The Tyrant Goddess: Herodas’s Fifth Mime

The mime thrived as a popular dramatic form alongside state-sponsored performances of tragedy and comedy in Athens, and elsewhere in the Greek world, although little is known about it in the Classical period. On the basis of a few titles, and some references to the genre as streetcorner or marketplace entertainment, it is commonly inferred that the mime represented plebeian themes or themes drawn from everyday life, including scenes of drunken lovers, adulterers, and other dubious types. In general, it is supposed also that the mime favored the representation of character over intricacies of plot.

While papyri have yielded a few scraps of Hellenistic or later mimes, our best evidence for the form remains the high literary adaptations of Herodas, who composed in the first half of the third century B.C. The seven complete poems (with substantial portions of an eighth) that survive are mimiamboi or iambic mimes: that is, mimes written in a form of iambic meter associated with invective poetry in the tradition of Hipponax, and owing something of their style and tone to this genre. It is not clear whether Herodas’s poems were intended for stage performance, but there seems no reason why they might not have been recited or acted by one or more persons as entertainment in the houses of the wealthy.

2. Wüst (above, n. 1) 1739.
3. G. Mastromarco, The Public of Herondas (Amsterdam, 1984; orig. pub. as Il pubblico di Eronda [Padua, 1979]). argues in favor of stage performances “either at court or at the houses of the
The themes of Herodas’s mimes are apparently conventional. We may note that women play a large role in them. They are seen talking with a procuress, visiting a festival, discussing with a teacher the education of the young, chatting among themselves about private pleasures (more specifically, the virtues of dildos), out shopping at a shoemaker’s (where again a dildo may be the special object of attention), and in the role of mistress over household slaves, as in the poem that is the subject of this paper. These are among the topics or episodes that are said to have a “close relationship with everyday life in the humbler levels of society,” and thus to admit of “what is thought indecent in more bourgeois circles.”

But the status of the women in Herodas seems no humbler than that of the householders represented in Old or New Comedy. It is true that a teacher of young children, a leather worker, and a pimp, who play important roles in three of the mimes, are not the more or less respectable landowning citizens who inhabit the world of formal comedy. They are, rather, characters on the margins of citizen society. I would suggest that their roles are perhaps better described by the figure of exclusion—as outsiders versus insiders—than by the figure of high and low, that is, as members of an inferior or poorer class. Male citizens, related to each other by networks of marriage and participation in affairs of state, constituted the core of city-state society, at least as we know it from the relatively abundant sources on Classical Athens. (Other cities may have approximated more closely the norms of Hellenistic Alexandria, which did not, as we shall see, conform in all respects to the Athenian pattern.) Others, whether resident aliens barred from the possession of land, or artisans, slaves, or the imppecunious, may correspondingly be seen as decentered, displaced to the boundaries of the community.

In the structure or ideology of the Classical city-state, women occupied an ambiguous place. They were part of the bourgeois household or oikos, of course, which was the elementary unit of the polis, but they did not have the public

richest and most educated families in Alexandria” (p. 95), as opposed to monologue recitals; contra review by I. C. Cunningham in JHS 101 (1981) 61–62.
persona of male citizens. Given the rigorous exclusion of women from most male activities and civic functions in Classical Athens, women’s social ties with one another constituted, or could be perceived as constituting, a kind of nether society, parallel to that of men. Existing both inside and outside the formal civic structure, women’s society was available as an image of an inverted or topsy-turvy world, where ordinary civic bonds were violated, suspended, or replaced with the alternative values of the household or religious association.

The prominence of middle-class women in the mime alongside less respectable characters, then, prompts a different reading of the social content of the genre. The defining characteristic of the mime would seem to be precisely the absence of male heads of household, or just those figures who define the social norms in official comedy. The “everyday life” of the mime, with its apparent realism and concern with the humbler orders, is in fact no more ordinary than the business of comic lovers or stern fathers. But the change of optic that brings excluded figures—including married women—into the center of the drama creates the effect of a more immediate engagement with real life, over against the conventions of established forms. This shift tends to subject those conventions, and the civic hierarchy they encode, to distortion or inversion. Hence the

8. See Helene Foley, “The Female Intruder Reconsidered.” *CP* 77 (1982) 1–12; Gallo (above, n. 7) 49–51. Herodas 1.26–35, which singles out the beauty of its women as the chief blessing of Egypt, indicates a tone or emphasis in the mime different from that of Athenian comedy.

9. Cf. the Arabic expression *min taht ila taht* (“from below to below”), used to describe communication among women; Louise Lamphere, “Strategies, Cooperation, and Conflict Among Women in Domestic Groups,” in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, Calif., 1974) 105, with reference to the “patricentered peasant family”: “Outside the family, the young wife creates relationships in the women’s community. . . . In these extra-domestic neighborhood groups, women exercise a good deal of influence over men’s decisions.”

10. Thus, Aristophanes, in *The Assemblywomen*, represents women as installing a new communal order at Athens, in which private property and conjugal exclusiveness—the structuring principles of the *polis*—are abolished; women take control of the acropolis in the *Lysistrata*, asserting their superior skills at domestic management as justification, while in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, forms of female festival and male assembly are fused in a complex parody of civic institutions. See Foley (above, n. 8); John Vaio, “The Manipulation of Theme and Action in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*,” *GRBS* 14 (1973) 369–80, esp. 371–72; Elizabeth Bobrick Carter, “Actor, Author and Audience in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*” (diss. Johns Hopkins, 1987) 106–16, on the women’s assembly; Froma Zeitlin, “Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*,” in Helene Foley, ed., *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York, 1981) 169–217. But women might also be represented in comedy simply as one among several disenfranchised constituencies of the city-state, whose sympathies or affinities were with the young, the dispossessed, the marginal. To take but a single example from the genre of New Comedy, at the conclusion of Terence’s *Phormio*, which is based on a Greek original of the third century B.C., the matron Nausistrata is shown inviting three males—her son, her nephew (who has just purchased the services of a courtesan), and the parasite Phormio himself—in to dinner, to the chagrin of her husband and brother-in-law, thus turning the usual hierarchy of the household and of the city upside down. See David Konstan, *Roman Comedy* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1983), 127–29.

