

Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6

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HERODAS' *Mimiamb* 6, it will be suggested in this essay, spoke to a sophisticated contemporary audience on three levels of meaning: first, as a piece of ribald dialogue characterized especially by obscene *double-entendre*; secondly, as a burlesque of Orphic myth and ritual; and thirdly, as a statement by the author of his own poetics. Modern commentators have noted the first two of these levels, albeit incompletely; the third has apparently gone unrecognized. More importantly, it has not been appreciated how the three join together to form a complex work of art; the subject of that work, the *baubon* or 'dildo', will be found to serve as an emblem of all three levels of meaning.

It was from Kerdon, Koritto informs her friend Metro, that she obtained the *baubon*; but as a result of Metro's confusion we hear of not one but three Kerdons in the mime: one who could not even 'stitch a *πλήκτρον* for a lyre' (51); one who has now grown old, though he had once been the lover of the late Kylaithis (54f); and one who is the man in question, the maker of the *baubon*, who came from Erythrae or Chios, "das antike Paris."¹ He had had two *baubones*, Koritto tells us, but she had been able to acquire only one; the whereabouts of the other is left unclear. This curious emphasis on false trails, on pairs of *baubones* and pairs of false-Kerdons, appears on the one hand intended to imitate the vagaries of ordinary conversation; but it is also well suited to indicate the multiple levels on which the mime itself functions. For the three Kerdons who appear in the course of the dialogue correspond to the three levels on which the work proceeds.

¹ O. CRUSIUS, *Untersuchungen zu den Mimiamben des Herondas* (Leipzig 1892) 121; cf. *Les Mimiambes d'Hérodas I-VI*, ed. P. GROENEBOOM (Groningen 1922) 188. In addition to the above, the following works will hereafter be referred to by the last name of the author or editor: *Herodas Mimiambi*, ed. I. C. CUNNINGHAM (Oxford 1971); A. DIETERICH "Die Göttin Mise," *Philologus* 52 (1894) 1-12=A. Dieterich, *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig/Berlin 1911) 125-35; *Herodas, The Mimes and Fragments*, ed. W. HEADLAM and A. D. KNOX (Cambridge 1922); J. HENDERSON, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven 1975); G. KAIBEL, "Zu Herodas," *Hermes* 26 (1891) 580-87; *The Mimes of Herodas*, ed. J. A. NAIRN (Oxford

To the 'real' Kerdon corresponds what might be called the surface meaning of the mime: two women complaining of their servants and unfaithful friends and discussing a desired object. To this level also we may ascribe a number of *double-entendres* which lend a particular tone to the dialogue and of which we can hardly believe the women themselves to be unaware. To the false-Kerdon who is now old but had once been a lover corresponds the second level of meaning: the mime, as we shall find, is parodic of certain aspects of mystery cults and their myths. And finally, to the false-Kerdon who could not stitch a *πλήκτρον* for a lyre correspond within the mime a number of indications that the poet is also speaking about the craft of poetry itself: such a concern is recognized as particularly Alexandrian and will scarcely surprise readers of Theocritus and Callimachus. It is with regard to these three levels that the investigation will proceed.

The first level of double meaning is found in the punning obscenities of the dialogue; the interlocutors in private are fairly frank about the subject of discussion—Cunningham (175), for example, has contrasted the obscurity of *Mime* 7—but their language is nonetheless full of suggestive *double-entendre*.

(1) *πλήκτρον ἐς λύρην* (51): the obvious was stated by Kaibel: "die Zote ist durchsichtig, *πλήκτρον* ist das *ἀνδρείον*;"² we may therefore imagine the sense of *λύρην*.

(2) *κύκον εἰκάσαι κύκωι* (60): commentators cite Cicero, *ad Att.* 4.8a.2 (= 82 Shackleton Bailey) for a familiar proverb, and so it is, but by this point the true subject of the mime is clear, and so the equally familiar obscene sense of *κύκον* must also be acknowledged.³

(3) *τρίβουσα τὸν ὄνον* (83): again Kaibel: "Natürlich ist aber sowohl *ἀλήθειν* wie *τρίβουσα τὸν ὄνον* zweideutig gemeint; wie jene Frau bei Apuleius (*met.* X 19ff) ist auch Eubule eine *asinaria Pasiphae*."⁴ It is not clear why Crusius would choose to deny what seems fairly obvious.⁵

(4) *λαίμῳι τις* (97): early commentators compared Theocritus

1904); *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, ed. N. J. RICHARDSON (Oxford 1974). The text used here is that of Cunningham.

² Kaibel 584; cf. Headlam 302 *ad loc.*, and Cunningham *ad* 6.51.

