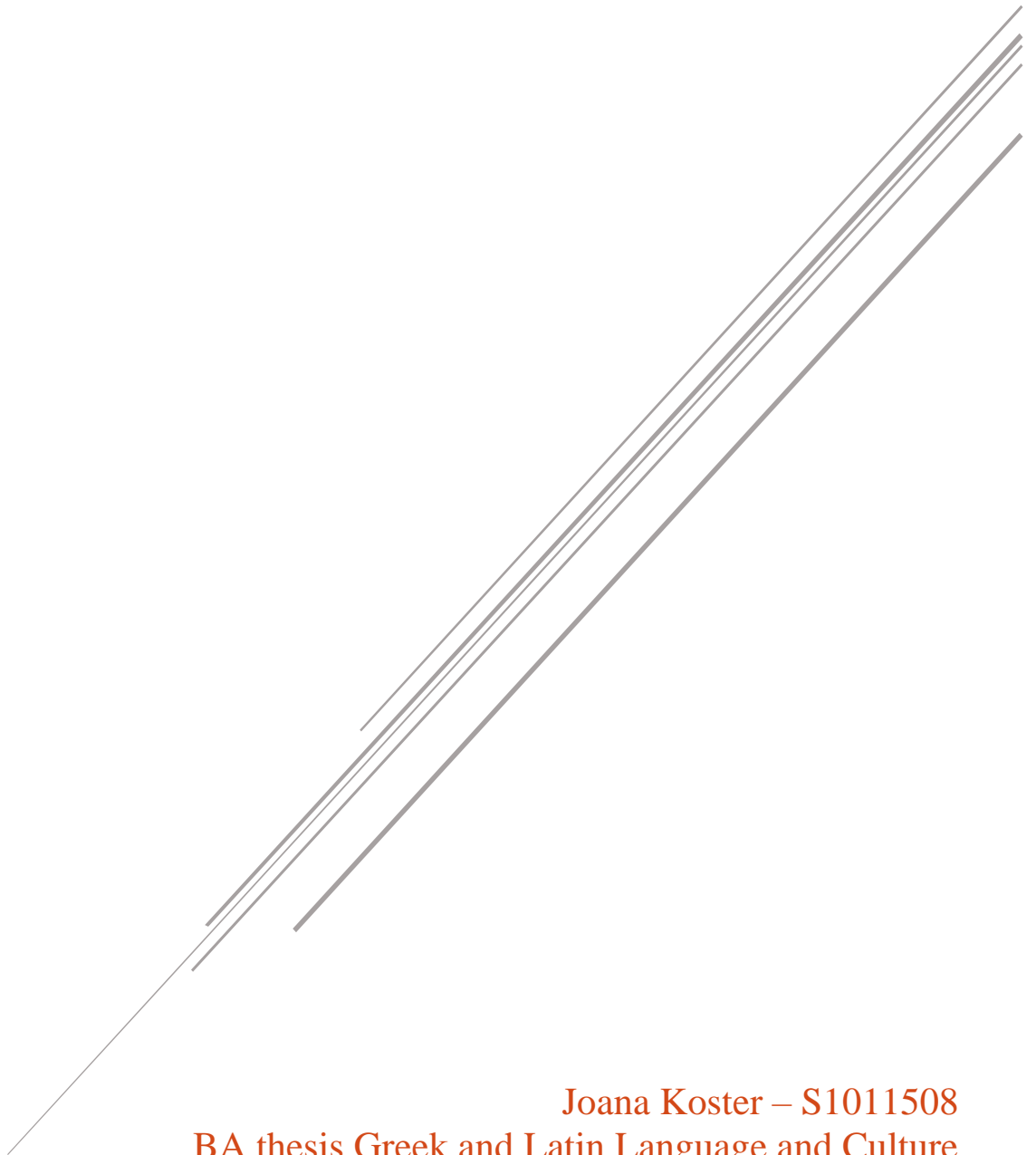


# The temptress, the shoemaker and the jealous woman

An examination of the sexual liberties of women in Herodas' mimiambos



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## Prologue

When doing research on antiquity, we can't help but look through the lens of our own experiences and morals. A field of studies where this is rather obvious is gender studies, and I felt myself intrigued by this kind of research. If research can be done looking into sexism in Disney movies, why not look at the portrayal of gender in Herodas? In the last couple of months, I've struggled to find a clear path for my research and to organise my thoughts. Finishing the thesis has therefore been liberating but also disappointing, because I felt like I had finally figured out what I wanted.

Now that it's coming to an end, I can say that I have enjoyed this challenge, with the help of many lovely people. There are a few that I would like to thank in particular. First of all, I want to thank my supervisor, who saw my potential and pushed me to keep going and be critical of my own work. Next, I want to thank Rosa Menno, who studied with me for hours on end and was great company during lunch and coffee breaks. And last, I also want to thank my parents and my brother and sister, who listened to all my doubts and made me feel proud and confident when I needed a boost.

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## 2. Introduction

The temptress, the shoemaker and the jealous woman. It is not another sequel of the Narnia books, but the three titles of three mimiambos written by Herodas. When asking ourselves the who, what, where, why and how of these mimiambos, we can't answer even one of those five questions with entire certainty. Herodas lived in the first half of the third century B.C., during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphos, and wrote his mimiambos over the course of his life. We can only speculate about the exact time when he wrote them. His place of residence is uncertain too, but several mimiambos indicate that they were written on Kos or the mainland off which it lies.<sup>1</sup>

We barely have any information on the writer, but what we do have are eight mimiambos with a lot of literary and cultural details to investigate.<sup>2</sup> Some research has already been done on the characterizations in each mimiambos<sup>3</sup>, the intertextuality of Herodas' work<sup>4</sup> and interpretations of individual mimiambos<sup>5</sup>. In 1992, Rachel Finnegan did research on the portrayal of women by Herodas, specifically in mimes I and VI, because despite the predominance of female characters, very little research had been done on these women.<sup>6</sup> Finnegan leads the way to more questions such as why these Herodian women disclose certain personal aspects of their lives whilst leaving other important elements, such as their husbands, aside.

What has not been researched so far is the topic of sexual freedom of the women in Herodas' mimes. The eight mimiambos that are almost completely extant all have either a woman as the main character (I, III, IV, V, VI, VII) or a plot that revolves around women (II), except for mimiambos VIII. Herodas' focus on women gives us an opportunity to look into this "female" perspective by analysing the different ways in which their characters have been portrayed. In this thesis I investigate the freedom these women express in regards to their sexuality and the role men played in this.

Were these women truly as free and careless as they come across at first sight? And how do men influence how freely they speak and act?

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<sup>1</sup> Zanker (2009), pp. 21, 51, 106.

<sup>2</sup> There are very small fragments of a ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth mimiambos, but because they are so fragmentary, they are not meaningful to include in this study.

<sup>3</sup> Ussher R. G. (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Esposito (2010).

<sup>5</sup> Fountoulakis (2007); Konstan (1989); Stern (1971); Stern (1981); Sumler (2010); Ussher (1980). Elaborate and useful editions are: Cunningham (1971) and Zanker (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Finnegan (1992).

## 2.1 Methodology

My hypothesis is that the sexual liberty of these women is only an apparent freedom that is in fact limited by men. Poetry is often much more nuanced than it appears during the first read. I suspect Herodas' work is too. In order to establish whether this is true, I will start by looking at the time and place of the mimiambs and what kind of women Herodas could have based his characters on, and then analyse the sexual liberty of the women in four of Herodas' mimiambs.