11. Contrast Anton P. Smotrič, “Eronda e il vecchio,” *Helikon* 2 (1962) 613, who argues that Herodas “portrayed the lives of simple men.” Smotrič supposes that Herodas’s realism manifests “his sympathy for the humble,” and that “his efforts to depict the lives of simple men are still vital in
connection between the presence of women and marginal figures in the mime on the one hand, and indecency on the other: it is a pattern reminiscent of the association between carnival license and "billingssgate" that Bakhtin describes in his study of Rabelaisian humor.\textsuperscript{12} We have no way of knowing whether there was a radically popular or festive spirit, in Bakhtin's sense, to the informal mimes of the Classical period. In the Alexandrian or high literary mime of Herodas, the inversions are, as we would expect, shot through with irony and satire, which have the effect of installing the reader, in collusion, so to speak, with the poet, as the moral center or judge of the dramatic action.\textsuperscript{13}

Herodas's fifth \textit{Mime}, entitled "A Jealous Person" (\textit{Zηλότυπος}),\textsuperscript{14} represents the woman Bitinia castigating a slave, whom she had admitted to her bed, for sexual infidelity. In the first line of the poem, she addresses him as Gastron, a vulgar name derived from \gamma\alpha\sigma\tau\iota\eta or "belly," and accuses him of being overfull (\upsilon\epsilon\rho\omicron\kappa\omicron\omicron\phi\iota\gamma).\textsuperscript{15} The term evokes a conventional ethical pattern in which satiety leads to arrogance and excess (\upsilon\beta\omicron\rho\omicron\omicron\varsigma), and thus to ruin (\delta\tau\iota).\textsuperscript{16} There is the

\textit{progressive literature" (p. 614); but his notion of realism and of the world portrayed in Herodas is substantially the same as that of Cunningham (above, n. 5). On the difficulties with attributing to Herodas a progressive realism, in the sense of modern socialist realism, see Mastromarco (above, n. 3) 87–92, with bibliography. For realism as an effect of changes in convention, rather than of a fidelity to empirical reality, see Eric G. Czapo, "Stock Scenes in Greek Comedy" (diss. Toronto, 1986) 28–31; Boris Tomashewsky, "Thematics," in L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, eds., \textit{Russian Formalist Criticism} (Lincoln, Nebr., 1965) 82, cited by Czapo, p. 30.

12. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}, tr. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) 1–51. There is also another connection. The exclusion of a male consort from the household in the world of the mime leaves the woman, who is conventionally imagined as libidinous (see n. 21, below), in need of a substitute: not a \textit{paterfamilias}, of course, but some object or creature under her control. In this sense, the slave in the fifth \textit{Mime} serves the same purpose as the dildo in the sixth and seventh.


14. The title alone gives no clue as to gender; in Roman mimes of the Empire, the jealous figure was commonly the husband of an unfaithful wife: see R. W. Reynolds, "The Adultery Mime," \textit{CQ} 40 (1946) 77–84.

15. On the significance of the appendix "Gastron," see Walter Headlam, \textit{Herodas: The Mimes and Fragments}, ed. A. D. Knox (Cambridge, 1922), ad line 1 (hereafter Headlam/Knox); Cunningham (above, n. 5) ad line 1; cf. esp. Aristophanes, \textit{Frogs} 200 (Charon to Dionysus). It is not certain that Gastron is described as \upsilon\epsilon\ρ\omicron\kappa\omicron\omicron\phi\iota\gamma; this depends on emending the manuscript reading \η\delta (= \eta\delta, "this") to \epsilon\iota \delta, "you are," with Headlam/Knox, following Franz Bücheler. If "this" (feminine) is accepted, then it may refer to Gastron's belly (i.e., \gamma\alpha\sigma\tau\iota\eta, the reference being implicit in the sobriquet), as suggested by Douglas E. Gerber, "Herodas 5.1," \textit{HSCP} 82 (1978) 161–65, accepted by Jacob Stern, "Herodas' Mimiamb 5," \textit{CP} 76 (1981) 208 n. 2; or else to \kappa\epsilon\rho\omicron\omicron\varsigma, i.e., his penis (cf. line 45), as proposed by Siegfried Mekler, and cautiously endorsed by Cunningham. The chief problem with the latter interpretation is that Gastron is still clothed at this point. Mastromarco (above, n. 3, 46–48) argues that the use of the deictic pronoun here tells in favor of composition for performance by more than one actor: the ambiguous reference would be made clear by a gesture.

16. See Solon 6.3–4; Aristotle fr. 57 Rose; Headlam/Knox (above, n. 15) \textit{ad loc.; LSI} s.v. \chi\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\varsigma (A)2 = "insolence," with examples; also John Enoch Powell, \textit{The History of Herodotus}, Cambridge Classical Studies 4 (Cambridge, 1939).
suggestion, in the sobriquet applied to the slave, that the source of his overreaching is the promptings of his stomach, that is, the lower pleasures. But the suggestion is immediately undercut, as Bitinna, in the coarsest language, expresses her indignation that the slave is no longer satisfied with her alone (2–3). No opposition between passion and self-control is projected here onto the status distinction of master and slave. If Gastron is lusty, it is at his mistress’s bidding. In the structure of domination figured in this mime, passion has a place at the top.

