

Herodas' *Mimiamb* 1

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THE *First Mimiamb* is probably the most familiar of Herodas' extant works. Metriche, sitting in her home, is visited by her old friend Gyllis; Mandris, the lover or perhaps the husband of Metriche,¹ has been gone for the past ten months in Egypt. After an exchange of pleasantries and commonplaces, Gyllis comes to the point of her visit: it is clear to her that Mandris has been captured by the charms of Alexandria and will not return; but Metriche should know that she has a secret admirer, a certain Gryllos, who has seen her at a recent festival and fallen in love. Gyllis recommends that Metriche yield to Aphrodite and accept him as her new lover. Metriche, however, firmly refuses: she will not make a laughing-stock of Mandris. After a farewell drink, Gyllis departs.

So much for the simple plot; and yet the listener will be struck by certain indicators which, if taken individually, perhaps signify little, but as a group seem to point in a particular direction. Metriche, for example, wonders at the suddenness of Gyllis' unexpected arrival; it is explicitly like the apparition of a god: *τίς σε μοῖρ' ἔπεισ' ἔλθειν* (8), *τί σὺ θεὸς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους* (9), *σε, Γυλλίς, οὐδ' ὄναρ, . . . πρὸς τὴν θύρην ἔλθοῦσαν εἶδέ τις ταύτην* (11–12). Six times in the course of the dialogue the interlocutors swear oaths: twice (11, 66) by the Moirai, whom Rose has argued we are to understand in this context as goddesses of fertility;² twice (69, 86) by the goddess Demeter; once (85) by *μᾶ*, probably the Mother of the gods;³ and once (32) by *τὴν Ἄιδεω Κούρην*, taken most natu-

¹ Opinions vary: J. A. NAIRN, *The Mimes of Herodas* (Oxford 1904) 1, and P. GROENEBOOM, *Les Mimiambes d'Hérodas I–VI* (Groningen 1922) 35, for example, assert that Metriche is wife; on the other hand, I. C. CUNNINGHAM, *Herodas Mimiambi* (Oxford 1971) 57, repeating a view stated in CR n.s. 15 (1965) 7 n.1, argues that she is probably a *ἑταίρα*. The evidence is minimal, but Cunningham's view seems more likely: to the implication of line 89, which he notes, we may add 58–59: that Gryllos makes his approach through the bawd. In addition to the above-mentioned works, the following will be referred to by author's or editor's name: O. CRUSIUS, *Untersuchungen zu den Mimiamben des Herodas* (Leipzig 1892) and *Herodas, The Mimes and Fragments*, ed. W. HEADLAM and A. D. KNOX (Cambridge 1922). The text used here is that of Cunningham.

² H. J. Rose, "Quaestiones Herodae," *CQ* 17 (1923) 32.

³ So, e.g., Groeneboom 65, Headlam 59, and Rose (*supra* n.2) 33.

rally as “Kore, the wife of Hades.”⁴ Further, at line 56 the festival at which Gryllos first saw and fell in love with Metriche is identified: *κάθοδος τῆς Μίσης*, “lediglich eine Doublette der *κάθοδος τῆς Κόρης*,” *i.e.*, the second day of the Thesmophoria.⁵ As for the goddess Mise, it appears from the few sources which survive about her that she plays a role equivalent to that more familiarly played by Iambe or Baubo: she is the hostess of the grieving Demeter who persuades the goddess to break her fast of mourning for the kidnapped Kore.⁶ Although it is of course commonplace for lovers first to see each other at religious celebrations—Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2 is a familiar example⁷—we nonetheless note in this instance particularly that Metriche’s rejection of Gryllos’ offer of love is associated with a festival in which a descent to the underworld is specifically celebrated.

The associations hinted at thus far in a number of minor, albeit consistent, details appear to be correlated with what is the primary leitmotif of the mime: the theme of on-coming old age. So, for example, at lines 15–16 “old age draws me down and the *σκιή* [here to be understood of age rather than death]⁸ stands beside me”; or at 67, “the whiteness of your hair dulls your mind.” So also at 38 the ash of decay threatens to gulp down Metriche’s bloom, and at 63 she is advised to act lest soon old age look upon her—perhaps from a mirror⁹—unawares. In a similar vein, it appears, are lines 42–43: when ‘He’ comes—presumably ‘Death’—no one will raise us up.¹⁰ Individually these many details are each unremarkable, but taken together they are sufficient in both number and consistency to establish an unmistakable undertone by which this ordinary situation is made to relate to the seasonal and

⁴ So, *e.g.*, Groeneboom 49 and Headlam 29, although Nairn 6, following an earlier suggestion of Headlam in *CR* 13 (1899) 151, argues for Hekate.

⁵ Crusius 18; see further Groeneboom 57 and Headlam 42.

