

Herodas

Selected Mimes

Mimiambi I, IV, VI

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Herodas of Cos (an island north of Rhodes in the Dodecanese) wrote mimes in the third century BCE. His surviving mimes were discovered in 1891 on a papyrus dating from the second century CE. About his life nothing is known.

The translations are based on the texts of Cunningham (Loeb, 2002), Headlam & Knox (Cambridge, 1922; reprinted 2014), Zanker (Aris and Phillips, 2009) with help from their notes, commentaries, and translations.

Mimes, Iambi, and Mimiambi

Mimes, like those of the fifth century BCE Sophron, were in prose and were staged by solo performers (or small troupes) using, dance, gesture, as well as voice.

Iambic poetry is associated with the names Archilochus, Semonides, Hipponax, and Anacreon and was used for satirical verse, some of it virulently personal.

Mimiambi were written by Herodas, combining the two genres: mimes in iambic verse. Their striking feature of several of Herodas' pieces is the intimate conversations among women and the subtlety of their characterization.

Iambic Verse, said to be the meter closest to everyday speech was used in tragedy and comedy for much of the dialogue portions. Hipponax substituted the *skazōn* or *choliamb* (limping iambic) for the usual iambic.

The iambic trimeter in dipodic units (three groups of two) goes like this (with x meaning *anceps* or variable, long or short, with many other possible substitutions, called "resolutions"):

$$x \bar{ } \cup \bar{ } \quad x \bar{ } \cup \bar{ } \quad x \bar{ } \cup \bar{ } \quad x$$

The *skazon* or *choliamb* substitutes a long for the 11th or penultimate syllable which is always short in the regular iambic, which gives it a limping or halting feel:

$$x \bar{ } \cup \bar{ } \quad x \bar{ } \cup \bar{ } \quad x \bar{ } \bar{ } \quad x$$

Dialect: If Herodas was from Cos he would have spoken Doric as his native dialect. The dialect he uses in his mimes is basically Ionic, though with forms from other dialects, especially Attic. It is intentionally artificial and literary.

Performance Ancient works, whether prose or poetry were generally originally published through performance or public reading. We do not know how the mimes were performed, but public spaces (such as the odeon on Cos) would lend themselves to performance by an actor (taking all the parts) or a small troupe of actors. Performance at private parties is also a likely possibility. The settings are usually simple so that elaborate stage settings and props would be unnecessary. Even in *Mimiamb* 4 (at the temple of Asclepius) words are enough to set the scene in the minds of the audience.

Recommendation for Further Reading:

The recent Text, Commentary, Translation, *Herodas Mimiamb*s by Graham Zanker (Aris and Phillips: Oxbow Books, Oxford) 2009 offers a good introduction to Herodas' work, numerous brilliant insights, and a good modern bibliography. A must read.

Mime I

The Go-Between *Prokuklis or Mastropos*

Mime 1: *Prokuklis* [f. < *kuklos* “circle,” “magic wheel”] or *Mastropos* [m. or f. < *maō* “desire, yearn for”] The go-between: procurer, procuress, madam, panderer, bawd, temptress are some possible titles from the Greek headings of a woman offering love for sale..

Scene: Metrichē’s respectable urban home on the island of Cos (Kos).

The point of the piece, as of the other mimes, is the characterization of the two women. Gyllis is clearly an old reprobate, plying her profession at the end of her career as a prostitute and wet-nurse, now the madam (and sometime working woman) of a small house. She knows all about Alexandria, the cultural capital of the Hellenistic world and expresses her knowledge with amusing juxtapositions. What can we gather about Metrichē? She lives in a house in town and most likely is in charge of a farm in the countryside. So she is a woman of ability and trust, if not means. She is in a relationship with one Mandris who has taken himself off to Alexandria, Egypt, the cultural capital of the Hellenistic world. Their relationship may be that of partners, companions, rather than wife and husband, which would explain her continuing friendship with a woman of Gyllis’ character and reputation as well as her loyalty to Mandris.

CHARACTERS

Metrichē: a Coan woman, status unclear, probably an ex-hetaira (companion). The scene takes place at her home.

Threissa (“Thracian woman”): Metrichē’s household slave.

Gyllis: the guest who comes calling in the title role.

Loud kick at the door.

METRICHĒ

Threissa, there’s someone banging at our door.

Go see if one of our people has come in from the country?