To better understand the analysis, I start with a short overview of the plots of the mimiambs. Then, because the mimiambs cannot be interpreted entirely independently from their writer, I proceed with an overview of the *Sitz im Leben* of the mimes. The legal and economic rights of the middle-class women in Hellenistic Egypt are examined first by looking at research on non-literary sources that are extant. These sources include contracts, documentary papyri, coins, tombstones, inscriptions and terracotta figurines. I examine sources from Egypt because Herodas most probably lived either on Kos or the mainland next to it and Kos was economically and socially connected to the Ptolemaic regime. They provide information on the rights of the women and therefore make up criteria which we can use to determine the legal and relationship status of the women in the mimes. Next, the genre of the mimiambs will be dealt with briefly, with a focus on the audience and the influences from Comedy. This is necessary in order to consider the stock elements that Herodas has adopted or the twist that he has given the women in their characterization.

Because this thesis focusses specifically on the sexual liberties of women, only mimiambs I, V, VI and VII will be analysed in detail. Mimiamb II discusses sexual behaviour only indirectly in that Battaros' speech is about the theft of a *πόρνη*. In the third mimiamb, *Mêtrôtimê* can be seen as the leading role, but the conversation with the teacher does not concern sexual activity. In the fourth mimiamb, the conversation is held by two women, but here again the subject matter is not sexual activity. The eighth mimiamb has a very different set-up, with Herodas as the main character, and discusses a dream with no allusions to sexual activity.

Having looked at the *Sitz im Leben* of the mimes, an analysis can be made of the social circumstances of the women's lives, namely their legal status and their relationship status, by looking at the forms of address, property, whether or not they have children, possibly the mentions of men in the mimes and the concern for a certain reputation among other women. The legal status of women can limit them in their resources and for the enslaved women it creates an extra dependence, namely upon their master. It therefore also influences the freedom

they have in talking about and taking initiative in sexual experiences. The relationship status is important to determine because it predicts to what extent the women take a man into account in their decisions with regards to their sexuality and speaking about it.

Once the circumstances of the women in mimiambos I, V, VI and VII have been defined, their behaviour and talk can be analysed. First, the sexual satisfaction or dissatisfaction is examined. This shows to what extent the women feel a need to be more free and explore their sexuality. Subsequently, the thoughts and mentions of men are analysed. How are the men considered in their choices? Next, the bounds of their speech are examined, in order to determine how freely these women act and seem to feel. Lastly, these three questions are combined to look into the dependence upon men with regards to their freedom in speaking about and acting on their sexual desires.

## 2.2 Plot

I briefly discuss the plot of the four mimiambs that I discuss in chronological order, starting with mimiamb I and ending with mimiamb VII.

The first mimiamb involves three women, Mêtrichê, Threissa and Gyllis. The mimiamb starts with Threissa opening the door for Gyllis, who has come to visit Mêtrichê for the first time in five months. After brief hellos, Gyllis holds a long monologue explaining her disbelief for Mêtrichê's patience whilst Mandris is in Egypt and she offers Mêtrichê a suitor, Gryllos. Mêtrichê is appalled by Gyllis' proposal and tells her not to suggest something like that to her ever again. Then Mêtrichê changes the subject and gives Gyllis wine. The mimiamb ends with Gyllis thanking her and leaving.

The fifth mimiamb is about a conversation between two women, Bitinna and Kydilla, and two men, Gastrôn and Pyrrhiês. At the start of the poem, Bitinna angrily asks Gastrôn why he no longer gives her attention and accuses him of sleeping with another woman. This is the start of a discussion in which Gastrôn first tries to tell Bitinna that he is innocent and later on simply that he is sorry. In the mean time Bitinna contemplates the proper punishment. Gastrôn is to be beaten by Hermon in the jail. Right after they leave, Bitinna changes her mind and decides that Gastrôn should get a tattoo and be hanged. Then Kydilla tries to convince Bitinna to forgive Gastrôn and at the end, Bitinna reluctantly gives in.

The sixth mimiamb is a conversation between two women, Korittô and Mêtrô. Mêtrô has come to visit Korittô because she has seen someone with a dildo, that they say they got from Korittô. Mêtrô wants to find out where Korittô got the dildo so she can get one herself. When she asks about it, Korittô first wants to hear where she saw the dildo, before she finally tells Mêtrô where she got it, namely from Kerdôn. She then continues to describes Kerdôn and his craftsmanship in detail. She tells Mêtrô that he had two dildoes with him, but that he wouldn't give her the second one, despite her persuasion methods. At the end of the mimiamb, Mêtrô sets out to find Artemis, who will tell her how to get to Kerdôn.

The seventh mimiamb can be read as a sequel to the sixth and starts with Mêtrô, who has brought a few women to Kerdôn's shop. Kerdôn invites them in and then proceeds to show his products, which reads like a catalogue. Next, Mêtrô and Kerdôn argue over the price of pair of shoes. At the end, Kerdôn tells the other women that they only need to send their slaves, if they're in need of more, and asks Mêtrô to return soon for her 'crab-shoes'.

### 2.3 The status of women in Hellenistic Egypt

One way of understanding the characters in Herodas' mimiambs is by picturing them in the society and time in which they were written. Whereas most dramatic literature in Classical Athens was myth-based and could not easily be compared to everyday life, literature in Ptolemaic Egypt features real women in everyday settings. I propose that the knowledge perceived through those texts is likely to differ much less from the image that we get from the non-literary sources that are extant. I will first explain what these sources reveal about free women and next about slaves.

The difference in social status of free men and women had become smaller compared to the Classical period and this is especially clear in the organisation of a marriage. From marriage contracts we know that from the third century B.C. onwards, reproduction was no longer the sole purpose of marriage, but rather a shared life.<sup>7</sup> These contracts briefly state the principles on acceptable behaviour for both men and women in a marriage. An example of the growing equality between men and women in Hellenistic Egypt is the extramarital liberties of men. Greek marriage contracts in Egypt state that the husband was not to engage in any extramarital associations that would hurt the wife, even financially.<sup>8</sup> Since this involved financial support, keeping a concubine or a mistress or a boy lover would be a breach of contract for a Greek husband in Egypt, unlike for a husband in Classical Athens. A contractual obligation for the wife was no extramarital sex at all. Any transgression of the obligations stated in the contract could be judged by three people of the couple's circle, who could then stipulate the punishment, usually consisting of the returning or giving away of property. It was possible for a married couple to divorce, usually forced by one of the two due to the transgression of the contract by the other. When in the wrong, the woman could then lose her dowry, the husband would not only refund the dowry but would also have to pay an additional fifty percent of the dowry as a penalty (*hemiolion*).<sup>9</sup> The wife would usually suffer financially from divorce, since she only gets her dowry back. The rest of the belongings would stay with the husband.

Within the marriage, women could exercise a bigger freedom than before. A woman was free to sell, buy or rent her property.<sup>10</sup> Whenever a contract was set up, a woman still needed a

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<sup>7</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. 96. An example of such a marriage contract is *P. Tebtunis* I 104.

<sup>9</sup> Modrzejewski, J. M. (2005). p. 352.