The rest of Herodas’s little drama in effect embroiders on this initial tension. There is no reference to a husband of Bitinna, who evidently has full authority in the house.17 She exercises this authority with no apparent regard for ordinary decency, except insofar as it is inevitably embedded in the language available to her, as in the allusion, just mentioned, to the ethical schema of repleteness and punishment, a schema that summons up an ideal of self-control quite foreign to the context. Cultural paradigms are thus twisted out of shape, or bent to unwanted purposes, and to that extent Bitinna’s discourse seems incoherent.18 Since, however, all power resides with her, neither Gastron nor the other slaves who take part in the action can hold Bitinna to the standard of reason or morality to which she herself implicitly appeals.

When Gastron denies that he has ever set eyes upon the alleged rival to his mistress, Bitinna puts it down (rightly or wrongly) to excuses (προφήσις, 5). Gastron’s next move is to call attention to his powerlessness: “I am a slave: do what you wish with me, and do not drink my blood night and day” (6–7). Bitinna responds by summoning another slave and having Gastron stripped and bound. Her next words, to Gastron, have a double edge: “If I do not disgrace you and make you an example for the entire neighborhood, why, do not count me a woman” (12–13).19 With the characteristically condescending wit of Alexandrian poetry, Herodas brings the moral irony to the surface. Of what, after all, is Gastron to be a public example? Bitinna rhetorically casts Gastron as a rebellious slave, and this is, presumably, the way she sees him. She cannot mean to advertise him as a creature who has deserted his mistress’s bed. Of course, Gastron is in no position to expose this contradiction. In the phrase made popular by Gregory Bateson, he is in a double bind.20

The two meanings of the injunction, “Do not count me a woman,” are obvious. The reader is meant to take it as a confession of Bitinna’s passionate

17. J. Arbuthnot Nairn and Louis Laloy (eds., Hérondas: Mimes [Paris, 1960] 74) comment: “it is certain that she [i.e., Bitinna] does not think for a moment about her husband, save perhaps when it is a question of the festival for the dead”; but there is no evidence of a living husband in the poem at all. In the apparently similar situation in the prose mime P. Oxy. 413 (see below, n. 42), the woman plans to administer poison to her husband.

18. Cunningham (above, n. 5, 148) describes the poem as a study in “neurotic fury”; cf. Frederic Will (Herodas [New York, 1973] 73) on Bitinna as a case study in “abnormal psychology.”


nature, which runs to extremes of sex and violence: Gastron has defied the wanton demands of his mistress, and if Bitinna does not punish him for this, she will be untrue to the libidinous reputation of her sex, a reputation well established in Old Comedy and elsewhere. She herself, on the contrary, asserts her womanhood in a spirit of self-respect and resolution: she means that she is not one to submit passively to insult. The idea is no different from what would be conveyed by saying, “Count me no man,” and the commentators quite rightly cite parallels to this notion. Thus, Cunningham, following Headlam, quotes the words of Creon in Sophocles’ Antigone, 484–85: “Now I am not a man, but she’s the man, if this power shall lie unpunished with her.” Callicles speaks to similar effect in Plato’s Gorgias: “This condition [πάθημα] is not the part of a man [ἀνδρὸς], to be wronged, but of some slave, for whom death is better than living—whatever is wronged and insulted but unable to help himself or anyone else in his care” (483A8–B4). Bitinna, who dominates her household, appropriates the dignity that attaches to the role of a free male citizen in the traditional ethic.

Bitinna’s next words appear to confirm this interpretation: “Not a Phrygian, rather?” (14). Headlam translates: “An eunuch should I be?,” and I think this must be right. Cunningham, however, following Crusius, renders the phrase, “Is not this rather the case of the Phrygian?,” which he explains as an “elliptical reference” to the adage “A Phrygian man is better and more docile when beaten.” Her meaning, on this interpretation, is that she ought to have had him beaten before this. Cunningham offers three reasons against Headlam’s version. The first is syntactical, and, in my view, indecisive. He then argues that “eunuch,” which is a possible meaning of Φονεία, “is not applicable to women,” and that “the relevance of the remark is not clear.” But, as we have seen, Bitinna is in fact laying claim to manly virtue; the womanliness of her behavior, at least according to the comic stereotype, is what she does not recognize. The opposition between “woman” and “Phrygian” in this context is thus entirely applicable.

Phrygians were conventionally represented by the Greeks as cowardly and effeminate, in contrast to the Greek ideal of masculine valor, and were preferred


22. See Just (above, n. 21) 170–72.

23. Headlam/Knox (above, n. 15) ad line 13; Cunningham (above, n. 5) ad 14; Otto Crusius, Untersuchungen zu den Mimiamben des Herondas (Leipzig, 1892) 100.