THREISSA *speaks through the door*

Who’s that at the door?

GYLLIS

It’s me.

THREISSA

So, who are *you*? Are you scared

to get any closer?

GYLLIS

Look here, I’m right at the door.

THREISSA

OK, so who *are* you?

GYLLIS

I'm Gyllis, Philainion's mom.
Go in and tell Metrichē I'm here.

THREISSA (*to her mistress*)

Somebody's calling on you . . .

METRICHĒ

Who is it?

THREISSA

Gyllis

METRICHĒ

Nanny¹ Gyllis

Get a move on², girl. What chance has persuaded you to come
see me, Gyllis? You're like an angel descended on us humans.
It's already been a full five months, I'd reckon,
since anyone has seen you coming to this door,
by the Fates³, Gyllis, not even so much as in a dream.

10

GYLLIS

I live far away, my dear, and in the alleys
the mud is thigh-high and I have
about as much strength as a blowfly;
old age is dragging me down that much
and its shadow is hovering.

15

METRICH

Hush. Don't exaggerate your age, Gyllis.
You are still able to squeeze⁴ other people.

GYLLIS

Go ahead and make fun of me. That's how it is
with you youngsters.

METRICH

Aw, c'mon don't get in a huff over it.

20

¹*Ammie*, "mamma": Headlam/Knox (15) "one of the child-words, natural in all languages, for nurse or mother." Gyllis was likely Metriche's wet-nurse, which could explain their continuing relationship now that Gyllis has a different type of clientele.

²*Strepson ti*, more literally, "withdraw a little": Headlam/Knox, Cunningham. Metriche addresses her as "slave," *doulē*. Even the respectable Metriche cannot resist the gossip brought by a woman who knows everybody's business. At least, unlike women in other mimes, she is not abusive to her slave.

³*By the Fates*: a common oath on Cos, without any special or portentous meaning.

⁴*Squeeze*, as in "hug" (in a sexual sense), but also perhaps "put the squeeze on" in the business sense.

GYLLIS

OK, kiddo⁵, how long is it now that you've lived
like a widow, alone, wearing out your single bed?
Look, it's been ten months since Mandris
set sail for Egypt and he sends back not a syllable.
Looks like he has a short memory and drinks from a new cup.⁶ 25
The home of the goddess⁷ is there. In fact everything
that exists and is produced has its start in Egypt:
money, exercise spas, power, fair weather, fame,
sights to see, philosophers, gold, young boys,
the shrine of the brother and sister gods⁸, a king who is good, 30
the Museum⁹, wine, whatever good things he could wish for,
and women, by the bride of Hades, as many as the stars
the sky above claims to hold aloft, as appealing as
the three who rushed to Paris once upon a time
to be judged for beauty—I pray they didn't hear 35
my mumbling.¹⁰ What are you thinking, poor dear,
just keeping your seat warm. You'll get old
without realizing it and ashes will overshadow your prime.
Look around yourself; make yourself a bit more titillating¹¹ 40
for two or three days; liven yourself up a bit and

⁵*Teknon*: Gyllis calls Metriche “child.” I have variously translated this term. “Kiddo” here, jocular, not quite getting to her point about her friend’s solitary life, “dear girl” when she is closer to her proposition.

⁶*Drinking from a new cup*: “He’s eating somebody else’s cupcakes,” as it were. This reminds me of an episode of *The Golden Girls*. Blanche is trying to let Rose know that she has had a liaison with Rose’s boyfriend. She uses the analogy of cupcakes. “Suppose he samples another woman’s cupcakes.” Rose of course takes it literally. “Why would he do that?”

⁷*The Goddess*: that is, Aphrodite.

⁸*Ptolemy II, Philadelphus and his sister/wife Arsinoe*. This reference is used to tentatively date this Mime: Ptolemy Philadelphus and his sister-wife were deified and given a shrine during their lifetime in 272–1 BCE.

⁹*The Museum of Alexandria*: a think-tank for scientists and scholars in various fields from philology to medicine.

¹⁰The lower a character goes, the more piety she shows. One can’t insult the gods until one does, but of course she doesn’t mean it.

¹¹In Greek *hilarē*, cheerful, “alluring” (Zanker ad line 40).

let your eyes glance in another direction. A ship is not safe
 being moored at a single anchor. When that day comes
 no one is going to lift us up from the netherworld.
 A wild winter storm swoops down and blows us away.
 No one knows the future. Life is unstable for us poor souls. 45
 Uh, there's no one around is there?