<sup>10</sup> Modrzejewski, J. M. (2005). p. 352.



guardian to sign. This seems to have been more of a formality than a validation of the contract.<sup>11</sup> An important difference remains: whereas men were free to go wherever they wanted, women were allowed to leave the house without their husbands permission, but only to go as far as was possible in one day.<sup>12</sup>

Papyri from Socnopaïou Nesos, dating from 250 B.C. to 250 A.D., have been studied by Deborah Hobson in order to look into women as property owners. Census declarations and registrations of property show that women in Socnopaïou Nesos owned nearly a third of all property, including houses, camels, slaves and capital. Because men had to pay taxes and liturgy and women did not, she suggests that men put their possessions into their wives' names in order to reduce the size of their own estates.<sup>13</sup> However, property sales show that women were capable of independent economic activity, regardless of their marital status.<sup>14</sup> Hobson also looked at wills, which provide important information about widows. Even though the wife was usually not bequeathed any property, provisions were often made for her to use the property and for her heirs to care for her for as long as she remained unmarried.<sup>15</sup>

We do not see the same closing gender gap when it comes to slaves. A lot of the information on slaves has been acquired from wills and personal letters. Married women often had slaves and usually those were female slaves. Women who owned slaves most of the time got them through their dowry or an inheritance.<sup>16</sup> In general, a lot of slaves were acquired through procreation. Children of female slaves took the status of their mothers and by rearing their slaves' children, owners increased their fortune.<sup>17</sup>

These sources present a much more independent woman than the Classical Athenian woman we know from philosophical treatises and tragedies. Those women were confined to their private space inside the house and were very dependent on their husbands for money and other valuables. As Pomeroy justly points out, the native Egyptians, who use the language and laws of the Greeks, were likely to share other Greek values as well.<sup>18</sup> Even though the relationship between men and women had changed into a more independent status for women in Hellenistic

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<sup>11</sup> Modrzejewski, J. M. (2005). p. 352.

<sup>12</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Hobson (1983), p. 316.

<sup>14</sup> Hobson (1983), p. 318.

<sup>15</sup> Hobson (1983), p. 320.

<sup>16</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. 128.

<sup>17</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. 133.

<sup>18</sup> Pomeroy (1984), p. 84.

Egypt, we might assume that the relative difference between men's liberties and women's liberties was still similar.

If Herodas based the women in his mimes on the women in his environment, we can expect certain behaviour based on the rights mentioned above. In respect to their talk, we can expect the married women to be modest, subdued and focused on their own duties and marriage. Because widows do not need to remarry in order to be taken care of, they are less dependent on a good reputation and we can expect them to be more open and less careful. Women who are not eligible for marriage, in this case slaves, do not need to worry about this reputation. They do, however, need to please their master and are therefore not likely to share an opposing opinion.

## 2.4 Herodas' genre

Before interpreting Herodas' female characters, the literary environment of the mimiambos must be considered. What was the literary tradition Herodas belonged to? How was his text perceived? How does Herodas comply with the existing mimic and comic tradition and how does he deviate from it? These questions are dealt with in this respective order.

In writing his mimiambos, Herodas became of part of the mimic tradition, but he chose to not just conform to the genre of the mime in several ways. The name of his work already tells us that Herodas is mixing genres: mimiambos, *mimos* and *iambos*. Mixing elements from different genres was common in Hellenistic literary works. Sophron of Syracuse was the first to write mimes in the fifth century B.C. and his mimes were written in prose. Mimes were short dialogues that focused on character portrayal, specifically of lower middle class people, in an everyday life setting, but through the lens of an aristocratic art form.<sup>19</sup> The genre died down for some decades but regained popularity in the Hellenistic age, where the Hellenistic poets gave it a twist. Theocritus wrote his bucolic mimes in the dactylic hexameter, creating a tension between the grand metre and his lower class subject matter. Herodas wrote his mimes in the choliambic metre, also deviating from the tradition of writing mimes in prose.

Whereas Sophron's mimes were meant to be read, it is not clear if Herodas' mimes were also *Buchpoësie* or meant for recitation or scenic performance. Good arguments have been presented for both statements but none conclusive enough to rule out the other option. Mastromarco gives a clear account of the arguments that were made up until then and carries out a systematic analysis of mimes one through seven himself.<sup>20</sup> Due to the lack of a scenic apparatus and regular vague references to body parts or other people, I find it unlikely that the mimiambos could be performed properly as a monologue recitation. I do agree with Elena Esposito that nothing prevents these mimiambos from being both read and performed, albeit clearly in front of an 'elite' audience.<sup>21</sup>

The influences of Sophron and Old and New Comedy on Herodas' work have been discussed by Rachel Finnegan, for her research on the portrayal of women in Herodas' mimes.<sup>22</sup> Sophron divided his literary works in male and female, depending on the characters. Finnegan justly notices that Herodas was clearly influenced by this division, since his cast is predominantly

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<sup>19</sup> Esposito (2010) p. 267.

<sup>20</sup> Mastromarco (1984), p. 5-19.

<sup>21</sup> Esposito (2010), p. 277.

<sup>22</sup> Finnegan (1992), p. 22-23.

female, and in some mimiambes even entirely female. These women show influences from both Old Comedy and New Comedy. The ambiguity of a noble, strong, independent attitude and behaviour such as decadence, addiction and deceit that we see in Old Comedy, is clearly visible in the mimiambes of Herodas. However, the plot of the story is much less fantastical and more focused on the everyday life struggles of love and work that we see in New Comedy.

The way in which Herodas plays with different genres tells us that his characters will not be a copy of the typical stock characters that we see in New Comedy. I propose that this discrepancy indicates which characteristics Herodas wanted to highlight.

### 3. Defining the female characters

In this chapter the seven speaking female characters in Herodas' mimiamb I, V, VI and VII are examined in terms of their legal status and their relationship status. These statuses are criteria on the basis of which we can expect certain behaviour from the women in these mimes. This expected behaviour can then be compared to their actual behaviour in chapter 4. Because the texts are short and do not offer a clear context, it is necessary to analyse different aspects of the women's lives critically in order to define the social environment in which they move and the responsibilities that fall to them. These statuses are determined based on the forms of address, property, accountability and expectations that can be derived from the mimiamb. Some women do not perfectly fit into only one category, as will become clear. It is important, however, to consider the different possibilities, so that we can interpret their talk with the right perspective.

#### 3.1 The legal status of women in the mimiamb

The legal status of women limits their freedom in such a way that being a slave meant being dependent on your master's approval for survival. That does not mean that free women were completely independent and that they did not have expectations to live up to, but the stakes were different. This influences the freedom they have in talking about and taking initiative in sexual experiences. Some women in Herodas' mimiamb are enslaved and some are free. The following subchapters explain the legal status of each woman.

##### 3.1.1 Enslaved women

In the four mimiamb that are being discussed in this thesis, only two women with lines appear to be slaves. One of them is Threissa, Metrichê's slave in mimiamb I. It is clear that she is a slave because of her name, the way she is addressed, and the way she is being treated by Metrichê. Slaves were frequently named after their place of origin, e.g., Λυδός, Σύρος or Φρύξ.<sup>23</sup> The name Θρέισσα tells us this slave was most probably born in Thrace. At the start of the poem, Metrichê also literally calls Threissa a slave: *σπρέψον τι, δούλη.* (I.8). Before this order and at the end of the poem, Metrichê's attitude towards Threissa confirms this status even more when she orders her around (I.1-2; I.79-81).

The other slave is Kydilla, Bitinna's slave in mimiamb V. Her name is not so telling but the way she is addressed is. She too gets ordered around from the start of the mimiamb (V.8; 41; 44-46; 54-55) and apart from being called by her name, she is called *δούλη* twice (V.44; 54).