³ For both primary and secondary citations see Henderson 117f.

⁴ Kaibel 586; for *τρίβω* particularly see Henderson 176.

⁵ Crusius 124–25: "Zwar dass der Dichter . . . obscöne Hintergedanken gehabt habe . . . scheint mir keineswegs ausgemacht." For *ὄνον* as 'millstone' see Groeneboom 192 *ad loc.*; *LSJ* s.v. *ὄνον* VII.2.

15.148; a more probable meaning was discovered by Leone and has been accepted by Cunningham: “il desiderio di avere il baubone.”⁶

(5) ὠρνιθοκλέπται, κῆν τρέφῃ τις ἐν κόλπῳι (102): the stolen bird is of course the *baubon* of the mime, and so we may take ‘bird’ in a sense attested in Aristophanes; that it is kept ἐν κόλπῳι merely confirms the *double-entendre*.⁷

In example 2 (and perhaps also 5) Herodas appears to have employed a familiar proverb, but particularly to have twisted it in the context; such is, as Crusius has shown in detail, his usual way: *e.g.* line 80 (“Aber in welchem Zusammenhang erscheint hier die altväterische Lebensregel”) or line 89 (“Die Stelle wirkt dadurch fast parodisch”).⁸

A second level on which the mimiamb functions is indicated by the poet’s choice of the word βαυβών to refer to the object of discussion; that this word had any prior existence cannot be proved, and the possibility remains that it was as much a γρῖφος to the contemporary audience as to the first students of the Herodas papyrus. But that in the sense of ὄλιβος the word is related to the mythic Baubo seems, despite the hesitation of Cunningham (*ad* 6.19), a natural conclusion.⁹ According to Clement of Alexandria, followed by Eusebius and, with some deviation in detail, Arnobius, Baubo was an Orphic equivalent of Iambe, one of the autochthons of Eleusis, who is most familiar for causing the grieving Demeter to accept κυκεών by an obscene display of herself;¹⁰ her name is presumed to indicate that which she displays.¹¹ The masculine βαυβών, or ὄλιβος, apparently

⁶ A. Leone, “Eroda VI,” *Paideia* 6 (1951) 302; Cunningham 173 *ad loc.*, who reads λαυμάι τις for Leone’s λαυμάττει.

⁷ For sources see Henderson 128 and 140; we recall Catullus 3.8; Apul. *Met.* 10.22. In addition to the examples of *double-entendre*, we may note four cases of χράσμαι, ‘to have sexual intercourse’ (29, 33, 55, 78); see *LSJ* iv.2 and Groeneboom 188 *ad* 55; to their examples add Diog.Laert. *Aristipp.* 2.74.

⁸ Crusius 124, 126; W. G. Arnott, “Herodas and the Kitchen Sink,” *G&R* 18 (1971) 130, is naive, seeing in such proverbs primarily an effort “to imitate life.” Similar to lines 80 and 89 is line 56, where a pious prayer is undermined by the context: see Nairn 76 *ad loc.* and Groeneboom 188 *ad loc.*

⁹ So, *e.g.*, P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1968) *s.v.* βαυβάω.

¹⁰ Clem.Al. *Protr.* 2.16–17; Euseb. *PE* 2.3.30–35; Arnob. *Advers.Nat.* 5.25–26, cited in *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, ed. O. Kern (Berlin 1922) fr.52.

¹¹ Dieterich 3f; so W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion* (New York 1935) 135. For Baubo’s display compare the Egyptian rite at Hdt. 2.60.

also played a rôle in her act. Such is indicated by the words of 'the Thracian seer' cited in Arnobius (*supra* n.10):¹²

*sic effata simul vestem contraxit ab imo
obiecitque oculis formatas inguinibus res:
quas cava succutiens Baubo manu . . .*

It is not therefore difficult to agree with Richardson that the Baubo story "is perhaps the *aition* for the handling of ἄρρητα," and to imagine that both in Baubo's act and in that of the worshipper the handling of *baubones* was regular.¹³

It is then an object not simply for their personal pleasure but one which the audience would imagine to have possible cult significance that Metro and Koritto seek to recover. That the object has this significance is not, as far as can be seen, of any serious importance to the interlocutors themselves, nor is there any evidence even that it is a joke between the two of them. It is rather a level of humor which exists between Herodas and his sophisticated audience, who watch the players act. Similarly, it is the audience who will eventually understand the meaning of the names chosen by Herodas for his characters: Metro has been named from *Μήτηρ*; Koritto from *Κόρη*.¹⁴ But by the characters themselves in the mime these meanings are apparently never perceived. A similar point may be made about Euboule: her rôle is to be on hand as witness when Koritto acquires the first *baubon* and as an inhibiting presence when Koritto tries her wiles on Kerdon to capture the second (81);¹⁵ thereafter she herself