METRICHĒ

Not a soul.

GYLLIS

Listen to me a minute.

This is what I came to tell you:
 Matalinē (you know Pataikion's daughter) . . . well her son Gryllus,¹² 50
 winner of *five* athletic contests: as a boy at the Pythian games,
 twice at Corinth¹³ over youths sprouting their first peach fuzz,
 and at wrestling he twice defeated the men in the Olympics,¹⁴
 fairly well-to-do, though he doesn't pick up a straw, as they say,
 from the ground.¹⁵ An unpunched ticket¹⁶ in the Love department. 55
 When he saw you at the festival of Misē's descent¹⁷, his insides
 turned inside out and he was smitten to his core;
 throughout the night and all day long he does nor leave
 my house, dear girl, but bawls like a baby
 and calls me sweetheart and is perishing of desire. 60
 But, my dear girl, Metrichē, grant this one failing
 to the goddess. Give yourself a make-over—
 have yourself a fling before old age sneaks up on you.
 You'll be rewarded twice over: you'll have a bit of fun
 and more love tokens than you'd believe. C'mon,
 take my advice. I'm your friend, by the Fates, I am! 65

¹²*Gryllus*, “the Grunter” (Zanker *ad* 50)

¹³In the Isthmian games.

¹⁴At Pisa, i.e., the Olympian games.

¹⁵Pick up a straw: a proverb for someone who leads a quiet life, as opposed to that
 imagined for a prizefighter (cf. “wouldn't hurt a flea”).

¹⁶Literally, “an untouched seal.”

¹⁷*The Descent of Misē*: part of the Thesmophoria, a celebration of the cult of Demeter
 and Korē (Persephone). In later literature Misē is a name for the old woman (also known as
 Baubo, see Mime VI) who cheered Demeter in her mourning for her daughter.

METRICHĒ

Gyllis, that white hair on your head has dulled
your brain. By my Mandris' safe homecoming
and by dear Demeter, I would not have listened
to this from any other woman but I would have taught 70
her to sing her limping verse with a limp in her step¹⁸
and to think of the threshold of my door as her enemy.
And don't you ever come to me with any such
message, but give it to your stable 75
of young girls as suits an old crone.
But leave Metrichē, Pytheas' daughter,
"to keep her seat warm." No one will laugh at Mandris.
Anyway, I'm sure¹⁹ these aren't the words Gyllis wants to hear.
Threissa, wipe out the cup and pour in
three measures of unmixed wine, dribble in a drop 80
or two of water and give her a bit of a tippie.

GYLLIS

Oh, no thanks. I couldn't.

METRICHĒ

Oh, c'mon. Take a sip.

GYLLIS

Give it here then.

I did not come to persuade you, but because of the festival.

METRICHĒ

To your continued health. 85

GYLLIS

This is nice. By Demeter, yours truly has never tasted
wine sweeter than Metrichē's.
Be well, my girl. Take care of yourself.
I pray my girls Myrtalē and Simē stay young
as long as I have breath in my body. 90

¹⁸The mimes are written in a meter called *choliambic* or "limping iambs."

¹⁹*I'm sure*: lit. "they say." Gyllis has a reputation. If she misses her fee, a stiff drink is at least a small consolation.

Mime IV

Women Making a Dedication and Sacrificing to Asclepius.

Asklēpiōi Anatitheidsai kai Thysiazousai

Scene: The island of Cos, the Asclepieion. A visit to a major temple complex was rather like a trip to the museum. The latest works of art are on display in the form of votive offerings, some, as we surmise from the women's reactions, by the best artists of the day.²⁰

Characters:

Cynno (Kunnō), a Coan matron, of limited means
Coccale (Kokkalē), her friend, another Coan matron
Cydilla (Kudilla), Cynno's slave (non-speaking part)
Temple Doorkeeper (Neōkoros)

The women are individually characterized: Coccale, the friend who has accompanied Cynno, is an enthusiast. She can't hold her tongue, but exclaims over everything she sees. She is, on the other hand, not in favor of screaming at the slave girl for a minor, or no, infraction. She gains our sympathy as the nice friend of a bossy woman.

Cynno sees herself as a sophisticated lady of town. She recognizes and drops the names of the artists whose works are on display, ones we also recognize as the top men in their field. She is in control of everything, except her slave and her circumstances.