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<sup>23</sup> Cunningham (1971), p. 58.

We get to know a little bit more about her place in the household, because Bitinna tells us she has brought up Kydilla in her own arms and even loves her as much as her own daughter Batyllis:

νῦν μὲν σ' ἀφήσω, καὶ ἔχε τὴν χάριν ταύτηι,  
ἣν οὐδὲν ἥσσον ἢ Βατυλλίδα στέργω,  
ἐν τῇσι χερσὶ τῆς ἐμῇσι θρέψασα. (V. 81-83)

‘I will pardon you now, and be grateful for this one over here,  
whom I love no less than Batyllis,  
since I have brought her up in my very own arms.’

This place in her heart as not only her slave but also a foster-child explains why Kydilla’s role in the fifth poem is much bigger than Threissa’s.

### 3.1.2 Free women

A clear indication that a woman was free, is that she was in charge of a slave. This is evident for four other women in these mimiambs: Metrichê, Bittina, Korittô and Mêtôrô. I will elaborate on each woman in order.

Metrichê, in mimiamb I, is clearly a free woman. Not only is she in charge of Threissa, but she is also in charge of countryside property:

Θ[ρέισ]σα, ἀράσσει τὴν θύρην τις· οὐκ ὄψηι  
μ[ή] .τ[ις] παρ’ ἡμέων ἐξ ἀγρουκίης ἥκει; (I. 1-2)

‘Threissa, someone is knocking on the door. Why don’t you go see  
if someone from our people has come from the countryside?’

Zanker suggests that this property and the people working on it are in fact Madris’ belongings and that Metrichê has temporarily been put in charge, while he is away.<sup>24</sup> If they are indeed not hers but Madris’ belongings, they must have a very stable relationship for him to trust her with it during his absence. Either way, her responsibilities indicate that she is a free woman and not a slave.

Bitinna, the main character in mimiamb V, is also definitely a free woman. In addition to owning at least four slaves (Gastrôn, Kydilla, Pyrrhiês and Drêchôn), she also paid for them herself:

δεῖ σ' ὀτεύνεκ' εἰ<ς> δοῦλος  
καὶ τρεῖς ὑπὲρ σευ μνᾶς ἔθηκα γινώσκειν. (V. 20-21)

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<sup>24</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 40.

‘You (Gastrôn) must understand that you are a slave  
and that I have paid three minas for you.’

Korittô, the host in mimiamb VI, is in charge of one slave, whose name we do not get but of whom Korittô is not particularly fond:

μᾶ, λίθος τις, οὐ δούλη  
ἐν τῇ οἰκίῃ <κ>εῖς· (VI. 4-5)

‘Jeez, you are a stone, not a slave,  
lying there in the house.’

Besides owning a slave, she also owns a few hens, enough that they need to be counted (VI. 99-102), and she is able to buy a dildo from Kerdôn, indicating that she has money to spend and some financial independence.

Mêtrô, the last of these four women and Korittô’s guest, tells us she has slaves too when she tries to comfort Korittô:

φίλη Κοριττοῖ, ταῦτ’ ἐμοὶ ζυγὸν τρίβεις·  
κῆγῶ ἐπιβρύχουσα ἡμέρην τε καὶ νύκτα  
κύων ὑλακτέω τῇ[ς] ἀνωνύμοις ταύτηις. (VI. 12-14)

‘Dear Korittô, you are wearing out the same yoke as me;  
By roaring day and night at these unmentionable women  
I am also turning into a barking dog.’

At the end of the poem, it becomes clear that she was accompanied by a slave herself, when she says that it is time for them to leave (VI. 98).<sup>25</sup> Just like Korittô, she is able to spend money on her own, because she is clearly looking to buy one of Kerdôn’s dildoes, when she finds him.

The legal status of Gyllis, the visitor in mimiamb I, is less obvious than the status of the four women mentioned above. Gyllis does not seem to have a slave with her, nor does she mention having one at home. When Metrichê calls her ἀμμὴ Γυλλίς (I. 7), she implies an affectionate bond between them, that can either be the bond between a procuress and a hetaera or even more likely between a child and her former nurse.<sup>26</sup> Cunningham points out that nurses acted as intermediaries in other literary works as well.<sup>27</sup> From the title of the mime (ΠΡΟΚΥΚΛΙΣ Η ΜΑΣΤΡΟΠΙΟΣ) it is already clear that Gyllis is a procuress, because both nouns mean procuress or madam, and her behaviour in the course of the mime confirms this. This means that she

<sup>25</sup> ὀγίαίνε μο[ι, Κοριτ]τί. λαιμάτ[τε]ι κῶρη; ἡμῖ[ν] ἀφ[έρπειν] ἐστί.

<sup>26</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Cunningham (1971), p. 57.

probably used to be a wetnurse as a slave and is now a freedwoman taking care of herself with her own business.

### 3.2 The relationship status of women in the mimiambos

The relationship status of the women in these four mimes is a predictor of their talk and sexual freedom because it relates to their sexual satisfaction and need to explore beyond the limits of their relationship. Apart from the legal restrictions discussed above, factors such as loyalty, whether the origin is love or fear or something else, and satisfaction are likely to contribute to the freedom women express, feel and long for in regards to their sexuality. These factors are dependent on the relationship status of the characters. These relationship statuses can be inferred from the mimes based on whether or not they have children, possibly the mentions of men in the mimes and the concern for a certain reputation among other women. The women are categorised per relationship status, namely uninvolved women, legitimate wives and widows.

#### 3.2.1 Uninvolved women

In the category uninvolved women I put those who are not part of a romantic relationship. Slaves, such as Threissa and Kydilla, were not eligible for marriage, so being married or widowed is out of the question for them.<sup>28</sup> That does not mean that they could not have any romantic or sexual experience at all. However, in both mimiamb I and V, there are no utterances by Threissa or Kydilla themselves nor their masters that imply any sexual or romantic experience. It therefore is logical to assume they either have none or that they are just not relevant to the story.

Another woman who appears not be involved in a romantic relationship is Gyllis. When introducing herself at the start of the poem, she identifies herself as Philainis' mother, but she does not mention a husband (I. 5). Philainis' name is important because it is the name of a famous fourth-century hetaera. With this name drop, Herodas already shows the audience the affiliation with hetaerae that Gyllis later boasts about (I. 89-90) and her profession as a procuress.<sup>29</sup> As explained in 3.1.2, Gyllis probably used to be a nurse and only became eligible for marriage after she was freed. Her old age is also important to take into account, especially because Herodas emphasises her age at several places over the course of the mimiamb (I. 13-19; I. 37-38; I. 67-75). This means she could be married or by now perhaps widowed, except that it does not makes sense for her to be so disrespectful towards Metrichê's marriage, if she

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<sup>28</sup> Pomeroy (1995), p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham (1971), p. 59.



herself still is in one or has been in one. Besides, if she were married, it would have been logical for her to mention her husband. Further, if she were widowed, the inheritance should have made her less desperate to set up Gryllos with Metrichê and to acquire the business that would result from that. In conclusion, it appears as though Gyllis is a single freedwoman, who provides for her child with her business as a procuress.

### 3.2.2 Legitimate wives

This category is not so black and white. By looking closely at the mentions of men and the concern for public appearance, we can argue that three women, namely Metrichê, Korittô and Mêtrô, are legitimate wives.

