The Spectation of Gyges in P. Oxy. 2382 and Herodotus Book 1

I saw Gyges clearly, not by guess,
I feared there was some plot for murder indoors—
such as are the wages for tyrannies;
but when I saw Candaules still awake,
I knew what had been done and what man had done it.¹

The debate over the significance of the papyrus fragment of a “Gyges Tragedy” published by Lobel in 1950 has died down for lack of evidence to prove either that the tragedy’s composition preceded that of Herodotus’ Gyges-logos or that it came long after. As the topos runs, “We may (will [perhaps/probably]) never know” whether Herodotus drew on a drama he had seen in the Theater of Dionysus as he composed the tale of the rise and fall of Croesus’ Lydian dynasty.² The fragment,

¹. P.Oxy. 2382, ll. 1–5 (of the sixteen recoverable lines of the fragment), ed. Page. I use Page’s edition throughout. The translation is mine, as are all translations in this essay. I also employ Hude’s 1927 OCT of Herodotus.
². Lobel 1950. Page 1951, reviewed in Raubitschek 1954, for the earlier date. Evans 1955 takes the other side. While the debate is interesting from the perspective of my argument here, it

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though, is rather interesting in its own right, if only for sheer titillation: Croesus’
great-great-grandmother narrates to a tragic chorus in vivid terms her reaction
to being exhibited by her husband. The queen’s rhesis also fills a noticeable gap in
Herodotus’ story and answers an important question: how did she know Candaules
had exhibited her? In fact, I will argue in this essay, the fragment’s answer to this
question embodies the key to one of Herodotus’ most prevalent metaphors, the
metaphor of sight, and demonstrates at the same time that Herodotus takes pains
to structure this metaphor in a way strikingly similar to that of the tragedy.

This essay outlines what I call the psychology of spectation in Herodotus,
the set of rules that Herodotus puts forward as governing human nature in the
specific terms of sight and looking, which work within the Histories as a whole
as an essential tool in the histór’s program of inquiry into causes.\textsuperscript{3} To this end,
the Gyges fragment will serve two functions: first, it will delineate contrafac-
tually Herodotus’ structure of looking by showing exactly what Herodotus has
emphasized and de-emphasized in his logos; second, it will provide the essential
link between the genres of historia and tragóidia that will in the end render up
the dividend of the present study. Herodotus’ psychology of spectation functions
as one of his overarching metaphors of causation—perhaps, as I suggest in my
conclusion, the most basic one; it is worth delineating this metaphor’s operation
for the sake of extending our understanding of Herodotus’ work, but a more
important question (in my opinion) raised by this delineation has to do with the
operation of this metaphor elsewhere in Greek culture: it is also, I try to show,
a fundamental principle of the tragic theater.

I define “spectation” in this essay as the act of looking, and so “the psychology
of spectation” in both Herodotus and tragedy as the text’s (or the author’s,
if one is comfortable with authorial intention) imagination of how spectation
affects the inner life of individuals—both the characters imagined by the text
and the “real people” outside it. My argument begins from a single truth about
spectation in the two genres: what may be represented on the tragic stage and
what may be represented in a narrative inquiry differ fundamentally not in content
but in the ways they make that content mean something to their audiences.
Briefly, Herodotus can bring the reader\textsuperscript{4} into the royal bedchamber, while tragedy
must keep its audience outside the palace. This initial formulation obscures the

\textsuperscript{3} On the importance of looking to Herodotus’ distinctions between Greeks and Persians,
with special reference to the verbal root theaomai that will assume some importance as this essay
continues, see Konstan 1987. On histór as an inquirer into cause see Connor 1993 and Thomas 1997;
see also Hartog 1988: 365–66 for the nuances of the term.

\textsuperscript{4} I use the term “reader” for the individual member of Herodotus’ audience throughout,
because from the perspective of literary performance (as opposed to cultural performance) there is
no difference in the relation of speaker to text to audience between the occasion of a lecture and that

\textsuperscript{is not material: the matter of this essay is to contrast the structure of the Herodotean version with
that of the tragic one. I am convinced by the dramatic shape of the story that Herodotus wrote the
Lydian logos from tragic sources; in this essay, however, I avoid any conclusions based on either
version’s antecedence.
fundamental issue of ecphrasis—that Herodotus’ scene is imagined action, just as the queen’s narration in the fragment narrates the same imagined action—which will prove of crucial importance in understanding Herodotus’ psychology of spectation; nonetheless, the distinction between historia and tragôidia persists, and consists in tragedy’s visibly enacting what appears from this perspective as an intermediate scene, outside the palace.

From an analysis of the effect on the Gyges-tragedy of this intermediate scene I argue that the difference in what can be displayed in what we might call the story’s primary register (for historia, the reader’s imagination; for tragedy, the literal performance space) can help us outline with some precision the operation of Herodotus’ own psychology of spectation. Spectation in the Gyges-logos will prove to have a vital role in the construction of Herodotus’ first book and to some extent the whole of his history, opening out from the Croesus-logos that represents the Gyges-logos’ goal into the wider story and finding a sort of telos in Xerxes’ position atop Aigaleos during the battle of Salamis. The comparison of the looking of the Gyges fragment with Herodotean looking will finally demonstrate that Herodotean inquiry seeks to teach what we might call, precisely rather than loosely, a tragic lesson.

My approach in this essay bears much resemblance to various theories of what we might call the psychodynamics of literature and cinema. In the notes throughout the paper I indicate correspondences between my tragic and Herodotean methodology of argument from the text and those theoretical ones, but my argument is nowhere in debt to psychoanalysis or to psychoanalytic literary and film criticism, since I have chosen to make every argument from the text and to avoid terms (jargon or otherwise) that might evoke in a confusing way any of a number of theoretical constructs. Specifically, I have avoided using the psychoanalytic language of the “gaze,” the “phallus,” and the “signifier” and “signified,” except in the notes; I hope these notes serve to indicate to the theoretical reader my opinions on a number of issues and to point the interested non-theoretical reader to some of the more rewarding theorizations of the problems with which I grapple here.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING

At the end of his proem, Herodotus establishes the framework of his history with his famous marking of Croesus (“Having marked [sêmênas] this man who I know first injured the Greeks,” 1.5.3) as the originator of the conflict between Asia and Greece. The history proper begins with the Gyges-logos as an explanation of how Croesus’ house came to rule Lydia, and so the Gyges-logos both forms the

of a reader’s recreation of that lecture. On oral composition as a determinant of the text of Herodotus, see Johnson 1994 (in opposition to the notion that our text is a transcript of Herodotus’ lectures).