24. The argument depends on the ellipsis of the first-person verb; but ἐγείρω in line 14 might be heard with Φονεία as well as with άτιτυδα in a kind of apo koinou or common construction; this would give the listener or reader the necessary cue. P. Groeneboem, ed., Les mimiambes d’Hérodas I–VI (Groningen, 1922) 60 ad lines 14–15, argues that punctuation after ἐγείρω would be necessary in this case.
as eunuch slaves (see Headlam ad loc.). By comparing herself to a Phrygian, Bitinna means that it would be shameful for her to submit passively to the insult she perceives herself to have suffered from Gastron: “Phrygian” stands here for the abject toleration of injury, as does Callicles’ mention of a slave in the passage cited above. The problem is with the nature of the injury to Bitinna—not the infidelity as such, which a Greek husband would feel it proper to avenge against a rival. but that it is the infidelity of a slave—and the inversion of Greek values represented by a free woman who takes a slave as a lover. Bitinna’s behavior undermines the ideological basis of the conventional contrast between Greek and barbarian—that is, the opposition between Greek virtue and barbarian servility—that she invokes to justify her revenge. Her comparison of herself to a Phrygian is thus relevant inasmuch as it is a vehicle for the ironic tension that informs the mime as a whole.

In a mock assumption of responsibility for her situation, Bitinna blames herself for having elevated Gastron to a position among human beings (ἐγὼ αἵτινες τούτων, ἣν Ἐγράκε, Πάτρων, ἣν θεία ἐν ἄνθρωποις, 14–15). The antithesis between slave and human being was conventional, and Headlam (ad line 15), comparing also Trimalchio’s assertion that his patron me hominem inter homines voluit esse (“desired that I be a man among men,” Petronius, Satyricon 39; cf. 57, 74), concluded that Gastron must be a freedman. In light of the explicit statements to the contrary by Bitinna and Gastron (6, 20), this cannot be the case (so Cunningham, rightly), and Bitinna’s power over the man is clearly absolute. Headlam missed the irony in her phrase. A human being differed from a slave precisely in that he was not conceived, by the Greeks, to be dependent on another; for this reason, even the condition of the wage laborer was conceived of as a kind of servitude. Gastron is entirely at the mercy of Bitinna, and thus anything but fully human, that is, free. This the reader perceives. What Bitinna herself means is that the privilege of her bed or love conferred a distinction upon Gastron that raised him above his fellow slaves. That distinction, however, is not equivalent to manumission, precisely because it continues to depend entirely upon the discretion or whim of the mistress. The status of a free human being is not contingent in this way.

The point of Bitinna’s remark for the reader, who, as so often in Alexandrian poetry, stands at an ironic distance from the characters in the narrative, is that she fails to discriminate between an actual difference of status and a mere

26. The two sides to the Greek notion of manly virtue are mastery rather than submissiveness in relations with others, and self-mastery in the domain of the emotions; Bitinna lays claim to the first in the act of violating the second. See Just (above, n. 21) 181: “The free man is contrasted in his inclinations both with those who are completely controlled (slaves) and those who are not in control of themselves (women).”
matter of preference, which leaves the slave exactly where he was with respect to his freedom. Bitinna’s is a world invaded by will, and therefore, insofar as power is hers, arbitrary. The meaning of the opposition between slave and free man, even as she appeals to it, is obliterated by her actions and her language.

There is a verbal parallelism between Bitinna’s exclamation that she not be considered a woman (μή με θήμις γυναίκας εἶναι, 13) and her claim to have conferred manhood upon Gastron (ἡ σε θείας ἐν ἀνθρώπως, 15). The word τίθημι in both, I suspect, points to Bitinna’s voluntarism, her sense that everything depends on what one wishes and can enforce.

Gastron no longer argues; he merely supplicates. Bitinna repeats the order to have him stripped, explaining that he must learn that he is a slave, purchased at three minae (20–21). Gastron, utterly defeated, tries pleading for forgiveness: “I am a human being,” he says; “I erred” (27). If he should ever again be caught disobedient to her wishes, he adds, let her tatoo him. Bitinna dismisses his appeal, and orders Gastron delivered to a warden to be flogged.

There is poignancy in Gastron’s confession of humanity, following upon the reminder that he is truly a slave. Gastron implicitly opposes humanity to divinity: the gods may be infallible, but mortals are not.28 In respect to mortality, he and Bitinna are alike, and there may be a subtle appeal for mercy toward a fellow creature, when all are equally liable to err. By changing the terms of the opposition in which humanity is one of the poles—that is, by switching implicitly from the contrast between a human being and a slave to that between a human being and a god—Gastron can lay claim to the human status that Bitinna had reckoned as hers to bestow or withdraw. Bitinna, however, is unmoved by this appeal, and tells him to take his complaints to her rival instead. And when Gastron protests that she will kill him without first having determined whether her accusations are true or false, Bitinna quotes his own confession against him (38 = 26). Gastron’s appeal to a common humanity thus backfires. He explains that he was simply trying to quench her anger, but Bitinna has won the verbal battle. This is predictable, since the entire confrontation was not so much an argument over the facts of the case as an exercise in absolute authority, including the authority over discourse. Bitinna orders him led away, with a rag to cover his nakedness as he goes through the marketplace. Gastron does not speak again in the poem.