Whether Metrichê is a wife or not has been reason for discussion, because, as Ussher states justly, the poem provides no clear evidence that Mandris is actually Metrichê's husband.<sup>30</sup> Zanker sums up the reasons why she should be considered an ex-hetaera nicely: Gyllis tries to convince Metrichê to hook up with Gryllos by mentioning her slowly fading beauty and Gryllos' wealth, which are arguments that are more important to an ex-hetaera than a married woman. In addition, Gyllis compares Metrichê to her other hetaerae.<sup>31</sup> Being an ex-hetaera, Metrichê can be compared to the stock character from New Comedy called the 'gold-hearted hetaera'. However, Rachel Finnegan presents a series of arguments that make it logical that Metrichê should be considered a married woman: Firstly, not just her admirer but also Mandris is a man of considerable wealth, gathered from the activities that keep him in Egypt. Secondly, her admirer first spotted her at a religious event (I. 55) and Gyllis shames her for being inside all the time (I. 36-37), suggesting that Metrichê lives a life of seclusion befitting a married woman. Thirdly, the fact that she refuses to even consider Gyllis' offer of wealth and pleasure doesn't suit the stereotype of a prostitute.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Gyllis comes to visit Metrichê can easily be explained by her being Metrichê's nurse when she was young. It is not problematic that Gyllis comes to Metrichê with a proposal that is not only daring but illegal if we interpret Metrichê as being a wife, because it also suits the genre of mime to have such an impudent main character. Considering the arguments Zanker sums up and the arguments that Finnegan presents, it can be pointed out that a combination of both is also possible and perhaps the most plausible. Metrichê used to be a courtesan and after being freed, she married Mandris.

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<sup>30</sup> Ussher (1985), p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Finnegan (1992), p. 27.

Another woman who acts like a wife is Korittô, the woman in whose house mimiamb VI takes place. In 3.1.2. I have explained why Korittô is a free woman, who owns a slave and has some financial independence. There's no mention of a husband or lover throughout the mimiamb so if there is a man of the house, he is not on her mind during this conversation with Mêtrô and he apparently does not hold Korittô back in her endeavours to seek more sexual satisfaction. The reason she then should be interpreted as a legitimate wife, and not a hetaera, is her concern for her public appearance. When Mêtrô tells her she has heard of her dildo, she immediately inquires how Mêtrô got that information:

—λίσσομα[ί σ]ε, μὴ ψεύσῃ,  
 φίλῃ Κοριττοῖ, τίς κοτ' ἦν ὃ σοι ράψας  
 τὸν κόκκινον βαυβῶνα;      ΚΟ. κοῦ δ' ὀρώρηκας,  
 Μητροῖ, σὺ κεῖνον;    (VI. 17-20)

(Mêtrô:) 'I beg of you, don't lie,  
 dear Korittô, who was it who made you  
 this scarlet dildo?'  
 Korittô: 'Where have you seen it, Mêtrô?'

Later, when she describes the dildoes in detail, she assures Mêtrô that they are alone, as if to ease her (VI.70).<sup>33</sup> This indicates that it is important to her that they are not heard and that she would otherwise not divulge all this information. This careful attitude suits a wife, who is careful to maintain a good reputation in order to avoid being accused of adultery and losing her marriage as a result.

Lastly, Mêtrô is the only character in Herodas' work who occurs not once, but twice in his mimiambs. She occurs in mimiambs VI and VII, which is written like a sequel. In mimiamb VI it is left unclear whether Mêtrô has a husband or lover or whether she is a divorcee or widow, because in her case as well there is no mention of a man. There is one line in which Mêtrô could be referring to a husband:

λέγεις ὁδὸν μοι· νῦν πρὸς Ἀρτεμεῖν εἶμι,  
 ὅκως ὁ Κέρδων ὅστις ἐστὶν εἰδ[ή]σω.  
 ὑγίαινέ μοι, Κοριττί. λαιμαῖ τ[ις], κῶρη  
 ἡμῖ[ν] ἀφ[.....] ἐστί.    (VI. 95-98)

'You say there's a road for me; I will now go to Artemis  
 so I can find out who Kerdôn is.  
 Farewell my Korittô. Someone is hungry,

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<sup>33</sup> Translation below at 4.1.

it's time for us to leave.'

When Mêtôr states that "someone I hungry", it can be interpreted with τῆς being her husband, who is hungry. Several commentators, however, have taken this line to mean that Mêtôr has a sexual appetite and that she wants to find out how to get to Kerdôn as quickly as possible.<sup>34</sup> I prefer the latter interpretation because otherwise this would have been a very abrupt way for Herodas to introduce a husband. In *mimiamb VII* however, Herodas does explicitly refer to a man in Mêtôr's life. Kerdôn tells her that the man to whom she opens her lips night and day is a lucky man (VII. 111-112). This implies that Mêtôr does have a man in her life, whether he be a husband or a lover, to whom she is devoted. From the start of the mime, we can deduce that ever since she left Korittô, Mêtôr has been to Kerdôn at least once before, since she has confidently brought him potential customers, and Kerdôn by now seems to know her well (VII. 1-4).

As a wife, Mêtôr is free to go out of the house without a man's permission, as long as she returns within a day (see 2.2). This makes regular trips to Kerdôn perfectly possible. Besides Kerdôn's reference to a man, it makes sense that Mêtôr is married, if she moves in the same circles as Korittô, who is also married.<sup>35</sup> The fact that Korittô feels the need to tell her that they are alone in *mimiamb VI*, that Kerdôn mentions a specific man and that Korittô and Mêtôr know the same women, make the status of legitimate wife fitting for Mêtôr.

### 3.2.3 Widows

One of the seven women in these four *mimiamb*s is a widow and that is Bitinna. She should be read as such because of her willingness to let her attachment be public knowledge, the number of slaves she has and her age. First of all, there is no mention of a husband in the *mimiamb*. This however does not rule out the option of being married, as we saw with Korittô. However, Bitinna is willing to send Pyrrhiês with Gastrôn out to Hermon, who is to beat Gastrôn, for everyone to see. This indifference displayed by Bitinna here would not make sense if she had a husband. Another option is that Bitinna is a hetaera. From the names that Bitinna calls out in the poem, we can conclude that she has four slaves. If she were a hetaera, she would have to make a lot of money to be able to afford four slaves. Furthermore, Bitinna has a daughter, Batyllis, who is not yet married (V. 70-71), suggesting that she has either already been married or is at least of relatively old age.

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<sup>34</sup> Stern (1979), p. 249.

<sup>35</sup> Zanker devotes a discussion to the gossip surrounding Korittô's dildo and the route of the gossip (p. 181-183).

## 4. Women's talk and sexual liberties

In this chapter we look at the behaviour and specifically the talk of the women analysed above. With their legal status and relationship status in mind, an analysis can be made of the talk of each character and the patterns that can be recognised in this behaviour. This specifically includes their sexual (dis)satisfaction, the thoughts of men during their conversations and the extent to which these women speak and act freely. How sexually satisfied they are points out to what extent they feel a need to be more free or not. Do they then consider a man in their decisions concerning sexuality? How is this reflected in how freely they speak with other women about their sexuality? These topics are dealt with in this respective order. From these three factors we can distill a dependence by these women upon men, which will be set out fourth.