5. For the nuances of meaning of this important act of signification, see Hartog 1988: 365–66 and Nagy 1990: 258–73. It is enough for my purposes that the Histories point oracularly to Croesus
transition from the proem to the heavily emphasized Croesus-logos and presents to the audience the first authorized logos of the *Histories*. This logos tells a tale of transgressive desire and its consequences, all centered on the act of Gyges’ looking. To summarize: Candaules desires his wife and consequently thinks her the most beautiful woman in the world. He has a retainer named Gyges to whom he prays his wife and whom finally he presses to see her naked. The queen discovers Gyges as he slips from her chamber, but remains silent and confronts Gyges the next day: he must either kill Candaules or die himself. He chooses the former, lying in wait in the royal chamber where he had hidden before, and afterward rules in Candaules’ place, founding the Mermnad dynasty, of which Croesus will be the last king.

Gyges thus sets in motion the events that lead to Candaules’ overthrow and the establishment of what will later be termed the first tyranny by looking transgressively at Candaules’ queen in the royal chamber. Candaules’ desire “for his own wife,” which Herodotus narrates as the aberrant interruption (1.8.1) of the divinely authorized (ektetheropiou) succession of the Heraclid dynasty (1.7.4), sets up this transgression, but it is Gyges’ giving in to the king’s demand and subjecting himself to the consequences of his own apopthegm about *aidōs* (“a woman takes off her *aidōs* with her clothing,” 1.8.3: Gyges’ wise first response to the king) that represents the point of no return where the queen will later put the fatal crossroads (“Now of two roads before you, Gyges, I give you the choice,” 1.11.2). Gyges, that is, seals his fate by actually looking at the queen, and into this scene of looking, with Gyges hidden from view in ambush, finally, comes the murder of Candaules, by the perversion of the original stratagem with the queen now in control: Gyges hides where he hid before, and the scene is played out again with murder the result in place of looking.

Speculation moves the narrative of this logos from beginning to end. More specifically, speculation serves as an indicator of the movement of power in Lydia: the person in control of speculation is also in control of the state. Candaules wants to use Gyges’ looking to prove that his wife surpasses all others, and so hides him from view (so that the queen cannot see him) behind the door; the queen sees Gyges and realizes what Candaules has done; she forces Gyges again to hide himself (so that the king cannot see him) and become the first tyrant, taking control by striking from that hiding place to kill Candaules. We can get an idea of the importance of speculation’s trajectory by noting (and here I anticipate part of my conclusion) that the act of looking in the Gyges-logos bears a strong resemblance to the same act

and then move to Gyges. See Lang 1984: 3–5 for a narratological reading of the back-track from Croesus to Gyges.

6. See Hegyi 1965 on Gyges’ tyranny as the first on record. See also McGlew 1994: 26–27, 31–32, for a discussion of the significance of Gyges as tyrant. My argument has interesting implications for a study of the discourse of transgression surrounding tyranny, but my focus here is on the bedroom scene in which Gyges’ tyranny is born.

7. For a relatively orthodox overview of the Gyges story as a narrative, see Flory 1987: 30–38.
in the Croesus-logos, where Croesus brings Solon into his thēsauros to have a look at Croesus’ olbos.

To understand the movement of the act of looking (and its obstruction) from scene to scene and character to character, we should begin near the beginning, before any looking has taken place—though we begin at a point where it is already too late for Candaules, since he has fallen in love with his wife (1.8.2):

χρόνου δὲ οὐ πολλοῦ διελθόντος, χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλῃ γενέσθαι κακῶς, ἔλεγε πρὸς τὸν Γύγην τοιάδε: Γύγη, οὐ γὰρ σε δοκέω πεθεσθαί μοι λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἴδεος τῆς γυναικὸς (ὡτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώπουσι ἐντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν), ποίει ὅκως ἐκείνην βεήσαι γυμνήν.

A short time later, as it was necessary that things come out badly for Candaules, he said to Gyges something like: “Gyges, as I don’t think you trust me when I talk about my wife’s beauty (for men’s ears are less persuadable than their eyes), arrange a way to gaze at her naked.”

“Men’s ears are less persuadable than their eyes,” says Candaules to his closest retainer, because “it was necessary that it come out badly for him.” Why necessary? When we try to isolate in this story the reasons for the scene of the gaze in the royal chamber, we come up against what seems a sort of narrative compulsion: the necessity for a bad outcome is in fact a narrative necessity, because Herodotus has engaged himself in telling the story of how Croesus’ Mermnadic line came into power. It is necessary that Candaules fall so that Herodotus’ sēmainō can finally take effect.

In this regard, we should not overlook the oracular tinge of khrēn here, for oracles will play their own part in this logos as they do throughout the Histories. It is worth noting that of the several instances Lang cites of the “dei genesthai formula,” this is the only one that uses khrēn instead of dei. This anomaly may perhaps strengthen the episode’s oracular connection to Croesus, patron of oracles; more, it may also point immediately backward to Herodotus’ narration of the Mermnads’ rise to power ek theopropiou (1.7.4) and immediately forward to the oracle that leaves Gyges in power after the coup (1.13.1) and seals Croesus’ own doom. Together with the extraordinary feeling of compulsion that seems to permeate this logos (1.8.4: “it is necessary to learn [from the wise]”; 1.10.1: “since [Gyges] could not escape”; 1.11.2: “it is necessary to die... because you saw what it was necessary not to see”; 1.11.3: “it is necessary that he or you perish”; 1.11.3: “Gyges begged that it not be necessary by compulsion to make the choice”; 1.11.4: “he did not persuade her, but saw the compulsion”; 1.11.4:

"since you compel me"; 1.12.1: "it was necessary that either he or Candaules perish"), the string of oracles works the inexorable forward movement of the narrative as a whole into the minute detail of the individual Gyges-logos.

On the other hand, we should not cover over the ambiguity of this quasi-oracular clause. To establish any one of Candaules’ actions as the direct consequence of the doom decreed by the narrative would betray the strange and, I think, effective placing of χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλη γενέσθαι κακῶς. The clause refers at first sight (by the offices of gar) to the shortness of the interval between weal and woe. However, as that brevity is expressed weakly and dependently by a genitive absolute, the gar cannot help also referring to the whole sentence expressing Candaules’ importuning of his retainer, and beyond that to the reason behind it, Candaules’ desire for his wife, which must also be a part of his doom in that it causes all the problems.

Candaules’ desire, though, is also, strictly speaking, the reason for his downfall, and is in itself sufficient compulsion to move the logos from beginning to end. A double causality of necessity and desire, then, sets up a dual chain of logic here: Candaules speaks the fatal words to Gyges both because it was fated that he end badly and because he desires his wife. This opening out of an instance of the standard narrative device of pointing to the catastrophic end of a logos10 may seem to rest too much weight on one of Herodotus’ plethora of gar’s. It will be admitted at the very least, though, that there are two chains of causality at work in the Gyges-logos—one oracular and one sexual—and that its inner story (Candaules’ desire) is driven by its outer function in the Herodotean narrative (Candaules’ doom).

