

Poetic Resonance in Herodas' *Mimiamb* 3

In discussions of Hellenistic poetry, Herodas is frequently set alongside Callimachus, Theocritus, and Apollonius as a skilled exemplar of Alexandrian technique. Nevertheless, his work is generally overshadowed by that of his contemporaries, and studies of his poetry have been infrequent and uneven. This is in some ways surprising since scholars like Konstan 1989 and Stern 1979 have demonstrated well the depth and intricacy of humorous and apparently shallow poems like *Mimiamb*s 5 and 6. *Mimiamb* 4 is even better appreciated and can be favorably compared to Theocritus' *Adonizusae*. In this paper, I will offer my own contribution to the study of Herodas' work by considering the literary merits of the understudied *Mimiamb* 3, also known as the *didaskalos*.

In light of its subject matter, it is in some ways surprising that the *didaskalos* has garnered so little attention. The *Mimiamb* depicts a distressed mother calling upon a teacher, Lampriscus, to inflict corporal punishment upon her son, Cottalus, who has neglected his studies in favor of gambling and other unseemly activities. The action of the mime centers on a student learning to read and is framed by references to the Muses in line 1 (οὐτῶ τί σοι δοίησαν αἱ φίλαι Μοῦσαι) and as the *potniai* of the last line (αἱ πότνιαι βλέπωσιν ἄς ἐμίσησεν, 97). The presence of the Muses is appropriate to the educational context of the mime (statues of the Muses are thought to have adorned at least some ancient classrooms (Mastromarco 1984, 34)), but by the poem's end it is clear that there is another level of meaning to be appreciated. At the close of the mime, Metrotime, Cottalus' mother, promises to bind her son's feet with fetters so that the Muses can see their enemy leaping with his feet bound (ἐλθοῦσ' ἐς οἶκον ταῦτα, καὶ πέδας ἤξω / φέρουσ' ὄκως νιν σύμποδ' ὧδε πηδεῦντα / αἱ πότνιαι βλέπωσιν ἄς ἐμίσησεν, 95-97). The jarring motion

of one leaping with bound feet is likely a reference to the jarring rhythm of Herodas' scazon, the suddenness of which seems inconsistent with the bulk of the poem.

In fact, another poetic image appears shortly before the end of the poem in a line that has posed several challenges to interpreters (Cunningham 1971, 126; Di Gregorio 1997, 239). At line 94 Lampriscus appears to wish that Cottalus' tongue secretly be coated in honey (λάθοις τὴν γλάσσαν ἐς μέλι πλύνας). Lampriscus, perhaps, wishes that Cottalus be successful in his studies, especially in the advanced studies of an orator, despite his inattention to his studies (Di Gregorio 1997, 239). There may also, however, be an implicit wish for Cottalus to be a successful poet, in light of the way Theocritus uses a similar expression for his singing rustics (πληρὲς τοι μέλιτος τὸ καλὸν στόμα, Θύρσι, γένοιτο, Theoc. 1.146). Cottalus' limping motion and honeyed tongue both recall Herodas' own verse, as does Lampriscus' emphasis on the unexpected quality of Cottalus' eloquence: Herodas' choice of writing in a low genre belies the sophistication of his verse, a disparity favored by Hellenistic poets.

The glut of poetic imagery by the end of the poem challenges the audience to reexamine the poem with a sensitivity to its poetic potential. Mime 3 certainly does not amount to a full poetic program or a sustained analogy between the negligent Cottalus and Herodas's work, but the use of ring composition alone exhibits the learnedness of Alexandrian poetry and hints at a playful association with high level poetry. It seems likely that some such meaning underlie the poem if, as is generally thought, the audience was composed of the literary and cultural elite.

Bibliography

Di Gregorio, Lamberto. 1997. *Eroda: Mimiambi (I-IV)*. Milan.

Cunningham, I. C. 1971. *Herodas: Mimiambi*. Oxford.

Konstan, David. 1989. *The Tyrant Goddess: Herodas' Fifth 'Mime'*. *CA* 8: 267-282.

Mastromarco, Giuseppe. 1984. *The Public of Herondas*. Amsterdam.

Stern, Jacob. 1979. "Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6." *GRBS* 20: 247-254.