent order from that of comedy's performative rivals, tragedy and satyr-play;
(2) by contrast with tragedy, comedy's interaction with epic tends to oscillate
between two poles. Comedy is either more 'Homer-centric' than tragedy
(that is, its focus is on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, while tragedians show a
greater interest in the Epic Cycle) or it tends towards what the author calls
'epic modality', a looser form of genre interaction that conjures an epic
atmosphere for the recipient through a combination of metre, Homeric
Kunstsprache, dramatic character, plot and situation. This interaction does
not follow one single template but needs to be teased out in each case.

In a complementary way, Telò's chapter ('Epic, *nostos* and generic geneal-
ogy in Aristophanes' *Peace*') explores the strategies of generic self-definition
in the finale of *Peace*, where a rhapsodic contest takes place between a war-
addicted boy obsessed with Iliadic epic and a peace-oriented and Hesiod-
inspired paternal figure acted out by Trygaeus. Telò shows how, in framing
the strife between the boy and Trygaeus as an intergenerational conflict
between a Homeric son and a Hesiodic father, Aristophanes is appropriat-
ing a central moment of the *epipolesis* of Book 4 of the *Iliad* and transmuting
it into a literary-critical comparison. The author suggests that what is at
issue in the *mise en scène* of this intergenerational encounter is the tracing of
the genealogical tree of Aristophanic poetic identity. Aristophanes presents
Hesiod as an ancestor of the iambic-comic mode, but he also dramatizes
the Homeric roots of Hesiodic poetry and in this way he brings to the
surface the Homeric origins of the comic self.

Comedy's complex dialogue with the lyric voice, monodic and choral,
is the overarching theme of Carey's and Rawles' chapters. Carey's chapter

('Comedy and the civic chorus') challenges the common view of the comic chorus as a distinctly civic voice. A comparison with non-dramatic choruses reveals that the comic chorus appropriates a civic choral mood in a highly selective and idiosyncratic way. Non-dramatic choral performances generally present the undivided voice of the polis, with some important exceptions, most notably epinician poetry. Comedy straddles this divide within the tradition, slipping into and out of the civic voice at will. The comic chorus frequently defines itself as distinct from and at odds with the polis but can also approximate the more conventional choral civic voice. This complexity of the comic choral voice reflects comedy's awareness of its ability to create new effects with traditional forms of expression.

Rawles' contribution ('Aristophanes' Simonides: lyric models for praise and blame') shifts the focus to comedy's interaction with the epinician tradition. While previous scholarship has looked mainly at Aristophanes' Pindar in terms of comedy's indebtedness to the lyric tradition, Rawles explores the ways in which Aristophanes uses a strikingly democratic Simonides as an advocate of a comic poetics of praise and blame. Differently from Pindar and Bacchylides, Simonides constructs epinician as both blame of the defeated and praise for the victor. The author argues that we should see Aristophanes' Simonides as one possible route to our own view of the earlier poet, but as a highly selective one, focusing on aspects of Simonides that facilitated an analogy between a Simonidean and a comic poetics.

Three chapters (Wright, Bakola, Fantuzzi and Konstan) illuminate comedy's much-discussed relationship with tragedy by exploring, among other themes, its reflections of and on socio-political discourse. Genre has been aptly defined as 'the mediating term between the literary work and the various cultural discourses and social functions within which literature operates.'[23] The first two contributions show that comedy uses social conflict to trope the agonistic dimension of its intergeneric engagement with tragedy, but it also capitalizes on this engagement to participate in the socio-political arena of the democratic polis. In 'Comedy versus tragedy in *Wasps*' Wright argues that this intergeneric contest is what lies behind the multiple thematic contests of the plot (father–son, old–young, aristocracy–democracy). The lower genre presents itself as a serious challenger to the higher genre, and Aristophanic comedy implicitly emerges as superior not just to other comedy but to tragedy as well in both its literary and its social dimensions.

[23] Segal in Conte 1994: xiii.

Bakola's reading of *Plutoi* ('Crime and punishment: Cratinus, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and the metaphysics and politics of wealth') assesses how generic identity may be mapped onto contemporary perceptions of 'classic' tragedy as well as cultural change. Cratinus' engagement with Aeschylus' *Oresteia* shows how comedy engaged with a timeless theme of Aeschylean tragedy while at the same time using Aeschylus to respond to contemporary political and economic concerns of the Athenian society of the 420s. Furthermore, given the importance of Aeschylean poetics for the comedy of Cratinus, *Plutoi* constitutes further evidence for the self-positioning of the comic author in relation to the tragic master as a 'classic' and may suggest the comic poet's appropriation of an Aeschylean anti-hegemonic political stance in his persona.