DOUBLe CompULsion: HERODoTeAN SPECTATION AS DESIRE

In this doubling of compulsion we find a literary problem with a psychological implication. Herodotus’ narrative compels Candaules’ downfall even as Candaules’ visual desire does; and the two compulsions interact to indicate the presence of a very precise psychological theory of spectacle. When Candaules declares that men’s ears are apistotera than their eyes Herodotus has him make both a programmatic statement about Herodotean narrative11 and a statement about his—Candaules’—desire with relation to Gyges and to the queen in the act of looking; his looking and its consequences therefore embody not only the desires of the characters but also the narrative movement of the Inquiry. The double compulsion of narrative and desire between them manifest a psychology of looking that, I argue below, will come in the course of Herodotus’ own looking into things (historiē) to position the reader as a spectator of tragic inquiry.

The programmatic side of the Gyges-logos has received a great deal of attention from readers of Herodotus; most notably, Benardete finds in Gyges’ apophthegms some of the structuring principles of Herodotus’ *historiê*12. The machinations of desire inherent in the acts of looking in the logos have, however, received very little attention; and no attention has, I think, been paid to the interaction of that interior compulsion with the exterior compulsion of the narrative. From this interaction of the two compulsions, though, we can begin to draw out Herodotus’ psychology of spectation.

We find in Candaules’ brief dialogue with Gyges a sort of personal version of spectation phrased, strikingly, in the terms of *peithô* and *nomos*. Candaules’ personal psychology of looking, which we must be careful to distinguish from the Herodotean psychology of looking that encompasses it and comments upon it, defines desire-in-looking as a play on the difference between the person looking, the thing looked upon, and the person watching the act of looking. That the dialogue delineates these differences in terms of persuasion and custom/law indicates not only the general interaction of the passage with the overarching themes of the Inquiry (and most notably for my purpose the expression of those themes in the Croesus-logos to come), but more specifically the implication of Candaules’ transgressive desire with Herodotus’ psychology (*peithô*, the belief that arises in the interior of the person) and ethnography (*nomos*, the belief that comes from society). After Candaules’ introduction of the subject (quoted above),

ō dè μέγα ἀμβώσας εἶπε· Δέσποτα, τίνα λέγεις λόγον οὕς ὑγιέα, κελεύων με δέσποιναν τὴν ἐμὴν θείασθαι γυμνήν; ὡμα δὲ κιθώνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδὼ γυνή. πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώπους εξευρήσαται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεί: ἐν τοίς ἐν τόδε ἐστὶ, σχοπτεῖν τινὰ τὰ ἐωτοῦ. ἐγώ δὲ πείθομαι ἑκείνην εἶναι πασέων γυναικῶν καλλίστην, καὶ σεο δέσομαι μὴ δέσονται ἀνώμολων. ὦ μὲν δὴ λέγων τοιαῦτα ἀπέμαχετο, ἀρρωθέων μὴ τί οἱ ἕξ αὐτῶν γένηται κακῶν.

(1.8.3–1.9.1)

But [Gyges] cried out greatly, and said, “Master, what unhealthy thing are you saying, bidding me gaze at my mistress naked? A woman, when her chiton is taken off, takes off with it her shame also. And of old fine things have been discovered for people, from which it is necessary to learn: among them is this one—that one look at his own things. I am persuaded that she is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg you not to beg of me things contrary to custom.” Saying such things he fought him off, fearing lest something bad happen to him.

Like Candaules’ initial apophthegm, that men’s ears are *apistotera* than their eyes, Gyges’ apophthegms link the interior of the story with the movement of

the narrative, since these customary sayings, reinforcements of the traditional nomoi, connect the particularity of the Gyges-logos to the universal frame of Herodotus’ inquiry, as each comes true and moves the story to its conclusion. Taken together with the traditional wisdom of the difference between ears and eyes, the traditional wisdoms of the presence or absence of feminine aidôs and of looking at what belongs to one also reveal the nature of the desires of each of the characters who figure in the triangle Candaules has brought into being by his own transgressive desire.

Those desires are, moreover, phrased in terms of nomos and peithô, the key terms of Herodotus’ investigation of culture: nomos king of all (3.38.4) and the persuasion/obedience that makes peoples believe in/obey their nomoi. The triangular positions thus participate in the larger framework of the History, in which Herodotus has undertaken to show forth his investigation, and so are subject to the narrative compulsion exerted by Herodotus’ use of oracular necessity and traditional wisdom. The triangle of looking therefore manifests a psychology wherein the triangle itself propagates desire even as desire creates and maintains the triangle.13 Desirous looking in the Gyges-logos, that is, embodies not just sex but also historical destiny.

From Candaules’ corner, the act of looking, theôria (to adopt the noun later used of Solon’s travels and integrally related to theaomai, the verb both Candaules and Gyges use for what the latter will do vis-à-vis the queen14), becomes a matter of belief and persuasion (“since I don’t think you are persuaded [peithesthai]”; “men’s ears are less persuadable [apistotera] than their eyes”; Gyges responds, “I am persuaded [peithomai] that she is the most beautiful”), which arises directly out of Candaules’ desire (“and desiring he believed [erastheis d’enomisde] that his wife was much the most beautiful of all women” [1.8.1]). The looking proposed by Candaules, which Gyges identifies as “things contrary to custom” (anoma),

13. The narrative compulsion of this logos and its relation to desire correspond tellingly with a certain psychoanalytic structure of overdetermination, one that stands in close analogy to the structure of the Herodotean (and, we shall see, the tragic) recension of the story—the Oedipus complex. The psychodynamic constellation called the Oedipus complex is at its most basic level a triangle of intersubjectivity, constituted among desiring self, other, and object. For varying formulations of the Oedipus complex, see Freud 1900 (the complex as a stage to be worked through), Lacan 1948 (the complex as constitutive of human subjectivity), Klein 1945 (the complex as a very early development in infancy, generating fantasies that recur in the adult). The co-primacy of the structuring triangle with the self’s desire makes the complex overdetermined by its very nature. The triangle effects the desire as much as the desire effects the triangle. When the complex becomes narrative, as in the classic, formative version, where the male child (self) desires the mother (object), and is prevented by the father (other), that narrative is overdetermined in much the same way as the Gyges-logos. The suspension inherent in the triangle (that is, the overdetermination of what we might call the “keep-away” structure of the complex) continues the triangle into adult life: the desiring adult self desires what the other (a wide variety of others, now—especially paternal, superegoical figures like heads of state) desires, and is therefore inevitably frustrated.

is counterposed to Candaules’ belief (lit. “holding as a custom” [enomisde]) in his wife’s superlative beauty, which arises from his desire for her. For Candaules, the compulsion to spectacle arises in the difference between custom (nomos) and persuasion (peithô): he holds the supremacy of his wife’s beauty as his individual custom (or even law, the other meaning of nomos, and the one that will prove the reason for Solon’s travels),15 but when he tries to convince even his most trusty retainer, Candaules’ customary belief must become a matter of persuasion, and he proposes the transgressive looking to increase the force of that persuasion.