The scene we have been examining, which takes up approximately the first half of the mime, begins with Bitinna’s command to Gastron: “Tell me” (λέγε μοι

28. On erring as human, see Headlam/Knox (above, n. 15) ad line 27. Veneroni (above, n. 5, 328) notes two senses of ἀνθρώπος, which she distinguishes as a universalizing Hellenistic use, and a traditional, status-conscious sense. There is a similar juxtaposition of the two senses of ἀνθρώπως, however, in the prologue to Menander’s Samia. Moschion, the adopted son of Demeas, observes that it is thanks to his foster father that he is a human being (δέ ἐκείνον ἶν ἀνθρώπως, 17); a few lines later, he excuses his father’s passion for a hetaera on the grounds that it is a human failing (πράγμα ἵνας ἀνθρώπως, 22). Cf. A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, Menander: A Commentary (Oxford, 1973) 547 ad line 17.
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σύ); it ends with the reduction of the slave to silence. Gastron attempts various strategies in his defense—denial of the charge (through a rhetorical question), supplication, a plea for mercy, an appeal to a fair hearing. All fail. His denials are dismissed as excuses (he has a “big mouth” [δοσιν... τήν γλάσσαν, 8]); his petition for forgiveness is taken as a confession (out of “his own mouth” [τῇ ἰδίῃ γλάσσῃ, 37]). Bitinna meanwhile insists on her power to command: “Strip him, I say” (ἐξαναθή, φημί, 20); “again, I tell you” (πάλιν φωνέω, 47; cf. also λέγω, 41, 50, in subordinate clauses). When she thinks to cover him before sending him into the streets, she speaks, in her vulgar way, of “hiding his unmentionable tail [penis]” (καλύψαι τήν ἀνώνυμον κέφαλον, 45). In the word ἀνώνυμον, “anonymous” or “nameless,” I think there is a hint that the slave’s humiliation is a loss of name or identity; he is unspeakable, outside the universe of discourse.29

I do not mean to suggest that Bitinna’s power over Gastron resides in her verbal authority. Herodas dwells on the binding of the slave (cf. 10–11, 18, 24–25, 31), and he is handled violently throughout (cf. esp. 41–42). But when a person subject to desire and to apparently irrational fits of jealousy has absolute power over another, the arbitrariness of authority is manifest in language as well. In particular, it appears as an abuse or cachetisation of conventional formulas of order and justice. In the upside-down household of Bitinna, language as a vehicle of social regulation is distorted.

Suddenly, Bitinna recalls something and sends a slave girl, Cydilla, to summon Gastron back. She shouts ahead to Pyrrhies, who is leading Gastron to be beaten, and cries out in exasperation that “one would think that he is tearing apart a graverobber, not a fellow slave” (56–57). Cydilla is a sympathetic character;30 it is at her intercession that Bitinna will finally relent in the punishment of Gastron. Her sense of fellow-feeling among slaves is appealing especially because in the household of Bitinna they are at the mercy of such arbitrary violence. There is no place here for a refined sense of loyalty to the wishes of their mistress, which are too fickle to trust in.31 The reference to graverobbing shows that Cydilla is not without respect for right and wrong: one who violates the sacredness of the dead

29. Cunningham (above, n. 5) ad line 45 remarks that “this and 6.14 are the earliest exx. of the development of ‘nameless’ to ‘unmentionable.’” Whether Gastron is a nickname, or simply a name applied by a master to a slave, it too suggests the anonymity that is characteristic of servitude.

30. Cunningham (above, n. 5, 147–48) quotes Headlam (“the only pleasant person in the piece”), then adds that it is possible that “she too acts out of self-interest”: cf. the rather extravagant claims for Cydilla’s generosity in Veneroni (above, n. 5, 325–27), on the basis of which Veneroni makes a case for Herodas’s humanism (p. 330).

31. Contrast the depiction of the “good” or loyal slave in New Comedy, e.g., Plautus, Menæachmi 966–76; cf. R. L. Hunter, The New Comedy of Greece and Rome (Cambridge, 1985) 145–47. I doubt that Herodas’s interest here is in the solidarity among slaves as such, as Anton P. Smotič, in Bibliotheca Classica Orientalis 2 (1966) 327, suggests; Cydilla’s sympathy for a fellow slave (σύνδουλον, 56) corresponds to the unpredictability of Bitinna’s temper. In her household, too keen an urge to carry out the mistress’s orders is harmful and unwise. See Mastromarco (above, n. 3) 88–89.
deserves punishment. There are standards of right conduct, that is, even if it is the case that for Bitinna they seem largely irrelevant.  

When Gastron is brought back, still bound, Bitinna announces her new intention of having him tattooed. Evidently, she has belatedly recalled Gastron’s own earlier suggestion of the punishment for any future disobedience. At this point, Cydilla begs mercy for a single offense, in effect a repetition of Gastron’s own plea (ἀφες... τὴν μίαν ταύτην / ἀμαρτήν, 72–73; ἀφες μοι τὴν ἀμαρτήν ταύτην, 26 = 38). Cydilla supports her appeal with a prayer that Bitinna may live to see her daughter married, and carry grandchildren in her arms (69–71). The strategy is to recall Bitinna to ordinary social life and practices, and thereby distract her from her too-intense concern with a slave lover. Her hopes for her daughter, and specifically that she may give her over to the household of a man (ἐς ἀνδρὸς οἴκον, 71), installs in the poem the theme of marriage among households, under the authority of a male. There is here, I think, an allusion to the conjugal reciprocity that is at the heart of New Comedy, which so often has its resolution in a citizen marriage. The implicit reference to the civic code that informs official comedy sets in relief the inversion of conventional values that characterizes the household of Bitinna, in which the mistress’s consort is a slave, and the authority normally pertaining to gender roles is reversed.

Bitinna reacts hysterically to Cydilla’s plea, threatening to run out of the house. If she should pardon the slave, she exclaims, “Who would not spit in my face when she met me, and rightly?” (75–76). Here again is the irony we saw earlier, in Bitinna’s intention to make a public example of Gastron. She must be thinking in a general way that her neighbors will despise her for leniency toward a disobedient slave, but she speaks as though the only shame in taking a slave as a lover is to be found weakly tolerant toward infidelity. This is precisely the ironic or inverted image of women’s society that Herodas is projecting in the mime.  