In 'From Achilles' horses to a cheese-seller's shop: on the history of the guessing game in Greek drama' Fantuzzi and Konstan illustrate the functioning of generic discourse in Menander by examining a case of tragic interaction that not only illustrates his Aristophanic self-positioning[24] against a tragic model but also lays bare the comic potential of the original tragedy. A generic variation of the dramatic guessing-game motif shows that in the *Perikeiromene* Menander defines the boundaries of comedy against the background of Pseudo-Euripides' *Rhesus*, a unique example of hyper-epic tragedy. What is gained from this analysis is a better understanding not only of the Menandrian play, but of *Rhesus* as well. In fact, Menander's reception of this play enables us to situate the Pseudo-Euripidean scene between Hector and Dolon alongside the Aristophanic versions of the guessing game in *Acharnians*, *Wasps* and *Frogs*.

The interconnections of genre and social discourse are also at play in Old Comedy's dialogue with the fable tradition. As Hall's chapter ('The Aesopic in Aristophanes') argues, Aristophanes' absorption of the Aesopic mode lies at the core of his generic persona and is at the root of some of his distinctive ideological postures. In particular, Hall explores how Aesopic fables are used in Aristophanic comedy (above all *Acharnians*, *Knights*, *Wasps* and *Peace*) to trigger humorous 'knowingness' as a strategy for social and ideological manipulation. Classical scholars generally agree that the fables reflect at some level their origins as low or popular culture, oral stories generated and circulated by slaves and lower-class individuals in antiquity, while paradoxically often reaffirming the slave-owning agenda in their validation of *force majeure*. The author instead proposes that the

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[24] On the continuities between Old and New Comedy see Csapo 2000.

socially low knowingness in which this apparent paradox is expressed is the greatest debt ancient comedy owes to Aesop. This stance may even take us into an intergeneric dialogue of a far more ancient and international kind, since fables in what is similar to an Aesopic form appear in Sumerian, Akkadian and Aramaic texts from the third millennium onwards.

Comedy's creative incorporation of paraliterary forms is also instantiated by Aristophanes' dialogue with ethnography, as Rusten shows in 'The mirror of Aristophanes: the winged ethnographers of *Birds* (1470–93, 1553–64, 1694–1705)'. This dialogue converts comedy's construction of its generic self into an exploration of the intersections between utopia and para-history. Aristophanes' absorption of ethnographic discourse raises the question: to what extent can ethnography be regarded as a parodic version of historiography? Furthermore, in *Birds* Aristophanes' customary exercise in generic self-definition draws upon the subversion of ethnography's identity–alterity dialectic.

The third and final part of the volume ('The reception of comedy and comic discourse') maps out two significant aspects of the reception of comedy's discourse on genre outside the world of drama. If it is true that our readings of ancient texts 'are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected',[25] the understanding of comedy's generic identity has to be inscribed against the background of its interpretations and reinterpretations throughout antiquity. The concept of genre as 'a succession of texts within a continuous process of horizon-setting and horizon-changing'[26] is itself bound up with the hermeneutics of reception. The reception of comedy is investigated here as a twofold phenomenon that provides insights not only into the diachronic making of comic identity, but also into the ways in which comedy's fabric of generic discourse is re-employed and manipulated by later genres to articulate their strategies of self-definition. Offering a comprehensive survey of the appropriations of comedy in antiquity is beyond the scope of this volume. We concentrate, instead, on two key moments of its critical reception, which mark crucial and similar turning points in the history of the ancient visions and revisions of comedy.

Both contributions in this section (Prauscello, Lowe) consider the reflection on comedy in genres (Platonic philosophy and Hellenistic scholarship) that programmatically adopt a prescriptive and normative viewpoint and may even exhibit a 'hostile' attitude towards comic discourse. How do self-declared 'enemies' of comedy (such as Plato) or practitioners of the

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[25] Martindale 1993: 7.   [26] Skoie 2006: 102, referring to Jauss' *Rezeptiontheorie*.