The doorkeeper (temple warden, acolyte, verger, attendant) offers polite assurances, is not dissatisfied with his share, but wants the bread or cakes that go with the sacrifice. (A drumstick without some carbs doesn't go a long way to feeding a young man.) He's unctuous as a man in his position would have to be. No one's sacrifice is less than perfect, if you want your daily bread.

CYNNO

Hail²¹, lord Paieōn²², you who rule over Tricca²³

²⁰See Zanker (2009): 98-131 for a brilliant discussion on the criticism of Hellenistic art to be found in this Mimiambus.

²¹*Hail*: these lines (until Cynno makes her personal excuse for her scanty sacrifice and addresses her friend) are a cult hymn to Asclepius and the other gods and heroes associated with his worship, arranged here in a group sculpture.

²²*Paieōn* (*Paiōn*): cult name for Asclepius; son of Coronis and Apollo; husband of *Hygieia* (Health), father of daughters *Panake* (Cure-all; cf. panacea), *Epio* (Gentleness); *Ieso* (Healing; cf. *iatros*, "doctor, healer", -iatry "healing"; the name Jason is from this root); Podaleirios and Machaon (Asclepius' sons) were the healers at Troy (the city founded by

and have made a home in delightful Cos and Epidaurus, and with you, Coronis, who gave you birth, and Apollo hail, and Hygieia, whom you touch with your right hand, and those whose holy altars these are,	5
Panake and Epio and Ieso, hail, and those who sacked the house and walls of Laomedon, healers of savage diseases, Podaleirios and Machaon, hail to you, and whatever gods and goddesses dwell at your hearth, father Paieōn; I pray you come here favorably and receive this cock, herald of my house walls, a side-dish to your dinner. We draw only scant water from our well and that not easily: otherwise we would have	10
made an ox or stuffed pig with all its crackling, not a mere rooster, as offering for our cure from diseases which you, stretching out your healing hands wiped away with a touch, o king. Coccale, set up the tablet ²⁴ on the right of Hygieia.	15
COCCALE	20
Wow. What beautiful statues, Cynno dear! What artist worked this stone and who was it that dedicated it?	
CYNNO	
Praxiteles' boys ²⁵ : don't you see the writing on the base? Euthies, son of Prexon dedicated it.	
COCCALE	
May Paiōn be auspicious to them and Euthies for these beautiful works.	25

Laomedon) during the Trojan War. Tricca, Cos, and Epidaurus: major sites for the worship of Asclepius, with Tricca in Thessaly given pride of place as the original temple to the god.

²³*Tricca* was a town in Northern Greece that sent a contingent to the Trojan War led by Podaleirios and Machaon (n. 21)

²⁴The *tablet* (*pinax*) contains the thanks for the cure and a brief description of it. Simple embossed tin plaques with reliefs of arms, legs, hearts, torsos, or the word *eucharistō* (“thank you”) are still commonly placed on icon stands in Greece.

²⁵*Praxiteles*: the most famous sculptor of the fifth century BCE. His sons Timarchus and Cephisodotus followed in their father's craft. The sculptures in question would be cult statues (*agalmata*). The next group is of human subjects in everyday activities (*andriantes*).

Look, dear, at that little girl over there gazing up at the apple! Wouldn't you say that if she doesn't get that apple, she will faint dead away? And Cynno, see that old man. By the Fates!	30
Watch that little boy strangling the goose. You would say the piece would talk if it weren't marble when you get right up to it. Mark my words, there'll come a time when people will be able to put life into stone.	
This statue of Batale, Myttes' daughter, Cynno, do you see how she is caught in mid stride? If anyone hasn't met Batale in the flesh, looking at this likeness they shouldn't need to see the real one. ²⁶	35
CYNNO Come along, my dear and I will show you something so beautiful you've never seen anything like it in your life.	40
Cydilla, go call the doorkeeper. Didn't you hear me speaking to you? Yes, you, gaping every which way. I swear nothing that I say is done as I tell her to, but she stands blinking at me blanker than a clam.	
Go on, I tell you, and call the doorkeeper, like <i>now</i> . Greedy guts, no priestess or ordinary woman finds any value in you, but everywhere you are as just as worthless. ²⁷ I call the god to witness, Cydilla that you are irritating me when I'm trying to keep calm.	45
I swear, that day will come when you will be scratching at that filthy scalp of yours. ²⁸	50
COCCALE Don't be so ready to take things to heart, Cynno. She's a slave: dullness clogs a slave's ears.	
CYNNO But, the sun's up and it's getting more crowded. You, wait there! The door is being unbolted and the shrine is free to enter.	55

²⁶Batale and Myttes: Batale is a local girl, recognized by the visitors. On the status of these two women in the hetaira class, see Zanker *ad* 4.35–6:113. Coccale shows mild disapproval of the ladies' profession with the verb in third person imperative mood.