32. I should like to suggest a further meaning in the reference to a tomb robber, or, in the phrase of Herodas, σμαύτων φοῖος (57. accusative of φῶς). Literally, the words mean one who carries off σμαύτα, “markers.” here in the common significance of tombs. But the word also carries a more general sense of linguistic signs. Is it possible that a sophisticated reader was intended to detect, in Cydilla’s reproach, the idea that the true offense worthy of punishment is the theft of meaning, that is, the evacuation of the content of linguistic signs? And might this be a veiled comment by Herodas on the preceding dialogue between Bitinna and Gastron? 

33. It seems specific to the mime to represent characters in what appears to be a private or domestic scene—that is, indoors, or, as in this mime, inside the courtyard (see line 11, and Groeneboom [above, n. 24] 157). Formal comedy invariably set the scene in a public context, whether a city street, as often in New Comedy and in Old, or outside the city (see David Konstan, “The Premises of Comedy: Functions of Dramatic Space in an Ancient and a Modern Form.” Journal of Popular Film and Television 15 (1988) 180–90). There is a point to this shift in locale. The mime represents characters who do not have a public status within the polis. In addition, characters in the mime reveal passions that they would hesitate to display publicly. In general, characters in public tragedy and comedy do not behave privately in a way that they would be ashamed of in the view of others; despite the sensitivity of Democritus, for example, to the disjunction between what people do or think in public or in private, such questions of hypocrisy and inward moral consistency
Bitinna rejects such contemptible softness with the words: “No, by the lady tyrant, but since he does not know himself, although he is a human being, he will know himself immediately when he has this inscription upon his forehead” (77–79). There are two conundrums in these lines: the first is the identity of the female tyrant (τὴν Τύραννον), evidently a goddess, invoked by Bitinna; the second is the word or words that Bitinna intends to have tattooed on Gastron’s brow. I do not propose to solve either problem, but rather to find the meaning of each phrase for the poem, independent of a specific reference.

While various suggestions have been offered concerning the identity of the tyrant goddess (e.g., Aphrodite, Hera, or an Oriental deity such as Isis or Men), none is secure. As Cunningham remarks, the epithet τύραννος “is not elsewhere used of a goddess.”34 Under the circumstances, it may be best to set aside the goal of recovering an actual reference for Bitinna’s unusual oath, and inquire rather into the meaning of such an exclamation on Bitinna’s lips.

It is not difficult to see in Bitinna’s choice of epithet a sign of her own imperious temperament. Bitinna is passionate, violent, and arbitrary in the administration of her own household, and this fits well with the characterization of the tyrant.35 It is natural for her to swear by such a deity as she prepares to have Gastron branded, and Herodas can, I think, have expected his audience to interpret her unusual oath in this way.36

It does not seem possible to decide certainly what motto is to be printed on Gastron. Cunningham suggests “Know thyself” or the like (this is not guaranteed by τοῦτο, “this”), but it may also be, as Headlam suggests, that a descrip-

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34. See Headlam/Knox (above, n. 15) and Cunningham (above, n. 5) ad line 77; also Kruse, s.v. “Tyrannos,” RE 7A2 (1943) 1843.


36. John Scheid (Religion et piété à Rome [Paris, 1985] 142–45) notes that in Hellenistic society the gods were coming to be seen as friendly rather than arbitrary and tyrannical, and that the latter view was a sign of superstition; cf. Plutarch, “On Superstition” (Mor. 164E–171E); Varro ap. Aug. Civ. Dei 6.9: etc.
tion of Gastron’s fault, or of his condition (that is, a slave), is intended, or else some formulaic characters. It is the fact of branding, in any case, that will impress upon Gastron the knowledge of his status that Bitinna wishes to impart; we cannot expect him to read the inscription in a mirror.

It is more fruitful to inquire what the lesson is that Gastron is meant to learn. Bitinna’s appeal to the Delphic injunction is certainly laced with dramatic irony. Bitinna had said that Gastron must come to know (γνώσεις) that he is a slave, and was purchased at a price (20–21). Here she alleges that he does not know himself, albeit he is a human being. Cunningham (defending the punctuation proposed by Headlam, which is adopted here: ἄνθρωπος ὃς [78], “being a man,” is concessive) observes that there is “a twisting of G[astron]’s words against himself,” since Gastron had himself asserted that he was only a human being (27). Cunningham comments that Gastron “has forgotten the wise precept γνῶθι σαυτόν, and has exceeded his due position: soon his tattoo will be there to remind him.” But Gastron meant then that he was mortal, and hence liable to error. To be ignorant of this is to place oneself on the level of the gods, and Gastron has not made this mistake. While Bitinna undoubtedly does once again turn the slave’s words against him, as she did earlier with his desperate confession, her accusation is specious.

What Bitinna means to teach Gastron is that he is a slave (cf. ἐπτάδουλον, 75), not a human being, and that he has exceeded his position in acting as though he were free—that is, as though he were truly a human being, which, as we have seen, is the antithesis of servitude in the Greek lexicon. She is in the very act of stripping him of even that limited claim to humanity that she had originally conferred upon him by taking him to her bed (cf. 15). The contradiction implicit in Bitinna’s appropriation of the Delphic precept is that Gastron, although he is a man, does not know that he is not a man, but a slave. The concessive clause by which humanity is attributed to Gastron is a lie, and will be contradicted by his being branded as a slave. Under Bitinna’s dispensation, self-knowledge—the knowledge of one’s position or status in the world—is itself riddled with paradox, because status is entirely contingent.