⁶ See Cunningham 72 and J. Stern, “Herodas’ *Mimiamb* 6,” *GRBS* 20 (1979) 251 with references in notes 19 and 20. For the cult of Demeter in early Ptolemaic Egypt see J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff 1970) 91–92.

⁷ See further Headlam 40; a close parallel is cited by Crusius 17: Dioscorides, *Anth.Pal.* 5.193.

⁸ Early editors, *e.g.*, Nairn 4, Headlam 19–20, and Groeneboom 42, understand *σκιή* of Death; but *cf.* Cunningham 62 and G. Giangrande, “Interpretation of Herodas,” *QUCC* 15 (1973) 85. Throughout the mime old age appears worse than death; see Groeneboom 51 *ad* 38: “Gyllis effraye apparemment Métriché non pas par l’image d’une mort prochaine mais plutôt d’une vieillesse qui s’approche.”

⁹ Groeneboom 59, unnecessarily disputed by Cunningham 74.

¹⁰ Crusius 12 suggested that *κείνος* in 42 must be Death; his view is widely accepted: *e.g.*, Groeneboom 52, Headlam 36, Cunningham 70. The other view, that *κείνος* = Mandris (Nairn 7) is rebutted by Cunningham.

life cycles which form the basis of so much that is familiar in Greek religion. It is an undertone of which we may well imagine the characters themselves are unaware, but which Herodas' more sophisticated audience is intended to appreciate.

When we turn to the individual characters the analogue becomes more precise. First Metriche, whose name derives from *Μήτηρ*:¹¹ she acts the role of the sorrowful beloved who awaits her lover's return and until he does she will not engage in sex nor even leave her home (76). Like Hera at Stymphalos (Paus. 8.22.2) or Aphrodite in Ps.-Bion's *Lament for Adonis* 59, Metriche, after having served as wife, plays the role of the grieving *χήρα*; this is clearly indicated at 21–22:

*κόσπον τιν' ἤδη χηραίνεις
χρόνον μόνη τρύχουσα τὴν μίαν κοίτην;*

Secondly, as for Mandris: from the role being played by the grieving Metriche it follows that he is acting in the mime the part of the absent seasonal youth-god whose return is awaited. As Mise had at line 56 a *κάθοδος*, so Mandris has a *κατάπλωσις* (68); we may note that here this rare noun is joined with the goddess Demeter in Metriche's oath. In addition to the usual translation, "I swear by Mandris' sailing home," we should on the level being described here also understand "by Mandris' sailing down": so, for example, in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* the descent into Hades is called a *κατάπλους*; elsewhere the death of Adonis specifically is characterized as a journey on the sea.¹² If then Mandris has had a 'sailing down', to where else should it be but an *οἶκος τῆς θεοῦ* (26)¹³ whose first specific virtue is said to be its *πλοῦτος* (28)?

Mandris thus is the lover absent—in the sacral sense 'dead'; on the other hand Gryllos, on whose behalf the bawd has come, is the would-be lover, who is still at the moment a virgin. On the surface the two are portrayed as essentially similar. For example, at lines 28–30 Mandris is imagined to be attracted in Egypt *inter alia* by the gold, wrestling, glory, tranquility, and *temenos* of the deified

¹¹ J. C. Austin, "The Significant Name in Herodas," *TAPA* 53 (1922) xvii; Groeneboom 36. For names with the termination *-ιχος* see L. Robert, *Hellenica* 11–12 (Paris 1960) 238 with n.3.

¹² Lucian, *Dial.Mort.* 10.9, 10.13; cf. Dioscorides, *Anth.Pal.* 5.193.4; Theoc. 15.133, on which see the comments of A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* (Cambridge 1952) 2.298. For the view that *κατάπλωσις* (68) = "by Mandris' sailing home" see Groeneboom 61, Headlam 50.

¹³ On the surface the goddess is obviously Aphrodite (Crusius 7, Groeneboom 45, Headlam 23), but the form of expression allows the secondary implication suggested here.

siblings;¹⁴ so we learn of Gryllos at 51–54 that he is wealthy, a victorious athlete, a quiet fellow, and a frequenter of religious rites. On the human level, no doubt, Mandris and Gryllos are distinct and indeed Metriche's rejection of the latter is apparently motivated by her love for the former. But in the analogous sacral sense it appears that Gryllos and Mandris, already established as similar in their habits, are opposite sides of the same coin: the one, Mandris, has passed his prime and has gone; the other, Gryllos, although we are told at 51–53 that he has advanced through the stages of life in athletic competition from child to youth to man, remains an "untouched seal in love" (55).¹⁵ Had Metriche accepted the bawd's offer, her union with the virgin Gryllos—he who is said to be "dying in his love" (60)—would apparently have had sacral overtones: this at least is the apparent meaning of line 83, ἔκη[τι] τῶν ἰρῶν, although the context at this point is not clear.¹⁶ In the meantime Metriche sits, the bloom beginning to pass, old age imminent, lamenting the one lover gone and gently rejecting the other, who is not yet ready: at the death of her consort the goddess becomes χήρα; upon his return as immature male, she becomes patient 'maid'; only when he reaches sexual maturity can she again become 'wife'. In the course of this mime Metriche moves from the first to the second state, but not yet to the third.