²⁷You're as useless in the temple as you are at home.

²⁸It's characteristic of the women in the mimes to mistreat their slaves, curse them and (as in comedy) threaten them with punishment. In this case Cynno may be threatening to have the poor girl branded.

COCCALE

Dear Cynno, do you see
what works are there!? You would say Athena had
carved these splendid pieces. Hail mistress!
That naked boy, if I scratch him
won't I make a scar, Cynno? The flesh 60
lying on the panel seems to throb so warmly.
And that pair of silver grilling tongs:
if Myllos or Pataikiskos, Lamprion's son,
were to see it they would pop their eyeballs
out, thinking it was actually made of silver.²⁹ 65
That ox and the man leading it and the woman
walking beside, and this hook-nose and that
snub-nose³⁰ don't they all seem so full of life?
If I wasn't worried about making a scene,
I would have let out a shriek in fear that ox would gore me, 70
he looks at me so askance, Cynno, with that one eye.

CYNNO

Yes, my dear, the hands of Apelles of Ephesus³¹
are true in all his paintings. You won't say, "that man
looked at one thing, but turned up his nose at another."
But whatever came to his mind he was ready to hurry
and try his hand at it.³² Whoever looks at him or his works 75
without gawking in admiration as is his due, should be strung up
by his foot at the dry-cleaner's establishment.³³

DOORKEEPER (verger, temple warden, acolyte, temple attendant)

The sacrifices have been completed and look

²⁹*Myllos* (or *Myelos*) and *Pataikiskos*: on the names, see Zanker ad 4.63: 117: the former name was known in comedy for its bearer's stupidity; the latter (with the addition of the diminutive suffix *-iskos* to the name *Pataikion*) for his petty thievery.

³⁰ *Anasimos* ("snub nose"). Another reading is *anasillos*, "man with his hair brushed upright"; "man with his hair cut like a hedge-hog."

³¹ *Apelles* of Colophon (and by adoption of Ephesus, also called Apelles the Coan), a famous painter of the fourth century BCE, renowned for his lines (*grammata*): see Pliny, *Natural History* 35.36.79–97.

³² The translation is based on the text and version of Headlam/Knox; similarly Cunningham; Zanker: "but whatever came into his mind, he strove to touch [the perfection of] the gods."

³³ And beaten, one supposes, like the dirty clothes, and hung out to dry.

toward happier times, ladies. No one has better pleased Paieōn than you.	80
Hail, hail, Paieōn, we pray you will be kind to these women for their excellent sacrifice, and to their husbands and close kin.	
Hail, hail Paieōn. Lord, grant our prayer.	85
CYNNO	
Yes, I pray we come back in the pink of health to make a more appropriate offering with our husbands and children. —Coccale be sure to cut the leg off the bird neatly and give it to the doorkeeper and put the token for the holy cake ³⁴ into the snake hole without any improper sounds and baste the offerings of meal. The rest we will eat in the comfort of home. Don't forget to bring it.	90
DOORKEEPER	
	Just a sec!
Give me some of the bread offering. For us holy men the loss of the bread is worse than to miss our share. ³⁵	95

³⁴The original offering of grains for the serpent of Asclepius were by this time replaced by a coin offering inserted into a box. Asclepius and his worship are associated with snakes (see, the caduceus, the symbol still used for the medical profession) indicating his association with the earth and her healing properties.

³⁵This translation is based on the text, notes, and rendering of Headlam/Knox; Cunningham has [with Cynno speaking] “Don't forget to carry some of the health offering” (*hygies* is used of the bread offering) with the rest too lacunose to interpret; Zanker: [the speaker is Coccale] “you there, don't forget to take away some of the holy bread. Hand [it] out as much as you like, for certainly at sacrifices”

Mime VI

Friends' Get-together or An Intimate Chat

philazousai or idiazousai

[The Red Dildo]

Scene: Koritto's house, a well-off dwelling in Ephesus

Characters:

Korittō, the woman of the house

Mētrō, her visitor

Korittō's slave (non-speaking part)

The piece could just as well be called "Women at Cross-purposes." Mētrō has a particular reason for coming to see Korittō: to find out the provenance of the magnificent red dildo. Korittō puts her off again and again, until finally she says, "oh, you don't have to beg," and names its manufacturer. Both women are consummate gossips and we learn the names and stories of more of their neighbors than we can keep track of.