### 4.1 Sexual satisfaction

The sexual satisfaction of these women can be derived from the mimiambes looking at their tone and the actions that they take or have taken. Since the slaves, Threissa and Kydilla, are not involved in any kind of relationship and don't talk of any experience, there is no sexual satisfaction to explore there. Gyllis is not involved in a relationship either, nor does she talk about her own experiences, so she too cannot be judged on this. Of the other free women, again the married women will be analysed first and then Bitinna.

Where nowadays we hope married women to be sexually satisfied, we cannot say the same for these Hellenistic women. The fact that marriage contracts stated that a man could indulge in other sexual activities, so long as they did not hurt the woman, shows that men could look for sexual pleasure outside of their marriage (see 2.2). Women did not have that same freedom. It is not surprising then that we see a lot of curiosity and enthusiasm in Korittô and Mêt rô towards the dildoes that Kerdôn makes. The desperation that Mêt rô radiates with all her questions and resolve imply a clear sexual dissatisfaction. On the one hand, Korittô does not come across equally desperate because she takes a long time to answer Mêt rô's questions. On the other hand, she bought the dildo just as well and she was willing to go to great lengths to acquire a second one, so the need to explore and experience new things is also present in her.

Contrary to Korittô and Mêt rô, Metrichê is not looking for a new experience, even when it is offered to her. Her husband has been gone for ten months and yet she cannot be tempted to even consider a suitor. This conviction is either a sign of sexual satisfaction that does not need to be improved, or incredible dedication towards her husband. The fact that Metrichê shames Gyllis

for even offering such a thing, does not make one of either options more likely, for it mostly shows that Metrichê is morally against the idea.

Bitinna, being a widow, has gone looking for sexual satisfaction with her slave Gastrôn. However, he appears to have engaged in sexual activities with another woman as well and Bitinna is far from pleased now. As much as Gastrôn may hope that the expression ‘sharing is caring’ would apply here, it does not. Bitinna’s jealousy is both an indication of the satisfaction that Gastrôn could offer her before, as well as an indication of the dissatisfaction that she feels at the time of the conversation. Her disappointment also shows how important this relationship was to her.

#### 4.2 Men in the *mimiamb*s

In these *mimiamb*s, in which women play the lead and seem to control the narrative, men are only mentioned a few times, and this female environment, the presence, or rather absence, of men is key in interpreting the *mimiamb*s. This paragraph explores the talk about men in these four *mimiamb*s and is meant to debate how much these women care for their men. The mentions of men that are relevant in this case are the men with whom the women are romantically or sexually involved. This means that Kydilla’s aggressive comments towards her fellow-slave Pyrrihês are not relevant, but Bitinna’s comments about Gastrôn are. Only the free women, who are either involved in a (sexual) relationship themselves or feel free enough to share their opinion, make these kinds of comments. First the mentions of men by the married women will be analysed, next those of Gyllis, the uninvolved woman, and lastly of Bitinna, the widow.

In the sixth *mimiamb*, the only man Korittô talks about is Kerdôn, the shoemaker who sold her the dildo. He is not her husband, but he does not discourage her eagerness. Instead, he lets her flirt with him. When she tells Mêtroph about his visit, however, she does not judge him so much as his workmanship:

κατ’ οἰκίην δ’ ἐργάζεται ἐν πολέων λάθρη,  
τοὺς γὰρ τελώνας πᾶσα νῦν θύρη φρίσσει.  
ἀλλ’ ἔργα, κοῖτ’ ἔστ’ ἔργα· (VI. 63-65)

‘He worked from home, dealing secretly,  
Because every door shudders at the thought of tax collectors now.  
But his workmanship, what workmanship that is!

Contrary to what is expected, her husband does not seem to be on her mind when talking about her sexual adventure with Mêt rô. This does not tell us that Korittô does not care for her husband, but it does point out that she does not care about his opinion on this matter.

Mêt rô does not mention a man either except for maybe once at the end of the mimiamb, as is explained above (3.2.2). From that line, assuming that she does refer to her husband, it is not clear whether she goes home to him happily or reluctantly. In mimiamb VII, Mêt rô does not refer to a man at all. All she is focussed on is getting Kerdôn business. Even when Kerdôn compliments her by saying how lucky her man is, she does not respond, and he simply continues his monologue. Mêt rô too does not keep her husband in mind when thinking about her sexuality in mimiamb VI or during her errand in mimiamb VII. In both mimiambs, Korittô and Mêt rô have many reasons to bring up their husband, but remarkably neither of them does so.

Metrichê has just as much reason to bring up her husband, and does so, when Gyllis has finally ended trying to convince her fervently. She displays her loyalty towards Mandris by swearing with his name:

μὰ τὴν γὰρ Μάνδριος κατὰπλωσιν  
καὶ τὴν φίλην Δήμητρα, ταῦτ' ἐγὼ [ἐ]ξ ἄλλης  
γυναικὸς οὐκ ἂν ἡδέως ἐπήκουσα, (I. 68-70)

‘for I swear by Mandris’ return  
and dear Demeter, coming from any other woman  
I would not have willingly listened to these things,’

Later during her scolding, she defends Mandris’ honour by saying that no one is to make jokes against him (I. 77). From these two comments, we can deduce that she trusts Mandris and that she cares about him and his reputation greatly. We can therefore expect Metrichê to act with her concern for Mandris in mind.

Gyllis does not have a husband to keep in mind or defend, but she eagerly interferes in Metrichê’s business and is determined to tell Metrichê all about her husband’s likely betrayal (I. 23-35). Not only does she boldly paint Mandris as unreliable, but she presents Gryllos as a sex object. After describing his achievements and his wealth, she describes him as desperate and lost:

ιδὼν σε καθόδῳι τῆς Μίσης ἐκύμηνε  
τὰ σπλάγχυν’ ἔρωτι καρδίην ἀνοιστρηθεῖς,  
καὶ μεν οὔτε νυκτὸς οὔτ’ ἐπ’ ἡμέρην λείπει  
τὸ δῶμα, [τέ]κνον, ἀλλά μεν κατακλαίει

καὶ ταταλ[ί]ζει καὶ ποθέων ἀποθνῆσκει. (I. 56-60)

‘when he saw you at the descent of Mise,  
his affections swelled, as his heart went mad with love,  
and he does not leave my house night or day,  
my child, but he calls out to me  
and calls me mommy and he is dying of longing.’

Gyllis may not have a man of her own to talk about, but the men she does mention, she talks about denigratingly and with little respect.

Bitinna too speaks with a denigrating tone, but not of someone else’s object of affection but her own. When she suspects that Gastrôn, her slave and sex partner, has devoted himself to another woman, she has an outburst and impulsively decides that Gastrôn should be punished severely. In her outburst she speaks very lowly of him: she calls him out for his big mouth (I. 8), says she should have beaten him up long ago (I. 14), reminds him that he is but a slave (I. 20), calls his penis ‘unspeakable’ (I. 45) and calls him a seven-times-over-slave (I. 75). We may assume that she actually liked Gastrôn before he found himself another woman and this don’t not match with the insults thrown at him now. Her talk can therefore not be taken seriously and is not a just indication of her bossiness, but rather her disappointment. The fact that she directs her anger not only at Gastrôn but also at Pyrrhiês, her other male slave, indicates that she is not in control of her emotions at this point. The way in which Gastrôn’s possible betrayal affects Bitinna, shows that she cares for him, more than she wants to admit.

#### 4.3 The bounds of these women’s speech

Having looked at the sexual satisfaction that the free women appear to have and the role partners play in the mimiambs, the bounds of these women’s speech can be analysed. How freely do these sexually satisfied and dissatisfied women speak? The more satisfied the women are, the less curiosity we can expect and the less freely we can expect them to want to talk.