¹² Crusius 128: "Leider unterliegt es keinem Zweifel, dass die hier vorausgesetzten Laster . . . sich sogar . . . an gewissen ausschweifenden Geheimkulten festgesetzt hatten." So also O. Kern, "Baubo," *RE* 3 (1899) 151: "Was unter den *formatae inguinibus res* der bei Arnobius erhaltenen Verse zu verstehen ist, hat uns jetzt der κόκκινος βαυβών des Herondas gelehrt."

¹³ Richardson 215. It is also possible, as Professor Benardete has pointed out to me, that the *baubon* is referred to in the lines of Orphic verse cited by Clement (*supra* n.10):

παῖς δ' ἦεν Ἰακχος,
χειρὶ τέ μιν ῥίπτασκε γελῶν Βαυβοῦς ὑπὸ κόλποις.

If we understand *μιν* as an oblique reference to the *baubon*, an otherwise obscure line becomes clear: *ῥίπτασκε* may be taken in a normal sense and *μιν* need not be a clumsy anticipation of *Βαυβοῦς*. A possible parallel to such a euphemism is Ar. *Ach.* 1149: τὸ δεῖνα (*cf. schol. ad loc.*); for *ῥίπτω* *cf. the double-entendre at Lys. 27.*

¹⁴ The point is made, but not developed, by Crusius 69; so also in a brief note by Crusius at the end of Dieterich 12.

¹⁵ The effort of G. Giangrande, "Interpretation of Herodas," *QUCC* 15 (1973) 95, to defend the papyrus' δούλη in 81 over the emendation to *Εὐβούλη* seems forced; either way, however, it is clear that Euboule is meant.

receives the *baubon* from Koritto and inappropriately hands it over to Nossis (25): in short, she observes and divulges the doings of Koritto and Kerdon. Her rôle appears to parallel that of Eubouleus in the Orphic myth: he is present as witness at Kore's rape, watches his pigs being swallowed into the chasm, and reports the event to the wandering Demeter.¹⁶ The parallel is not blatant, but it is close enough to suggest a puzzle the solving of which is to provide the contemporary audience with additional amusement.

Kerdon, we are told, works *κατ' οἰκίην* . . . *λάθρη* (63) to avoid the tax-collector—so Koritto supposed, although no doubt the suspicion of Groeneboom is equally plausible: “tant à cause du caractère ignoble de sa marchandise que pour échapper aux *ἐπώνια*.”¹⁷ But of course such secrecy, although capable of superficial explanation, is also proper for a cult object of the Mysteries; it is not a question of choosing a right explanation but of recognizing multiple levels. Secrecy, in fact, is stressed throughout the mime: so in 24 *ἐκ τοῦ Κοριττοῦς στόματος οὐδεὶς μὴ ἀκούσῃ*; in 26 *ἔδωκεν αὐτῇ καὶ εἶπε μηδέν' αἰσθῆσθαι*; in 41 *τῆν μεν γλάσσαν ἐκτεμεῖν δεῖται*; in 93 *ὁ δ' ὤμνυε οὐκ ἂν εἰπεῖν μοι*. At 70 we are especially informed *αὐταὶ γάρ εἰμεν* and at 31 that the first *baubon* has been given to the *profani*: *τῆσι μὴ δεῖ*.¹⁸ The *baubon* in short is *ἄρρητον* except to the select; the rest must be *ἐκποδῶν* (15).

That Herodas has knowledge of such cults is clear from elsewhere in his works. *Mime* 1.56 refers to a festival *Κάθοδος τῆς Μίσης*: *Mise* (*Misme*) appears to have been one of the hostesses of the wandering Demeter and as such an equivalent figure to Baubo.¹⁹ If we accept the interpretation of Dieterich and Crusius, we find in a line of Cratinus clear evidence for the cult use of *baubones* by her worshippers: *μισηταὶ δὲ γυναῖκες ὀλίβοισι χρῆσονται*.²⁰ *Mime* 7.85 refers to a

¹⁶ The parallel to Eubouleus was noted by Headlam 291, although he considered it “far.” For the myth of Eubouleus as *aition* for a ritual of the Thesmophoria see Kern, *Orph. frag.* fr.50, citing Clement of Alexandria; and Richardson 81f. It is worth noting that an inscription from Paros (*IG* XII.5 227) mentions together Zeus Eubouleus and Babo (= Baubo): see Kern, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.12) 150, and Guthrie, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.11) 135. The inscription is also quoted in *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. T. Allen and E. E. Sikes (London 1904) ad 2.491.