Not only Gastron’s words, but also his suggestion of tattooing is turned to his disadvantage, as we have noted. By inscribing her message on Gastron’s flesh, Bitinna casts her slave as a tablet. She had previously reduced him to silence; now she treats him as the mere vehicle of her words. If the power of speech is indicative of humanity, then Gastron, who must wear the utterance of another

37. Mastromarco (above, n. 3, 50) suggests that the word τοῦτο might indicate a gesture by Bitinna toward the needles and ink that Kosis (mentioned in line 65) was carrying on stage. Stern (above, n. 15) suggests that the message “Know thyself” would be for the benefit of Bitinna, who needs such instruction, rather than Gastron; this seems oversubtle.

38. See Stern (above, n. 15).

39. Cf., e.g., Plato, Gorgias 508A5. οὐφός ὃν; the weak concessive tone of the phrase, “being a man,” is sufficient for my argument.
on his skin, is no more than an object. Gastron will not come to know himself by this means; he will simply be marked or labeled. In this extreme act of domina-
tion, the self-consciousness enjoined by the Delphic maxim is beside the point.

Bitinna’s disruption of the Delphic maxim is juxtaposed to her invocation of the
tyrant goddess. She subverts the Classical injunction to order and self-
awareness both in her behavior, in which power is in the service of sexual lust,
and in her language. In its place, she installs a deity emblematic of disorder and
arbitrariness, corresponding perfectly to the disposition of the household over
which she rules. Throughout, Bitinna invokes traditional paradigms of justice or
self-restraint in a way that parodies the Classical ethic.

I have been suggesting that the scene dramatized in Herodas’s fifth Mime
inverts the values of the Classical city-state. Michel Foucault has brilliantly
delineated the associations between personal self-control, domestic order, and civic
ideals in the moral literature of fifth- and fourth-century Athens.40 Sexual immo-
rality, Foucault shows, is a function of excess and passivity (p. 57). Sexual
pleasure leads to transgression through the overindulgence of an inferior desire
(pp. 58–59). Not that sexual pleasure is simply to be denied. Rather, it is to be
controlled, managed (p. 67): hence, Foucault’s title, L’usage des plaisirs, “The
Management or Governance of the Pleasures.” Self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια) is the
guiding principle of the art of right living, and it is achieved by self-discipline
(ἀσκησις). “Virtue, in the order of pleasures, is not conceived of as a state of
integrity, but as a relation of domination, a relation of mastery” (p. 82). And
Foucault adds: “To insure control of oneself, exercise authority over one’s
house, and participate in the government of the city are three practices of the
same type” (p. 88). Mastery is the active form of freedom, and temperance or
self-control is, accordingly, a masculine virtue. “Just as, within the house, it is
the man who commands, and just as, within the city, it falls neither to slaves nor
children nor women to exercise power, but to men and men only, so too must
each one make his manly qualities prevail over himself” (p. 96). This set of
structural relations has its point of intersection in the role and responsibilities of
the married head of the household, which was the ideal economic unit of the
Classical city-state: “consideration of marriage and the proper conduct of a
husband is regularly associated with consideration of the oikos” (p. 167).

A woman, too, has a role in the management of a household, but to the
extent that she exercises a responsible kind of control, she may be described as
possessing a masculine spirit (ἀνδρικῆ δύναμις, as Socrates puts it in Χενο-
phon’s Oeconomicus 10.1, cit. Foucault p. 97). In Herodas’s mime, Bitinna
appears, as we have seen, to have complete authority over her household; at
least, no male is mentioned as χύριος, or legal head. But it is clear that she does
not rule as a man—that is, in terms of the ideology described by Foucault, with a

40. Michel Foucault, Histoire de la sexualité II, L’usage des plaisirs (Paris, 1984); pages cited in
the text refer to this edition.
virile virtue manifested in self-control and in an orderly disposition of the household. On the contrary, she violates the Classical (Athenian) ideal of management both of herself, by submitting to be ruled by her baser passions, and of her domestic establishment, by elevating a slave to the position of consort. Her lapse in these two domains should have, according to Foucault’s analysis, its correlate in the political sphere as well. I suggest that Bitinna’s reference to the tyrant goddess serves this function, importing the notion of tyranny, with its associations of arbitrariness and want of self-mastery, into the cosmos of the poem. The appeal to tyranny effectively displaces the regulatory wisdom of the Delphic maxim, which is in any case subverted by Bitinna’s paradoxical application of it.

The world represented in Herodas’s Mimes, and specifically in the fifth, may be seen, then, as a systematic inversion of the ideology of the Classical city-state. But the transformation that Herodas registers ironically, that is, as a perversion of the Classical paradigm, is not simply a theoretical variation on an ideal type. The world of Herodas’s mime seems also to reflect the poet’s own society, where women are likely to have enjoyed more liberty and autonomy than they possessed in fifth-century Athens. In Egypt, at all events, for which the evidence is most plentiful, women in Greek communities could enter into contracts, own property, hold certain public offices, and manage their own households. They could arrange a marriage for themselves or for a daughter, as Bitinna evidently plans to do, without the formal approval of a male guardian or χώρος. Women, or some women, at least, enjoyed an independence in Alexandria and elsewhere that was beginning to render obsolete the Classical ideology based on a radically bipolar gender opposition. Herodas adapts the mime form, with its traditional license and focus on marginal figures of society, in order to cast an independent woman of Bitinna’s status as a conventionally dissolve comic type. I suspect him of a certain snobbery in this, a courtly disdain for progressive changes in Hellenistic urban life that is characteristic, I think, of Alexandrian poetry in general. Independent bourgeois ladies of the middle class were easy targets for the refined irony of antiquarian esthetes, though a lewd and domineer-