At that point, however, Candaules’ personal nomos and the cultural nomoi come into conflict: Candaules’ nomos of desire has crossed a double line of cultural custom to which Gyges attempts to call his attention: on the one hand the line of aidôs, the modesty that figures Greek culture’s (and here, for Herodotus, Lydian culture’s) imputation of a dangerous interiority to the female body;16 on the other the line of possession. Both lines are boundaries of custom, the cultural nomos that determines the normal, and the two are closely linked in Gyges’ response—clearly a woman who has removed her chiton and (perforce also) her aidôs is one of the undifferentiated mass of “one’s own things” (ta heautou). Candaules’ desiring position is uncustumary/unlawful by its very nature, in that it brings his royal custom into conflict with the things discovered by men: instead of the kala endorsed by Gyges, Candaules holds to the supreme kallos of his wife; his nomos, that is, must be the king of nomoi.17

From Gyges’ corner of the coalescing triangle, on the other hand, the act of spectacle holds the same conflict, presented externally: a contrast between two persuasions—the necessity of obeying (peithêsthai, an alternate translation) the king and the necessity of obeying custom. Where Candaules is trapped by the difference between his nomos of desire and the nomoi of culture, Gyges is trapped between those same nomoi of culture and the command of Candaules (deesthai, with its implications of necessity). Gyges’ response to Candaules contains no hint of his own desire, because all the desire lies with Candaules. Gyges fights Candaules off in fear not that he will be punished for desiring to see the queen but that something bad will happen. As to the queen, in the matter of aidôs Gyges has left an opening for her desire which the narrative will take up, literally, with a vengeance. Like the ramifications of the conclusion that arises from it, that one should look at one’s own things, however, the implication of the queen’s agency is for now latent in the narrative.

15. On nomos as a category of historical explanation that defines the limit of inquiry into psychology see Humphreys 1987.
16. Cairns 1996; see below. Dewald 1993 adds the historical reasoning; see n. 20 below.
17. I am greatly in debt to one of Classical Antiquity’s anonymous referees for the inspiration behind the two preceding formulations.
Candaules’ rejoinder, therefore, in that it assumes Gyges’ desire, actually generates that desire from the perspective of the narrative, and so makes clear the parallel operation of the narrative compulsion and the compulsion of desire:

ο δ' ἀμείβετο τοῖς Θάρσει, Γύγη, καὶ μὴ φοβεῦ μήτε ἐμέ, ὡς σεο πειρώμενος λέγω λόγον τόνδε, μήτε γυναῖκα τὴν ἐμήν, μὴ τί τοι ἐξ αὐτῆς γένηται βλάβος.

(1.9.1)

But [Candaules] answered with these words: “Courage, Gyges, and fear neither me, thinking that I am making this speech as a test of you, nor my father, lest some harm come to you from her.”

Candaules takes for granted the desire of Gyges, a desire that the narrative never states. Indeed, Candaules never even addresses the question of what Gyges does or does not want, but says merely “Fear not,” and by the end of Candaules’ narration of the plan Gyges is indeed “ready” (hetoimos), but for no other reason than that “he could not escape” (hôs ouk edunato diaphugein, 1.10.1). Since Candaules believes the queen to be the most beautiful of women, there can be no question of whether another man desires her: according to Candaules’ nomos, Gyges must desire the queen. Gyges’ corner of the triangulated spectator, experiences the compulsion of desire as an external force positioning the individual transgressively at the behest of the desiring spectator.18

Candaules’ absolute need for Gyges’ eyes in the royal chamber, which becomes in the context of the logos an absolute need to transgress cultural nomoi, arises in the very nature of Candaules’ personal nomos of desire. Candaules’ problem is indeed that he believes his wife the most beautiful woman in the world: this is the very nature of desire in the terms of the visual world, Herodotus implies (erasethis d’enomisde, “desiring he believed”), and it is problematic in that the superlative (the conception of his wife as the most beautiful woman) necessarily seeks the realization of comparison—only the presence of another desiring subject can simultaneously confirm that the object is desirable and

18. When we consider the act of looking as itself a manifestation of desire, Herodotus’ Gyges-logos begins to resemble a Freudian family romance. For psychoanalysis, spectacle, when structured into a triangle as it is in Herodotus, becomes more than simple sight: just as it is a signifier of political power, it is a signifier of desire. The Oedipus complex itself, indeed, may be reimagined as child looking at mother, father looking at child looking at mother; not to mention the obverse, father looking at mother, and child looking at father looking at mother (it will be noted that the mother’s gaze plays no part here—a point that will prove crucial for the workings of the Gyges story). The gazes of the basic complex describe a contained, mimetic desire: child and father in competition, the father in possession of the child’s natural and primary object. The gaze, we might say, describes both the desire and the frustration of desire: looking at the object becomes a substitute for the object itself, as the male child assumes his constitutive frustration (see Lacan 1948). The gaze both fulfills desire in that it substitutes for the object and frustrates desire in that it is not the object, just as the boy configured by the classic Oedipus complex accepts another woman as a substitute for his mother. That is, the gaze is desire made visual.
that the self has it. Candaules needs Gyges for his desire to work properly, as he demonstrates by the loving detail in which he describes the peep-show he envisions (1.9.4–5, especially 1.9.4: “on this chair she will put each one of her garments as she takes it off, and she will provide you with much leisure to watch” [theēsasthai]).