It remains to discuss Gyllis, the bawd. In her we may see—borrowing from a different seasonal cult—a reference to the grotesque old woman whose mythic task is to seduce the grieving goddess from her sorrow: so Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 195ff; she appears also as Baubo, the obscene old hostess whose myth is central to Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6;¹⁷ apparently comparable is Mise, whose 'Descent' is mentioned at line 56 of this

¹⁴ For an effective rebuttal of the view that lines 28, 30, and 31 are interpolated see I. C. Cunningham, "Herodas 1.26ff," *CR* n.s. 15 (1965) 7–9; to his arguments might be added the clear thematic balance to lines 51–56. It seems hard to deny the assertion of Groeneboom 46: "Dans les vers qui suivent Gyllis sort de son rôle, car il est inadmissible que la science égyptienne ou que le musée aient offert le moindre intérêt pour elle-même ou pour Mandris. C'est Hérodas lui-même sans doute qui adresse ici en passant un compliment à Ptolémée." Cunningham 57, however, is correct that such flattery is incidental.

¹⁵ Cunningham 72 *ad* 55; the other view is that σφρηγίς is a separate item in the list, implying secrecy: Nairn 10, and O. Specchia, "Eroda I.55," *GIF* 10 (1957) 43–44.

¹⁶ Headlam 57: "ἀλλ' ἔκητι τῶν ἰρῶν if the reading is correct can only refer to τὰ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἱέρ' ἀνοργιάστὰ σοι (*Ar. Lys.* 898)"; cf. Cunningham 78 *ad* 83 where other views are also mentioned; a curious suggestion is made by J. M. Edmonds, "Some Notes on the Herodas Papyrus," *CQ* 19 (1925) 130: "τὰ ἱερὰ are the oaths or bonds of sworn friendship."

¹⁷ See my "Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6" (*supra* n.6).

mime. It is Gyllis, the bawd, who attempts to seduce Metriche away from her grief; it is she who offers at line 40 a momentary diversion in the revivifying act of sex: *κίλαρή κατάστηθι*. In this context we may well suppose that the word *ίλαρή* is technical, of the cheer associated with the return of the absent god.¹⁸ It is Gyllis who at 86–87 drinks the sweetest wine and who in a final hint in the penultimate line of the mime has among the women in her control one named for Aphrodite's sacred plant: Myrtale.¹⁹

Herodas himself is thus seen to be in complete control of a subtle work of art; in line 71, in fact, he signs his mimiamb about as clearly as an artist can: *χωλήν δ' αείδειν χόλ' αν εξεπαίδευσα*.²⁰ Although it is of course not necessary that the interlocutors themselves indicate any awareness of the level of meaning which has been described here, it seems plain that to the sophisticated contemporary audience this mime must have spoken as a multifaceted work. On the one hand, it speaks on the superficial level of plot and character, which, although it has not been a topic of discussion in this paper, is unquestionably vital to any appreciation of the whole. In addition, it is clear that the audience is intended—like the audience of *Mimiamb* 6—to receive pleasure at identifying the elements of what might be called a parody of religious myth and cult. Yet it would, I believe, be an error to suggest that these undercurrents constitute nothing more than a witty trivialization of the sacred. To some degree, in fact, the opposite is simultaneously the case: the audience comes finally to recognize that there has also been an exaltation of ordinary lives, which are here seen to resemble those of the gods and thereby to gain an unexpected dignity.

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¹⁸ Cf. the Hilaria of Magna Mater and Attis (*CIL* 1² p.313) and of Isis (p.334); sources are cited in Cumont, *RE* 8 (1913) 1598, who also notes the connection to the myth of Attis: "Der Gott, dessen Tod man beweint hatte, war an diesem Tage auferstanden." Of the divinity the proper word was apparently the cognate *ίλαος*: e.g., Theoc. 15.143 (Adonis); *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 204 (Demeter). See also Headlam 34, who however cites only the erotic sense of *ίλαρός*.

¹⁹ A hetaira's name (cf. *Mim.* 2.65); the myrtle especially belonged to Aphrodite: Headlam 60, Groeneboom 65, Cunningham 80.

²⁰ Crusius 24; cf. *Mim.* 8.79 and Callim. fr.203.14.