Most of the women in these mimes speak remarkably freely about their feelings and specifically their sexual desires. Even though one would expect the married women Korittô and Mêtôr to be the most prudish and the most careful in expression too much sexual unsatisfaction, these women discuss their sexual behaviour and needs very openly. This does, however, match their sexual curiosity. It is soon clear that both women are real gossips.<sup>36</sup> Korittô desperately wants to know where Mêtôr saw the dildo and how it got there (VI. 19-20; VI. 22). When asking about

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<sup>36</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 182.

the maker of the dildo, Mêtôr reveals unnecessary details about the lives of the candidates (VI. 49-56). On the topic of sex, these women don't hold themselves back either. Korittô fervently describes the dildoes Kerdôn brought with him:

ἐ[γὼ] μὲν—δύο γὰρ ἦλθ' ἔχων, Μητροῖ—  
 ἰδοῦσ' ἀμίλλη<sup>37</sup> τῶμματ' ἐξεκύμην·  
 τὰ βαλλί' οὕτως ἄνδρες οὐχὶ ποιεῦσι  
 —αὐταὶ γὰρ εἶμεν—ὀρθά· κοῦ μόνον τοῦτο,  
 ἀλλ' ἡ μαλακότης ὕπνος, οἱ δ' ἱμαντίσκοι  
 ἔρι', οὐκ ἱμάγ[τες]. εὐνοέστερον σκυτέα  
 γυναικ[ῖ] διφῶσ' ἄλλον οὐκ ἀνευρ[ή]σ[εις]. (VI. 67-73)

'But I – because he brought two, Mêtôr –  
 having seen them, my eyes nearly burst out of their sockets with eagerness  
 Men can't make their penises stand  
 – it's okay, we're alone – this straight. And not just that,  
 but its softness is like sleep, and the tiny straps are  
 wool, not leather. You will not find another shoemaker more well-disposed  
 to a woman if you looked for him.'

During her description of the dildo, Korittô assures Mêtôr that they are alone (VI. 70). This worry of being overheard is a typical motif of New Comedy and can be seen earlier in the mimiamb as well when Mêtôr sends away the slaves:<sup>38</sup>

—ἐκποδὼν ἡμῖν  
 φθείρεσθε, νώβυστρα, ὧτ[α] μοῦνον καὶ γλάσσαι  
 τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐορτή— (VI. 15-17)

' – get the hell out of our way, you close-minded, only ears and tongues  
 and otherwise on holiday!'

After Korittô finishes her enthusiastic description (VI. 67-73), she sums up all the ways in which she tried to convince Kerdôn to give her the other dildo as well. She kissed him, stroked him and caressed him (VI. 76-78). Instead of the prude attitude we would expect from a married woman, she does not conceal her behaviour in front of Mêtôr. She proudly says she did everything she could think of (VI. 74). Mêtôr doesn't speak so vulgarly but she does support Korittô in trying everything to convince Kerdôn and even wonders why she had not offered sex (VI. 79).

<sup>37</sup> I adopt the conjecture by Zanker to change ἄμ' ἰδμῆι into ἀμίλλη, because this seems more logical than a repetition of a sensory verb.

<sup>38</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 170.



More expectedly, Gyllis and Bitinna discuss the topic of sex very openly too. Zanker states in his discussion of the first mimiamb that the purpose of this text is the characterization of Gyllis.<sup>39</sup> What is most remarkable about this characterization is the daring attitude with which she conveys her proposal. As soon as Metrichê and Gyllis have said their hellos, Gyllis starts explaining why she came and she does not beat around the bush:

ἀλλ' ὦ τέκνον, κόσσον τιν' ἤδη χηραίνεις  
 χρόνον μόνη τρύχουσα τὴν μίαν κοίτην;  
 ἐξ οὗ γὰρ εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐστάλη Μάνδρις  
 δέκ' εἰσὶ μῆνες, κοῦδὲ γράμμα σοι πέμπει,  
 ἀλλ' ἐκλέλυσται καὶ πέπωκεν ἐκ καινῆς. (I. 21-25)

‘But dear child, how much time have you already been separated  
 while you wear out your single bed on your own?  
 because it has been ten months since Mandris set out to Egypt,  
 and he still does not send you a word,  
 but he has forgotten completely and drunk from a new cup.’

Not only does she propose that Metrichê should not spend her time waiting for Mandris on her own, she suggests that Mandris might not come back at all. Expressing this lack of trust in Mandris so plainly is a risk, because Metrichê could easily be offended by this comment.<sup>40</sup> Gyllis seems to lack a sense of decorum, but this straightforwardness can also be attributed to her experience in this topic of conversation due to her work as a bawd or to the bond that Gyllis and Metrichê share. However, Gyllis’ courage has its limits. In lines I.47-48 Gyllis asks whether anyone is near.<sup>41</sup> *Μήτις* indicates that she expects a confirmation,<sup>42</sup> which leads us to interpret this as a question to assure Metrichê, rather than herself, that they can speak freely. When she gets this confirmation, she continues to advocate her plan with all the advantages she can think of, most of them sexual.

Bitinna does not beat around the bush either. The first three lines of the mimiamb are an outburst by Bitinna towards Gastrôn in which she vividly asks whether his penis is too sated for him to give her any attention:

λέγε μοι σύ, Γάστρων, ἥδ' ὑπερκορῆς οὕτω  
 ὥστ' οὐκέτ' ἄρκεῖ τὰμά σοι σκέλεα κινεῖν  
 ἀλλ' Ἀμφυταίῃ τῇ Μένωνος ἔγκεισται; (V. 1-3)

<sup>39</sup> Zanker (2009), p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Later it shows Metrichê indeed did not appreciate Gyllis’ gutsy talk of Mandris (I. 77).

<sup>41</sup> ἀλλὰ μήτις ἔστηκε σύνεγγυς ἡμῖν; (I. 47-48)

<sup>42</sup> As opposed to *οὐ*, Cunningham (1971), p. 71.

‘Tell me, Gastrôn, is this so over-full  
that it no longer suffices for you to move my legs  
but that you are involved with Amphytaie, daughter of Menon?’

What is important to realise, is that during the entire mimiamb Bitinna is not only talking *about* a man but also *to* a man, of whom she is very possessive. The relationship between them is explored further in 4.4. This man, Gastrôn, is her slave and should therefore obey and be careful in his speech and actions, rather than him limiting her in her speech. Despite Bitinna’s outburst, indicating that she is not in control of her emotions, she does control the conversation and she puts Gastrôn in his place multiple times (V. 8-9; 12-13; 36-37). These moments confirm that Bitinna feels free to say whatever she wants to say, as is expected by her status as a free woman and a widow. However, it should be noted that Bitinna only addresses slaves in the fifth mimiamb and it is very likely that her talk is only meant for their ears and not those of other respectable women or men. Her outburst is therefore not necessarily courageous, but rather desperate.

The slaves in Herodas’ mimiambs fit the comic slave stereotype in that they act assertively and speak their minds.<sup>43</sup> Threissa only has four lines but in those lines she manages to come across witty:

τίς σύ; δειμαίνεις  
ἄσσον προσελθεῖν; (I. 3-4)

‘Who are you? Are you afraid to come closer?’