Candaules, however, is not a patient to be psychoanalyzed but a character, one among the three main roles in the logos, and the story moves the way it does because the other characters have desires of their own that fall beyond Candaules’ expectation of them. Candaules’ fantasy takes into account only the looking of Gyges, but the structuring looks of the Gyges-logos as narrated by Herodotus are, in the event, triangular, the purest form being the brief moment when Candaules’ plan works followed by the moment when it fails apart (1.10.1–3):

έσελθοὺσαν δὲ καὶ τιθεῖσαν τὰ εἶματα ἐθετέτο ὁ Γύγης. ὡς δὲ κατὰ νότον ἐγένετο ιούσῃς τῆς γυναικὸς ἐς τὴν κοίτην. ὑπεκύνσες ἐγόρρεε ἐξω. καὶ ἦ γυνὴ ἐπόρα μιν ἐξιόντα. μαθοῦσα δὲ τὸ ποιήθην ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός οὔτε ἀνέβουσε αἰσχυνθεῖσα οὔτε ἐθετέσει μαθεῖν, ἐν νῷ ἔχουσα τείσασθαι τὸν Κανδαύλεα παρὰ γὰρ τοῖς Λυδίοις, σχεδὸν δὲ καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις βαρβάροις, καὶ ἀνδρὰς ὀρθὴν γυμνὸν ὡς αἰσχυνθὲν μεγάλην φέρει.

Gyges watched her as she entered and put off her clothes. And when he was behind the wife’s back as she got into bed, he slipped out and away. And the wife saw him go. And though she realized what had been contrived by her husband, she neither cried out as outraged, nor seemed to realize, having it in mind to avenge herself on Candaules: for with the Lydians—as with nearly all other foreigners—it is held a great disgrace even for a man to be seen naked.

Whereas Candaules was in complete control of the fantasy-scene he limned for Gyges, other forces have taken over now that Gyges has actually entered the king’s bedroom. In the scene itself, effected both by the subjective desires of the three characters and by the narrative compulsion of the Inquiry, we have a fantasy not just of Candaules—a chimera at any rate, since we have no access to his subjectivity—but of narrative, narrator, and audience: it is Candaules who directs the drama, so to speak, and acts what he thinks is the protagonist’s role, but Herodotus is the khoregos and the playwright.

Compelled himself by desire and narrative, Candaules has put Gyges into a similar position, from which Gyges will not be able to extract himself by his own means. Driven by the dual goads of fate and his own desire, Candaules could not rest until Gyges consented to play out the scene that the king thought would confirm the desirability of the object of his desire. Specifically, Candaules wanted to force Gyges into the specular position whence he could not but confess that the queen is the most beautiful of women—that is, whence he would have had to elucate that the king was in possession not just of the object of his own
desire, but the object of every man’s. The difference in Candaules’ apophthegm between ears and eyes (1.8.2) represents in this register the difference between presence in the royal chamber and absence from it: until Gyges actually stood in the bedroom gazing at the naked queen, Candaules postulated in his aphorism, the king would not be sure that his desire and the desire of the rest of the world coincided.

But the scene that now occurs, along with the event of the logos, demonstrates that the unproblematic certainty Candaules seeks cannot be more than fantasy. The “actual” triangular structure generated by the fantasy (I place quotation marks around “actual” to emphasize that this scene, too, is fantasized, since it takes place in the minds of Herodotus and his audience) brings into the bedroom not only the obedient, trusted retainer as the representative of the rest of the world’s desire for the queen, but also the retainer, Gyges the future tyrant, in the additional role of self in his own right. Moreover, and more perilously, that role implies a third corner, the object as self in her own right—the offended queen.

The queen’s realization and her concealment of it, along with Herodotus’ ethnographic dictum about foreigners and nudity, manifest in two separate but intimately related narrative moments the difference between Candaules’ plan (1.9.2–3) and Herodotus’ narration of the bedroom scene as it happens. Herodotus’ anthropology of nakedness gives the external, authorized reason for the accession of the queen’s interiority: the shame felt by foreigners, which turns the a’idōs (“shame” in the sense of modesty) mentioned by Gyges into aiskhunê (“shame” in the sense of dishonor), the queen’s motive for revenge.

ERO S AND AP OPHTHEGM

The queen’s recognition and Herodotus’ ethnography, taken together with Gyges’ own desires, transform Candaules’ fantasy into the dangerous triangle it creates. The difference between fantasy and event points up first of all the danger inherent in Candaules’ position and in the fantasy that position generates, and secondarily the importance of separating the fantasy of the royal chamber from Herodotus’ analogous narrative expression of it. The fantasy by itself, removed from the historical narrative around it, is motivated very differently: there is no concern for Croesus’ eventual arrival on the scene, and so Candaules’ desire looks like a paradigmatic, rather uninteresting ménage à trois. In the context of the struggles between the Heraclids and the Mermnads, though, and especially of the finger-pointing of sēmēnas (1.5.3), the fantasy becomes a parable laden with traditional wisdom and foreign politics. Spectation (theòria) itself becomes a metaphor for the task of the historian, and the other characters are invested with power. Gyges and the queen, that is, have their

19. From a Lacanian perspective, the desire of the Other: see Lacan 1948.
own parts to play, because they will found the dynasty of which Croesus is the scion.20

The problems of triangulation—the queen’s recognition, the shame of nudity, and Gyges’ desire—that arise in the joining of Candaules’ fantasy with Herodotus’ history are the implications of the same traditional wisdom Gyges placed in opposition to Candaules’ ears/eyes dichotomy, that a woman takes off her aidōs ("shame," "respect") with her clothes, and that a man should look on those things that belong to him (1.8.3–4). As is so often the case in the Histories, all the wisdom-utterances turn out to be true through the operation of the overarching narrative,21 by performing themselves in the way the logos spins itself out: that Gyges needs to be persuaded by his eyes is implicit in the difference between the answer he makes to Candaules and the consequence, that he does finally enter the royal chamber despite everything he says. But the answer he gave to Candaules’ ears has nevertheless a decisive effect on the direction of the story: the queen does indeed part with her aidōs in a fashion beyond Candaules’ imagination; and Gyges in the end has looked upon nothing that he has not made his. In the narrative event, even Gyges’ own transgression is repaid by Croesus’ downfall, and so Herodotus’ psychology of spectation discharges itself in a reinforcement of the power of nomos, that king of all.

To bring this psychology home to the reader in the scene of spectation itself, what Herodotus leaves out here is as important as what he puts in, for the narrative never refers to an erotic desire on the part either of Gyges or the queen, nor does it ever reveal how the queen learned “what had been done by her husband” (1.10.2).22 By denying the erotic motivation and leaving the moment of recognition mysterious, the logos forces together in the reader the two functions of the story: the interior scene of looking is joined to the exterior history of Lydia by the audience, who must read in their own fantasies to make the logos intelligible and relevant. And in so reading in, the audience cause the traditional wisdom to refer to themselves. The difference between historical sweep and prurient peep-show

20. Dewald 1993: 62 reads the Gyges-logos as an example of Herodotus’ understanding of the interpretation of objects, and makes the telling point that from one perspective Candaules’ mistake is to regard his queen as an object to be admired rather than as the potential mother of his heirs—a powerful argument, I would submit, in support of my hypothesis that a Herodotean narrative compulsion is at work here, transforming the erotic fantasy of the logos into a broader psychology of spectation: if Dewald is correct, the difference between the queen as erotic object and the queen as matriarch coincides with the difference between the compulsion of Candaules’ desire and the compulsion of Herodotean historio-ethnographic necessity.