How times have changed. A hundred years ago Walter Headlam (1922: xlvi) wrote of Mime VI, "It is an ugly subject; but allowance being made for it, the mime is at least as clever and amusing as the rest." In 2021, the owners of our local exotica establishment are pillars of the community in the minds of all decent people in town. I would like to dedicate this translation to Kathy Sprague and Tabitha Simmons, long-time proprietors of Safari Pearl in Moscow, Idaho, with thanks for their work for our community, for making Moscow safe for people treated as different, and for working with dignity and courage toward an inclusive community.

KORITTŌ

Have a seat, Mētrō.

(*To her slave*) Get up and give the woman
a chair. Do I have to tell you everything myself?

Can't you do anything, on your own, you wretch.

I swear, you are more like a stone than a slave in the household.

But when your rations are being measured out 5

you count the grains, and if just this much falls through

you spend the whole day muttering and seething

with indignation so the walls can hardly hold you.

Now you are wiping off the chair and polishing it up,

when it's needed, little cheat, do me a favor and thank her, 10

because I would have given you a taste of my hand (i.e., *if she hadn't been here*).

MĒTRŌ

Korittō, my dear, you're worn down by the same yoke as I am.

I'm like a barking dog, snapping at

these confounded³⁶ creatures day and night.
 But the real reason I came to see you. . .
 KORITTŌ (*to her slave*)³⁷

Go on, get to work. 15

Blast you, you sneak, nothing but ears and tongue
 and the rest, a holiday!
 MĒTRŌ

Please, and don't tease me,
 dear Korittō, who was it that stitched up for you ...
 that scarlet dildo?³⁸

KORITTŌ

Huh? Where have you seen
 it, Mētrō?

MĒTRŌ

Nossis, Erinna's³⁹ daughter had it 20
 a couple of days ago. Man, that's some fine gift.

KORITTŌ

Nossis!? And where did she get it?

MĒTRŌ

You won't tell on me
 if I tell you?

KORITTŌ

I swear by my own sweet eyes, my dear Mētrō,
 from the sealed lips of Korittō, no one will hear
 whatever you say.

MĒTRŌ

Bitas' wife Euboulē 25
 gave it to her and said no one was to know.

³⁶She calls them “nameless”, i.e., unnameable; because what she would call them would be unspeakable. (Cf. “Expletive deleted” in some modern transcriptions of conversations or testimony.) I used to call the former president the turnip, to avoid using profanity.

³⁷These lines can also be ascribed to Metro (e.g., by Zanker), so that she gives an example of her barking, by yelling at her own slave. On the other hand Metro may be trying to win sympathy by claiming to share her friend's burden. She tries to make herself out to be a compassionate character (55–6) with her platitudes about the dearly departed Kylaithis. It's clear she has one thing on her mind.

³⁸See Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 108–10: “Ever since the Milesians deserted us not so much as a measly five-inch dildo is available to provide us with some small comfort.”

³⁹ It is part of the satirical tone that Herodas chooses the names of two of the best known women poets, Nossis and Erinna, for these women of questionable character.

KORITTŌ

Women! That woman will be the death of me one day.
I gave in to her pleading and let her have it,
Mētrō, before I had even tried it out myself, 30
but she snatches it up like a door prize and hands
it over to women who shouldn't touch it. To hell
with her! What a friend! Let her find someone else
to pal around with instead of me from now on. But for Nossis
daughter of Medokes to use it! There's a lot more I would
like to say (Nemesis⁴⁰, don't listen)— if I had a thousand
I wouldn't give her one that was rough as sandpaper. 35

MĒTRŌ

Oh, Korittō, don't be so quick to get a stink
up your nose if you hear something dumb.
A real woman has to put up with anything.
My bad, it's my fault for talking too much, 40
I should have my tongue cut out of my mouth.
But, that item I particularly mentioned to you,
who is it that fabricated it? If you're my friend, tell me.
What are you smirking at me for? Is your Mētrō nothing
but a stranger to you? Or what is this coyness?
I beseech you, Korittō, and don't play with me: 45
tell me who made it.