41. On the status of women in Hellenistic society, see Sarah B. Pomeroy, Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra (New York, 1984) 89–91 (on a woman’s right to give a daughter in marriage), 93 (on dowries); on whether a woman in Alexandria could act without a χώρος or guardian, there seems to be some confusion in Pomeroy’s account; contrast p. 89 (“contracts were made between men”) with p. 200 n. 85 on “the numerous cases in which women acted under Greek law without using a χώρος,” citing P. W. Pestman, Over vrouwen en voogden in het oude Egypte (Leiden, 1969) 17–19. It appears that Greek women might also elect to act under Egyptian demotic law (p. 120), which did not require a male χώρος. On women as slaveowners, see Pomeroy, 128–29; on ownership of land, 152–54. See also David M. Schaps, Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece (Edinburgh, 1979) 4–8, on Hellenistic women and rights of ownership, in contrast with the law at Athens; cf. p. 49: “Not every city in Greece required the χώρος consent to a woman’s transactions.” For Greek women in the Hellenistic and especially the Egyptian economy, see Schaps 96–98. Athenian laws concerning women’s rights in marriage and property may never have been the norm for all Greek cities; see M. I. Finley, “The Problem of the Unity of Greek Law,” in The Use and Abuse of History (Harmondsworth. 1987; orig. pub. 1975) 138–42.
ing woman might be an object of fun among the lower classes as well, since the mime we have been discussing also has a close analogue in what is evidently a popular prose composition preserved on papyrus datable to the second century A.D. Be that as it may, Herodas’s fifth Mime seems to me to have a critical and conservative tendency. Bitinna is represented against an implicit standard of Classical, manly virtue, and is shown as wanting.

Cydilla intervenes once more, reminding her mistress that it is but four days to the festival of the Gerenia, a festival of the dead known only from this mention (80). Bitinna relents. She directs Gastron’s gratitude to Cydilla, whom she loves like her own daughter, having nurtured her in her own hands (81–83). Bitinna seems to be recalling Cydilla’s image of future grandchildren cradled in her arms: we have seen her disposition to echo the language of interlocutors. Here, her suggestibility works in Gastron’s favor, though with so changeable a mistress there is scant reason for confidence.

In the final two lines of the drama, Bitinna threatens Gastron that, after the ritual libations are poured to the dead, he will never again enjoy the honey of the feast. Thus, the poem ends on a note of deliberate irresolution, promising endless repetitions of the dreary scene just witnessed. Sentimentality and spite, rather than reason, rule in the personality of Bitinna.

In a sensitive study, Jacob Stern has read this mime as an indictment of Bitinna’s own failure of self-knowledge, and has seen in the festival of the dead a vehicle for the theme of mortality as a solvent of the social distinctions between free man and slave. I am less inclined than Stern is to draw a moral from the action. The mime presents a scene of helplessness in the face of passionate violence, and knowledge seems beside the point in such an atmosphere. On my reading, the Delphic adage is not so much a standard of morality in the poem as it is the subject of a joke, abused as it is by Bitinna: it is she who elevated to the


43. In other mimes (for example, the first), Herodas offers a more benign picture of women. Even in the fifth, it is perhaps possible to see Bitinna in a more favorable light, or at least in a less monochromatic one—as an anonymous referee, to whose comments I am much indebted, has pointed out. I take the liberty of quoting from the referee’s report: “The mime, I think, does not so much monodimensionally condemn the mistress’ breach of moderation, as explore the contradiction within the dominant ideology of sex and gender. According to the logic of ὁφροσύνη, Bitinna both can and cannot act ethically in the mode of self-determination.” Consistently with this dialectical reading, the referee observes that Bitinna’s jealousy need not be taken as wholly irrational or unmotivated.

44. Lee Quinby has pointed out to me the oddity that here a festival installs a lapse in the disorder of the poem, a kind of Bakhtinian moment in reverse.

45. Stern (above, n. 15).
role of lover the slave who is instructed to know his place. The spirit of Herodas's drama is aloof and satirical, not didactic.

In the hands of Herodas, the world of the mime is a subject for irony. This is, I have suggested, consistent with the general tenor of Alexandrian poetry, which represented antitypes to Classical forms and conventions, although it implicitly invoked those conventions as an ideal (in part by its language with its strange, high-literary adaptation of Archaic forms). In this, Hellenistic sophistication intersected with two older traditions: the satirical violence of iambic invective, and what I believe was the farcical and hilarious spirit of the Classical mime. As an emblem of the difference between the mime, at all events as we know it from the elegant sketches of Herodas, and other comedy, we may perhaps point to a contrast between the presiding deities of the several forms: the bounteous gods or goddesses such as Peace, Reconciliation, and Wealth, who so frequently bless Old Comedy with their epiphanies; the Dionysian hilarity of the satyr play; the artful contrivers such as Pan, Chance, or Misapprehension, who guide New Comedy to its fated resolution; and Tyranny, who exercises her whimsical sovereignty in the inverted universe of mime.46

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46. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Brown University, the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford University, where I had the benefit of many stimulating suggestions and comments. I wish especially to acknowledge the helpful remarks of Erich Gruen, who encouraged me to develop the argument on the position of women in Alexandrian society.