21. See Lang 1984: 65 for a treatment of these maxims that looks toward the other wisdom sayings in the Histories. On the interplay of the apophthegms with one another and with the programme of the Inquiry see Russo 1983: 26–29.

22. Indeed, as one of Classical Antiquity’s referees points out, the phrase ek tou andros is itself radically ambiguous, and could—at first reading—even mean that the queen had learned from her husband what he had done, a possibility immediately denied by oute edoxe mathein. This ambiguity lends force to my contention that Herodotus’ audience must read into the scene precisely what the tragic fragment makes explicit: that the queen learns by seeing that her husband is still awake.
is thus both bridged and re-inscribed by the positioning of the narrator and the reader vis-à-vis the logos, their fantasized presence in the royal chamber. Herodotus points to the danger in that presence of narrator and audience in his ethnographic item about the shame of nudity among foreigners: what seems to Greek-speakers (that is, perforce, the reader) a normal erotic desire becomes transgressive when exported to Lydia or any of the other nations Herodotus will examine in the Inquiry; and so to look in fantasy at this scene is to experience in fantasy the danger posed by the foreigner, and most especially by the sort of transgressive injury that will prove to be the theme of the Inquiry.23

The bedroom scene is both apophthegmatic and transgressively lewd, its doubleness resulting directly from narrator’s and reader’s placement in a similar position to that of Gyges: like him, we are forced into the royal bedchamber so that the narrative can proceed. By the simple act of reading we engage—we are forced to engage, have no choice in the matter—with the histör in the spectation of historia. We must look, so that we can get to the origin of the Persian Wars, but gazing upon the naked queen, whether for pleasure or for historia, is transgression. And transgression in Herodotus, just as in psychology, draws retaliation, retaliation specifically constituted between the same two poles of apophthegm and prurience. These two counterposed sources of the story’s meaning between them give rise to the ambiguity of what we might call looking’s “signification”: what the act of looking itself points to, as Herodotus points to Croesus. Spectation, that is, must always signify a certain ambiguity of the object, because the weakness of sight lies in its failure to penetrate:24 since looking at the object does not reveal the object’s interior, it fails to comprehend aidōs or aiskyhunē.

At this point we should contemplate precisely what Gyges’ gnôme about aidōs means in the context of the bedroom scene. Cairns has recently argued that the aidōs of Gyges’ apophthegm refers to the whole range of social norms that govern Gyges’ ordinary relations to the queen.25 The stripping away of aidōs may thus represent the removal of the fixed hierarchy that establishes Candaules as the head of state and the lord of his own chamber. But the point can be carried even further, for Bassi has recently argued that Greek culture construes female clothing as a mark of (conventionally dissimulating) femininity.26 If we may extend Bassi’s conclusions, drawn primarily from drama and philosophy, to Herodotus, we can deepen our understanding of the shift from aidōs to aiskyhunē in the transition from clothed to naked as the moment of the queen’s acquiring an interior agency. From this perspective, the scene of nudity and spectation in the royal bedchamber

23. On the construction of the foreigner/barbarian as the quintessential Other to Greek culture see Hall 1989, esp. 1–13.
24. This point is made cogently in a more general study of Herodotean objects by Dewald 1993.
becomes a narrative of the inscrutability of the feminine object moving from the outside of her body to the inside and thus conferring interiority. If the clothing has gone, so has the warning flag: the conventionally duplicitous woman suddenly becomes inscrutable in her duplicity. When the object is without its deceptive clothing the spectator cannot tell what is going on in its interior: the woman becomes a subject in her own right, with the capacity to repress her emotion (“neither cried out being shamed”) and knowledge (“nor appeared to learn”).

The queen, caught within the scene of spectation, has an interior, and can keep in that interior what she plans (“having in mind to avenge herself”), not revealing it to the sight of Candaules. What appears on her surface may or may not reflect the hidden interior; the content of what she has seen may or may not be revealed. Indeed, the problem of interiority threatens not only the spectators, but also the narrator and reader, because every act of looking, real or imagined, has the same ambiguity, which poses the same danger to the spectator (Candaules primarily, but also, I will want to suggest, the reader): the danger of the contents of what we’re looking at. As Candaules fails to grasp that his fantasy scene has larger narrative implications, every spectator must ask: where does the compulsion come from? within? or overhead? who narrates my fantasies? All this dangerous ambivalence comes about through a peculiarly Herodotean economy of looking: the queen sees Gyges even though he is kata nòtou (“in back of her”), and then keeps her knowledge hidden. The emphatically unstated turn of the queen’s head—the ambiguous interiority arising despite narrated reality, her knowledge of the plot—demonstrate that the scene of transgressive erotic spectation falls under the sway of the narrative compulsion of historia. The queen knows what has happened because Herodotus has brought us with her into the bedchamber, to see nomos exact its penalty. I call the economy “peculiarly Herodotean” because the transformation of Candaules’ fantasy into the narrated scene extends, through the wisdom-utterances and the language of necessity, straight out of the initial sēmainō. The whole Gyges-logos moves in the direction it does, from Herodotus’ perspective and ours, so that we can get to Croesus.

The triangular desires implied in the first bedroom scene, then performed in the queen’s revision of it, when she forces Gyges to kill Candaules in the same bedroom, indeed resemble the place of this logos in the Histories: the course and gist of the story of Gyges are themselves shaped by the need to point to Croesus, the tyrant who does not understand his ancestor’s customary wisdom about looking at one’s own possessions. Herodotus’ narrative frame moves us along from the Heraclids to the Mermnads through this seen scene of the bedroom: the motion of Herodotus’ sēmainō is an inexorable (if leisurely) forward sweep that seems to have little to do with the transgressive desires of the king’s fantasy. But in the process of this motion, drawn along with the historian, we are brought into the bedchamber where these desires operate: we are there with the historian; we see the spectation as it happens. The absence of erotic desire and the silence of the narrative as to the mechanism of recognition that forces the reader into the scene
propels the narrative forward precisely in that it is the narrator’s and the reader’s fantasy that calls down retaliation. I shall return to this point in greater detail below; for now, it is enough to note that Herodotus seems to refuse to narrate desire in favor of narrating nomos: to spell out desire and trace its paths would, perhaps, place too much emphasis, for Herodotus’ purposes, on the inner chain of causality. That inner chain—the chain of desire—is one that the tragic fragment seems interested to explore.

