HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Herondas (3rd Cent. BC)

From the island of Cos, Herondas moved to Alexandria, and though we know virtually nothing about his life, we have a sure sense of his literary placing, in the elegant and sophisticated verbal climate of his contemporaries, Theocritus, Callimachus, and Menander. These writers are all distant from the epic or classical tradition, though all are keenly aware of, and playing with, meters and allusions from those earlier literary worlds. The form in which Herondas chose to reflect his time was the *mimiambos*, a satirical mime or playlet of a kind favored, already in the fifth century, by Sophron—reputedly a stimulus and source for Plato. Not only did Herondas work from the example of these satirical pieces, but he wrote in an archly archaic Greek harking back to the language of sixth century lyric poets. The result is a self-conscious highly literary genre of Alexandrian mime, with the added Theophrastian dimension, which will appear in the sample lines below. (Theophrastus, of course, had introduced the notion of the 'typical' character, in his *Characters*.)

Metriche, who speaks below, is a classic go-between, doing her best to set up a young woman with a good looking guy.

It is the way of young women to banter, but I don't see how you yourself can do it. For how long, now, my child, have you been widowed, wearing out your empty bed alone? Ten months have passed since Mandris departed for Egypt, and he has not sent you a single line. The house of the Goddess is there; everything, everything, spectacles, philosophers, young boys, temples of twin gods, an excellent King, a museum, wine all the good things one could desire, women without number—by the Virgin, Mistress of Hades, the sky is not so glorified by bearing so many stars—and lovely as in the time when the goddesses came for Paris to judge their beauty—(may they not hear me saying this)—while you, u happy one: how must you feel as you sit warming your chair? Thus, without you suspecting it, age approaches and your bright youth wastes itself in ashes. Look elsewhere and change your thoughts; for a few days be joyous with some other who is also joyous. A ship on a single anchor has no sure mooring…