¹⁷ Groeneboom 189; cf. Nairn 77 *ad loc.*

¹⁸ Crusius 123: “Auch hierdurch bestätigt es sich, dass die Rede von einem *ἄρρητον* ist.” So also Crusius at the end of Dieterich 12: “καὶ ταῖσι μὴ δεῖ (= βεβήλοισ).”

¹⁹ For sources see Headlam 41 *ad loc.* and Dieterich 3f.

²⁰ Kock, *CAF* I 105 fr.316: *μισηταί*, i.e., = “die von der Göttin *Mise* Besessenen”: Crusius 130 and Dieterich 11; so also Kern, “*Μισηταί*,” *RE* 15 (1932) 2049.

marriage of Artakene arranged by Hekate: whether the reference is to a hierogamy celebration—Artakene being in that case an epithet of Aphrodite—is much disputed. Despite the hesitation of editors—*e.g.* Headlam, Nairn, Cunningham—the position of Rose remains plausible,²¹ although neither side appears capable of final proof: (1) the preceding reference in 81 to Athene and the following reference to (apparently) the goddess Hekate in 91 make it “at least highly unlikely that mortal women are meant in 86, 87”; (2) the wedding seems to be creating an unusual stir; and (3) Hekate is not without some connection with marriage. In support of Rose’s position, however, the obvious, it appears, has not yet been said: it is not—as he asserts—“new foot-gear” that the ritual would demand, for in *Mime 7* “foot-gear” has the consistent secondary implication of ὄλιβος.²² The presumed hierogamy will then in fact create a demand for *baubones*, not for shoes.

The mimiamb also functions on a third—and most typically Alexandrian—level in that it appears to be speaking about the craft of poetry itself. Such a concern is of course familiar from the works of Theocritus and Callimachus and should not be unexpected in Herodas, although here again it is apparent that it is not a level which the characters within the mime perceive but rather one through which Herodas addresses his audience. The *baubon* becomes an emblem of Herodas’ conception of his own poetry: like the *baubon* Herodas’ verse has a superficial ugliness but contains hidden layers of meaning. The unseemly Kerdon—whom we will know “when he speaks” (61)—is a producer of obscene wares but ones in which knowledgeable observers will see subtlety. The remarks of Koritto at 65f (κοῖ’ ἐστ’ ἔργα· τῆς Ἀθηναίης | αὐτῆς ὀρῆν τὰς χεῖρας) and

²¹ Headlam 357; Nairn *ad* 7.85; Cunningham 186; H. J. Rose, “Quaestiones Heroeae,” *CQ* 17 (1923) 33–34.

²² The evidence is presented by I. C. Cunningham, “Herodas 6 and 7,” *CQ* 14 (1964) 34f; his conclusion, however, is disputed by G. Lawall, “Herodas 6 and 7 Reconsidered,” *CP* 71 (1976) 165–69, who argues that there is no evidence for Cunningham’s contention that Kerdon in *Mime 7* is (as in *Mime 6*) “engaged in the selling of baubons.” But the central question is not whether the women in *Mime 7* are buying shoes or *baubones*; it is whether the words of Kerdon in *Mime 7* are capable of double meaning. Of this there is in my opinion little doubt, even if we follow Lawall and imagine that the women are only buying shoes in *Mime 7*; Lawall himself acknowledges a close relationship between *Mime 6* and *Mime 7*: “Traffic in baubons and sex there certainly has been, but only in the privacy of the customers’ home, not in the shop.” But if this is true, can we believe that Kerdon, even if he is at the moment only selling shoes, is doing so with a straight face? For the *double-entendre cf.* Ar. *Lys.* 417f. discussed by Henderson 138.

71 (ἀλλ' ἡ μαλακότης ὕπνος) are on the one hand to be seen as characteristic exaggeration, but as Herodas describing the object which represents his art, these lines are more serious. The *baubon* is a work of high craftsmanship like the art of Apelles at *Mime* 4.57 or the tapestry of Adonis at Theocritus 15.79f. These are the usually cited parallels to *Mime* 6.65, and in each case the object of comparison has also a religious significance.²³ So too the phrase ἀλλ' ἡ μαλακότης ὕπνος is multivalent: on the one hand, as the most obviously 'literary' phrase in the mime,²⁴ it represents Herodas' awareness of the poetical tradition in which he stands. But in these words we also find the subtlest pun in the mime, and in this way the phrase may also be thought to epitomize the riddling quality of Herodas' writing: the word βαυβών is in this instance being connected with the verb βαυβάω.²⁵ In short, the wares of Kerdon, like those of Herodas, are grotesque on the surface but subtle and strangely beautiful beneath.