THE OBJECT AS NARRATOR

I saw Gyges clearly, not by guess;
I feared there was some plot for murder indoors—such as are the wages for tyrannies;
but when I saw Candaules still awake,
I knew what had been done and what man had done it:
but as if not recognizing, though my heart was hammering,
I held back my cry of shame, silent:
but for me, twisted in my bed by contemplation,
night was endless with sleeplessness.27

We find in the tragic fragment in contrast to Herodotus’ version the special element of the mechanism of the queen’s recognition of the act of looking and her springing to action; more, we find that mechanism crucially relegated to her second-hand narration to the chorus. She, not a disembodied narrator but a principal, tells the story from her own perspective. Before we consider the configuration of the speculation, we should note simply this: the queen is telling her story, on stage, visibly in control. Her tragic character differs from her Herodotean one in this respect—perhaps not radically, but importantly, for the Herodotean queen in taking control of the situation simply lays out the facts, maintaining her inscrutability and giving no indication of her own wishes (“Two roads lie before you, and I give you your choice,” 1.11.2). In the fragment, a different kind of subjective power over the situation that Candaules has set up accrues to her as a

27. Ll. 1–9.
narrating subject—someone who, having hidden what she knows, can later herself lay out the scene for the chorus and audience of the tragic theater. She can so lay it out, to anticipate, because of the “intermediate” scene of tragic speculation, the theatrical scene placed between the audience and the royal chamber. To the importance of the queen as narrator I shall return, when we have seen just what it is she narrates.

The first striking element of the fragment is that the queen accomplishes the turnabout of her recognition epei d’ et’ egrészonta Kandaulen horò, “when [she] sees Candaules still awake.” The fragment adds one crucial detail: Candaules’ wakefulness; and we can understand this wakefulness in only one way. The queen can mean only that she sees that Candaules’ eyes are open, that is, that he himself is looking back at her. Any other interpretation of egrészonta is obviated by the context, since unless Candaules is actually watching the scene unfold, the queen must necessarily still suspect treachery. This particular act of looking stands in stark contrast to Herodotus’ description of her noticing Gyges kata nòtou—we hear in the tragic fragment that the queen has eyes of her own (“I saw Candaules”), and that there is a self behind those eyes possessed of the ability to be affected by, process, narrate, and act upon what she sees. Herodotus’ version has the queen somehow seeing from the back of her head, and describes a very different sort of mental process from the one the queen describes to the tragic chorus. Herodotus provides the bare minimum of detail, just enough to say that the queen was shamed but did not show it, but her on-stage narration makes explicit what Herodotus leaves mysteriously implicit: Gugen [saphós] eiseidon, ouk eikasmati, “I saw Gyges [clearly], not by guess.”

An economy of looking constitutes itself in this tragic fragment, very similar to the structure of Herodotus’ version of the story but nonetheless different in a crucial way: in Herodotus, in what we might call the “primary” act of looking, Candaules sees Gyges seeing the queen; in the fragment’s primary act of looking, on the other hand, the queen sees Gyges seeing her, then sees Candaules seeing Gyges seeing her. The recognition of Candaules’ wakefulness makes all the difference, for now the other, implied, acts of the triangle must also come into play; suppressed into the background by the ambiguity of the queen’s sight in Herodotus, the transitive looking in the fragment is fully operational once the queen has looked into her husband’s eyes: Gyges sees her seeing Candaules. Candaules sees her seeing Gyges seeing her—the elaboration quickly verges on absurdity. For the psychology of the fragment, though, all these triangles are of importance, for each one describes a specific configuration of desire. It is the queen’s looking that sets the triangles spinning in this fashion, for by recognizing her husband’s gaze, and even more by acting upon it, she destabilizes the scenario Candaules created for himself, exercising her own decisive influence on the

28. In the terms of psychoanalysis, the erotic gaze serves both to put the subject in possession of the object of desire—Gyges gazing at the queen—and to alienate the subject from that object
issue—all the more decisive for the contrast between her concealment of her recognition in the bedroom and her own narration of it to the chorus.

And so the most important element of the tragic fragment is what it is not: that is, an actual representation of the bedroom scene. That scene, here in the tragic theater, takes place in the imagination of the audience. When we consider tragedy’s status as itself a theatron, a place of looking, we encounter the paradox of the fragment: the scene of the acts of looking takes place in the mukhos of the palace—more, involves feminine nudity—and therefore could not be represented in the tragic theater; for this reason we have in the fragment the queen’s report of events.29 The manifold spectation that takes shape in her narrative is imagined spectation.

**THE DRAMA OF HISTORIA**

Imagined spectation poses interesting problems for the comparison of Herodotus and tragedy, for of course the looking in Herodotus, too, is imagined—the narrator stages the scene in the reader’s head. The question of the relation of audience to text or performance presses itself upon us here. How do the words that describe the erotic gaze—on the stage as on the page—affect the reader of (or listener to) Herodotus differently from the viewer of tragedy? As I noted above, we face a paradox in considering the tragic fragment, for in the tragic theater the most important events are not seen but described. What we do not see is more important than what we do see, and this apopthegm has a strange consonance with Gyges’ “A man should look on what belongs to him.” The tragic audience avoids actual, realized transgressive sight through the strictly bounded functioning of sight in the theater, whereas Herodotus’ reader is pulled with the course of the historia into the bedchamber. At the same time, the queen’s narration allows (or even forces) the tragic audience to imagine looking transgressively at a character who now, realized in the body of an actor, appears in all her outrage, while Herodotus keeps the reader forever removed from her presence.

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29. On the relation to femininity of interior and exterior in tragedy see Loraux 1987: 23–24 and Padel 1990 passim; on the creation of a fantasized interior to the feminine object see Wohl 1998.
What then is the scene of history? Where does its looking take place? Though not enacted in body like tragedy, it has nevertheless its own special mode of looking, through the imagination of the seeing-eye historian, who by autopsy brings us to the farthest reaches of his travels. Herodotus reports the goings-on in Candaules’ bedchamber from his own perspective, as if he too were there and we his audience with him. Historia itself describes an act of seeing, and so must always have something of voyeurism about it. Indeed, we may analogize spectation in tragedy, a fantasy evoked in the participants in the tragic theater, to Candaules’ situation before he gets Gyges to enter the bedroom. In both tragedy and history, the scene of spectation is narrated, and thus staged only in the audience’ imagination, but tragedy differs crucially from history here in that in the drama’s world of visible enactment, the vision-dependent scene of looking is relegated to speech. That dangerous bedroom scene will never be enacted, and so the tragic audience will never run the risk of underestimating the object, although they are allowed Candaules’ fantasy of his desire’s confirmation: the tragedy is a play of desire, even obsessive desire, but without the threat of the movement of power that the actual looking will pose. The queen, we can presume, will take control later in the tragedy, but the issue of the spectation-motivated power struggle will threaten the tragic audience in a way very different from the way Herodotus threatens his audience.