KORITTŌ

Sheesh, you don't have to beseech me?
Kerdōn⁴¹ made it.

MĒTRŌ

Kerdōn? Hm, which Kerdōn? Tell me that.
There are two Kedrons: there's that blue-eyed
neighbor of Kylaithis and Myrtalinē,
but he couldn't stitch so much as a lyre pick; 50
and the other living near the apartments
of Hermadorus as you turn off Main Street.
Once upon a time he was somebody. He's old now.
The late Kylaithis, gods bless her, lived with him. 55
I pray whatever kin she has left keep her memory.

KORITTŌ

Neither of those, that you suggest, Mētrō;

⁴⁰The name she actually uses is *Adresteia* (*Adrasteia*) a name that became synonymous with Nemesis, punisher of all kinds of excess.

⁴¹*Kerdōn*, a name related to *kerdos*, “gain, advantage,” also “crafty, cunning.” His shop is the scene of Mime 7.

this one comes from Chios, or Erythrae, I don't know.
 He's bald, short, he looks just like Prexinos.⁴²

They are like two peas in a pod⁴³, until 60
 you hear him speaking. You will recognize
 it's Kerdōn and not Prexinos from his stentorian voice.
 He works from home, selling his wares on the side,
 now that every door shudders at the tax-collectors.
 But the work! He's a true master. You'll think
 you see the hand of Athena, not Kerdōn's. 65
 At sight of them—Mētrō, he brought two!—
 my eyes about popped out of my head.
 Men can't get their erections so— you know,
 we're alone here— stiff. And not just that
 but the softness of sleep⁴⁴, the little straps are wool 70
 not thongs. You can search, but you won't find
 a cobbler more attentive to a woman's needs.

MĒTRŌ
 How did you let the other one get away?

KORITTŌ
I tried everything,
 Mētrō. I used every kind of persuasion on him:
 I kissed him, I stroked his bald bean, 75
 I poured him sweet wine to drink, called him “honey”.
 The only thing I didn't do was offer him my body.

MĒTRŌ
 Well, if he asked for it, you should have.

KORITTŌ
 Yeah, I should. But it's a put off to be too forward.
 And besides Bitas' wife Euboulē was hanging around; 80
 day and night that woman wears away our millstone
 grinding grain; she has turned it into slag to avoid paying
 four obols for her own.

MĒTRŌ
 How did he find a path to your door,
 my dear Korittō? And tell me the truth. 85

⁴²*Prexinos* (*Praxinos*), a name that suggests he was well-known as a huckster at the market.

⁴³In Greek: “You couldn't say one fig looks so much like another fig.” Fig, naturally, has sexual associations, used for *pudenda muliebra* (“lady parts”).

⁴⁴The Greek word for “dildo” is *baubon*, related to *baubao* “lull to sleep.”

KORITTŌ

Artemeis⁴⁵ the wife of the tanner Kandas pointed
out our house and sent him here.

MĒTRŌ

That Artemeis is always finding something new,
getting way ahead of Thallō⁴⁶ in pimping her products.
But then when you could not pry the second one
loose you should have found out who paid for it.

90

KORITTŌ

I begged him, but he swore he wouldn't tell me.
He's in her clutches, Mētrō. He's got a thing for her.

MĒTRŌ

That's my cue to be off. Now I'm going to Artemeis,
as soon as I can, to find out all about this Kerdōn.
Keep well, my dear Korittō. Hubby'll be hungry⁴⁷
and it's time for me to mosey on home.

95

KORITTŌ

Close the door behind you.
You there, in the chicken coop. Count the hens.
Throw them some feed — chicken thieves will
steal them even if you keep them in your lap.⁴⁸

100

⁴⁵*Artemis*, of course, is the name of the chaste huntress goddess who couldn't even stand to be seen naked.

⁴⁶*Thallo*, related to *thalos*, “sprout, bloom,” implying ripe fertility.

⁴⁷There is no subject for “be hungry” so it is possible, as Zanker argues, that Metro is referring to her sexual craving. In either case she has at least one stop before going home to prepare dinner.

⁴⁸See Zanker (2009) on the sexual innuendos of keeping chickens in one's lap (180), and other erotic messages throughout the poem (158–87).