Both are, in addition, 'stitched' (ράπτω): it can be no coincidence that a word implying the rhapsode's craft is so frequently used of Kerdon's handiwork: 6.18, 43, 47, 48, 51 (*cf. Mime* 7.129). The false-Kerdon is unable to "stitch a πλήκτρον (= βαυβών) for a lyre" (51). The true one presumably can, for in this sense the πλήκτρον/βαυβών is the mime and Kerdon its maker an image of the poet himself. Yet the *baubon*, we are told, has been wrongly taken by Nossis, the daughter of Erinna (20, 33). There can be little doubt that the choice of names—like that of Metro, Koritto and Euboule—is significant: the intention is a slighting allusion to Herodas' fellow poets.²⁶ The precise reason for this insult is unclear, although Crusius

²³ Thus the distress of Groeneboom (190): "ici le cynisme va très loin et dépasse à mon avis les limites du bon goût, quand l'oeuvre du cordonnier fabriquant de βαυβώνες est comparée avec celle de la vierge Athéna."

²⁴ Parallels cited by Headlam 307 and Groeneboom 191 include: Hom. *Il.* 10.2; Hes. fr.239.4 (Merkelbach-West); Theog. 470; Theoc. 5.50 and 15.125. Kaibel (585) is reluctant to accept the sudden 'literary' phrase: "da eine gelehrte Anspielung auf das Homerische μαλακῶ δεδμημένοι ὕπνω kaum am Platze sein wird . . ." F. Will, *Herondas* (New York 1973) 100, rightly notes "the strange beauty" thus given the description of the *baubon*.

²⁵ Chantraine (*supra* n.9) *s.v.* βαυβάω, citing especially Eur. fr.694 N.; *cf.* H. Weil, "Les Mimiambes d'Hérodas," *Journal des Savants* 1891, 664.

²⁶ Although the point is denied by Nairn 72 and Groeneboom 182, most are convinced that there is here what Headlam (290) calls "malicious cynicism"; so Crusius 118: "Es steckt darin wohl eine litterarische Bosheit." As noted by Cunningham (*supra* n.22) 32 n.3, the view of Crusius is given "added probability . . . by the inclusion of Νοκκίδες and Βαυκίδες in the list of shoes (?) in 7.57–58."

suggests that Herodas is attacking their "Überschwänglichkeit."²⁷ Yet the general point is unmistakable: *they* are taking the art of poetry in wrong directions. For Herodas himself poetry is like the *baubon* equivocal, puzzling and typified by a diminutive precision; so the peculiar description of the *baubon* itself emphasizes diminutives: οἱ δ' ἱμαντίσκοι ἔρι', οὐκ ἱμάντες (71f). As Cunningham correctly argues in regard to the style and scope of Herodas' work, he is "a fitting companion for his contemporaries Theokritos and Kallimachos."²⁸

And like the latter, Herodas chose the meter of Hipponax, the scazon or 'limping' iamb for his mimes. That in *Mime 6* he identifies a product in that meter with a *baubon* is especially appropriate: for as the scazon was taken to be a variation on the usual iamb, so Baubo plays a mythic rôle more familiarly assigned to Iambe.²⁹ We may well imagine that this γριφός too is intended.³⁰

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²⁷ Crusius 118. The remark is by a woman, and presumably Herodas thought that Nossis and Erinna were also women. At best we can say that there is in Herodas no support for the thesis of M. L. West, "Erinna," *ZPE* 25 (1977) 118, that *The Distaff* is a literary forgery by a male author; cf. S. B. Pomeroy, "Supplementary Notes on Erinna," *ZPE* 32 (1978) 17f. Other grounds for Herodas' attack on Erinna can be imagined, although conviction is difficult: (1) her ἡλακάρτη might have been considered 'sentimental' by the mimiambist; (2) according to Antiphanes in *AP* 11.322 she was, like Callimachus, a poet highly regarded by pedants; (3) Cunningham (164) suggests that "Erinna's relationship with Baukis may have given rise to rumours against her character."

²⁸ Cunningham 16.

²⁹ *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 195f; although, as noted by Allen and Sikes (*supra* n.16) *ad* 2.195, the connection between Iambe and iambic meter may be "absurd," it was nonetheless accepted in antiquity: see Richardson 213f.

³⁰ I would like to thank Professor Seth Benardete of New York University for his helpful advice while I was writing this essay and the anonymous referee for useful suggestions.