Kydilla has more lines, namely 13, and portrays an image of a caring, loyal, yet assertive slave. It is very likely that Kydilla dares to speak her mind because she knows how much Bitinna cares for her, as discussed in 3.1.1. Even though she is present at the conversation between Bitinna and Gastrôn, she only interferes at the very end and makes sure not to express a strong opinion on the matter. Instead, she appeals to the empathy of Bitinna to forgive Gastrôn this one mistake (V. 69-73).<sup>44</sup> The fact that she calls it a mistake (ἁμαρτία) does not necessarily mean that she herself condemns Gastrôn’s behaviour. It is likely to be a way to calm down Bitinna and make her feel justified in her anger at the same time.

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<sup>43</sup> Ussher (1985), p. 48.

<sup>44</sup> KY. μή, τατί, ἀλλὰ νῦν μὲν αὐτόν—οὕτω σοι; ζῶντι Βατυλλίς κηπίδοις μιν ἐλθοῦσαν; ἐς ἀνδρὸς οἶκον καὶ τέκν’ ἀγκάλης ἄραις—; ἄφες, παραιτεῦμαί σε· τὴν μίαν ταύτην; ἁμαρτίην.

Metrichê, the last of the seven women who get lines in these mimiambos, is the only one who pays a lot of attention to decorum and acts prudishly. When Gyllis is making her argument, Metrichê is kind enough to let her finish without interrupting. Only when Gyllis has made her point, does she fire her disapproval at her:

Γυλλί, τὰ λευκὰ τῶν τριχῶν ἀπαμβλύνει  
τὸν νοῦν· μὰ τὴν γὰρ Μάνδριος κατὰπλωσιν  
καὶ τὴν φίλην Δήμητρα, ταῦτ' ἐγὼ [ἐ]ξ ἄλλης  
γυναικὸς οὐκ ἂν ἠδέως ἐπήκουσα,  
χωλὴν δ' αἰεῖδεν χῶλ' ἂν ἐξεπαίδευσα  
καὶ τῆς θύρης τὸν οὐδὸν ἐχθρὸν ἠγεῖσθαι. (I. 67-72)

‘Gyllis, your white hairs are dulling your mind;  
for I swear by Mandris’ return  
and dear Demeter, coming from any other woman  
I would not have willingly listened to these things,  
I would have taught her to sing her lame songs with a limp  
and to find the threshold of my door hostile.’

Metrichê’s disapproval indicates how uncommon and inappropriate Gyllis’ behaviour is. She explicitly points out that this kind of talk is not fitting in a conversation between these two women:

σὺ δ' αὖτις ἔς με μηδὲ ἔν<α>, φίλη, τοῖον  
φέρουσα χώρει μῦθον· ὃν δὲ γρήϊυσι  
πρέπει γυναιξὶ τῆς νέης ἀπάγγελλε· (I. 73-75)

‘and don’t you ever come to me again, my dear,  
with another story like that; But declaim to young girls  
what is fitting for an old woman.’

#### 4.4 Dependence

The dependence upon men by these women can be deduced from the way in which they consider a man while they speak and act. This dependence will be examined per woman individually and these women will be tackled in order of expectedly most dependent to expectedly most independent.

The women that are expected to be most dependent upon men in their freedom to speak and act in regards to their sexuality are the slaves, Threissa and Kydilla. As we have seen, they do not have relationships and the person in charge is a woman, Metrichê and Bitinna respectively. Whereas we can see little dependence in the four lines that Threissa has, we can see a little more

in Kydilla's character. Kydilla agrees with Bitinna on Gastrôn's mistake in order to get her to listen. Bitinna cares for her as if she were her own child and this makes Kydilla more dependent on her approval because it is likely that more is expected of her.

Of the free women, the most dependent are expected to be the married women, if we consider the marriage contracts discussed in 2.2. Instead, Korittô and Mêtrô are women who speak very openly about their desires and act on them. Metrichê, on the other hand, does make her decision not to have a suitor based on her love for Mandris. That she used to be a hetaera, who would be more licentious and heedless, creates a comical contrast with her current resolved and faithful attitude.

A more expectedly independent woman would be Bitinna, as a widow. The opposite seems to be true. There is an interesting dynamic in the behaviour displayed by Bitinna and Gastrôn in *mimiamb V*. Bitinna shows clear jealousy, which has transformed into anger, which she is now releasing onto Gastrôn.<sup>45</sup> Legally there is a very clear power relationship: Bitinna is a free woman who owns and is in charge of a male slave, namely Gastrôn. However, the emotional relationship is much less clear-cut. Relationships oftentimes create a dependency upon the other person involved in the relationship. In power relationships, the dependency results in devotion and loyalty of the inferior towards the superior. In love relationships, devotion and loyalty are expressed by both lovers towards the partner. A tension can arise, when this loyalty flows in opposite directions. Here Gastrôn, as the inferior, needs to be devoted to Bitinna, whereas Bitinna, out of love for Gastrôn, expresses devotion towards him. Herodas uses the contrast of social hierarchy and emotional dependency to convey a feeling of comical absurdity and awkwardness.

The woman who was expected to be the most independent is Gyllis, because she is free and uninvolved. In this respect, Gyllis acts the way we would expect her to act: careless and interfering. She does not have a love life of her own to look after but that does not mean that she cannot freely express her opinion on love lives of other women, such as Metrichê. Of all women in these four *mimiamb*s, Gyllis is the one to speak most freely about sexuality and the need to look after one's own desires.

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Noël Allard, Pascal Montlahuc and Marian Rothstein explain in their article how the way emotions are dealt with, is gendered and that in ancient literature women tend to be the victim of their emotions (Allard, Montlahuc and Rothstein (2018)). Bitinna can be seen as a clear example of that. She is a victim of her own emotions because she blames herself for Gastrôn's mistake (I. 13-15).

## 5. Conclusion

The questions that have been posed at the start of this thesis are:

Were these women truly as free and careless as they come across at first sight? And how do men influence how freely they speak and act?

Finnegan compared Herodas' work to Attic Comedy in that it portrays the comic male view of how women in the respectable, slave-owning class behave and talk, when left alone. The discrepancy between the expected dependence of the women upon men and their actual dependence can be seen as evidence for this comparison.

In his *mimiamb*s, Herodas portrays women with different legal and social statuses: enslaved and free, uninvolved, married and widowed. Herodas, however, focuses much more on the emotions and behaviour of the women than their social context. Often it is very hard to determine the relationship status of the women, as was the case with *Metrichê* and *Bitinna*. The freedom with which the women speak for most free women does not match the predictions that result from this classification. Whereas the married women speak much more freely than expected, the widowed *Bitinna* shows a great internal struggle and dependence upon her object of affection.

Even though men in these four *mimiamb*s are in the background in the narrative, it is the absence of the men in the dialogues and in the women's minds that makes these conversations interesting and, in my opinion, right. Where men do appear in either the utterances of the women or as a character, their influence is very big. *Bitinna* is thrown entirely off her game by *Gastrôn* and *Metrichê* is almost blinded by her love for *Mandris*.

Even though the scenarios are placed in an everyday life setting, the likelihood of conversations like these actually taking place is very small, because the women act much more independently than we read in other literary and non-literary sources. This thesis supports what Finnegan suggests, that Herodas plays with the idea that men have of conversations between women when they are left alone. He uses this unrealistic, fantastical world as a humoristic tool. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to look into the underlying tone of Herodas in this work. How do his characters relate to his world? Should we laugh at or pity the sexual desperation with which he portrays the women and the real life limitations that it implies?

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