The fragment, in fact, exposes an essential dynamic of tragedy even as it comments on Herodotus’ narrative history: the tragic theater, unlike historic narrative, functions by means of a certain literal blindness in its realized action that perhaps saves the audience from the fate of Candaules and Croesus; this blindness is part and parcel of tragedy’s general and oft-noted privileging of text, of which the conventional messenger speech is only the most obvious example. To put the problem this way is not to conflate the two performative modes but to set out toward an understanding of their crucial differences. Obviously the reader of Herodotus is not subject to ambush in the bedroom or downfall through overconfidence; obviously the audience in the tragic theater would not be subject to those hazards were they to see the bedchamber scene in the flesh, as it were. But literary performance has the cardinal virtue (and/or vice) of the capacity to realize fantasy, and the fantasies realized onstage and even in historical narrative come to the audience attended with ramifications for the psychic life of the individual reader or watcher. The fantasy of transgressive looking, whether of Candaules, Herodotus, or the audience, itself oversteps the conventional, cultural limits of sight (again, Gyges: “A man should look on the things that belong to him”). When Candaules pays the price for trying to realize the fantasy in his bedchamber, that

price, enacted as it is in a repetition of the original scene, presses itself on the reader or spectator as the inevitable working out of the fantasized looking. Both reader and spectator cannot but contemplate the danger of spectacle, and the outcome for both kinds of audience is the kind of vicarious experiential learning\textsuperscript{32} that only the literary event can provide. The process of learning is different for history than for tragedy, but the two modes will in the end prove to teach similar lessons.

\section*{THE TRAGIC QUEEN AS \textit{HISTÔR}}

Herodotus’ version takes its start in the narrative, historical motion toward Croesus and so presents the scene of spectacle as objective history; that is, as if the scene were visible to the same eyes that regard the most authorized events narrated in the \textit{History}\textsuperscript{33}. The repetitions of the scene—the queen presenting Gyges with the crossroads (she, in the place of Candaules, offers herself as object), Gyges’ murder of Candaules (Gyges comes out of hiding to fulfill his spectacle by breaking his \textit{pistis} to his king and obeying instead the command of the queen)—take place sequentially, all on the same fantasized “stage” in the reader’s imagination. In the tragedy, by contrast, we can be reasonably sure that the episode from which our fragment comes, in which the queen presents Gyges with his choice in full view of the audience, falls between the two invisible, reported scenes of the \textit{mukhos}. In \textit{historia}, that is, there is no institutional difference between inside and outside as there is in the tragic theater. The historic narrative—even a historic narrative so contrary to what we think of as history—demands this sequential forward movement, subsuming such spatial distinctions of seen and reported as we find in the theater under the inexorable sweep I began to delineate in the start of the Gyges-logos: “Since it was necessary that things end badly for Candaules….” The result of the historical narrative is a foregone conclusion: Gyges will murder Candaules; the story of the Mermnads demands it. The psychology of the Gyges-logos develops as a narrative and for that reason involves the reader in its “nomographic” structure as simultaneously detached and complicit.

This outline seems relatively simplistic, but when we turn to the tragic theater and the involvement of the looking of Gyges with the looking of the tragic audience we find a structure that reveals the Herodotean version as in fact exceedingly complex, and freighted with self-reflexive significance for the act of \textit{historia}: the clearly marked psychology of the fragment points up the places in Herodotus that make his Gyges-logos a comment on the nature of the literary act just underway for narrator and reader, and by defining those places contrafactually in the following

\textsuperscript{32} One is tempted to adduce the very loaded concept of \textit{pathēi mathos} (Aesch. \textit{Ag.} 177) here.

\textsuperscript{33} That is, those events that Herodotus relates in his fully-authorized voice as \textit{histôr}. On the different narrative voices employed by Herodotus see Lang 1984: 37–51.
discussion of vision in the fragment we can begin to demonstrate the tragic
operation of Herodotus’ own looking.

We have in the fragment a spatial distinction we do not have in Herodotus:
the interrupted spectacle of the audience that prevents their participation in the
looking of Candaules, Gyges, and the queen. In compensation for that interruption,
however, we find the tragedy opening out the scene of looking into a delineation
of the interiors of the characters: the queen tells the chorus that she concealed her
knowledge in the bedchamber, as her husband disassembled his erotic stratagem.

Here we might adduce some of Ruth Padel’s arguments on tragedy as a place
to stage the interior of the human subject—on the rhesis as the ekkyklêma of
the soul.34 The anonymous tragedian stages precisely the interior of the queen,
and precisely in opposition to the action she describes in the royal chamber.
The looking of the audience directs itself toward her not as erotic object, as
it would in the bedroom scene, but as speaking subject, portrayed by an actor
in a mask. The audience must, I think, fantasize the voyeuristic scene just as
Candaules has, but in the enacted nature of tragedy the fact that the audience have
not seen this character undress, that she rather tells the story of her being seen,
places the transgressions of Candaules and Gyges in a realm quite different from
the realm of the stage: the events narrated by the queen occur for the audience
beyond the limit of the drama’s visible enactment; indeed, they define that limit
in that they describe the exhibition of a non-existent feminine body beneath the
masculine actor’s costume.35 The audience’s imagination of the erotic scene must
therefore serve not, as in Herodotus, to force them into Gyges’ position but
rather to force them into the queen’s, to identify with her and see the scene from
her perspective.

The existence of this off-stage interior chamber inside the skênê, just beyond
the limit of dramatic enactment (that is, the limit of the visible performance space),
begs the question of spectacle yet one more time: if the queen is here onstage
telling the story of her voyeuristic violation, can we then analogize theatrical
looking—that is, the audience’s looking at the drama—to the erotic, transgressive
gaze of the royal bedchamber? Yes, I would submit, and no. Certainly the visual,
active component of tragedy involves its audience in a sort of spectacular economy
that causes them to look upon things that are not their own; indeed, if we can judge
by the story of Phrynichus’ Capture of Miletus, a criterion for successful tragedy
is that it not be overly oikeios in its subject matter.36 But the appeal of tragedy
then, I think, as now, is its unique ability to show the audience what does not
belong to them while at the same time preventing them from looking upon what
belongs to anyone else.

35. I am pleased to find this theory of male nudity as limit confirmed in the realm of “histrionics”
(Bassi’s useful term for the theater’s deployment of displaying behaviors) by Bassi 1998, ch. 3.
36. Rosenbloom 1993 builds a very strong case for de facto censorship in the Attic theater.
Thus, the tragic audience does not see the naked body of Candaules’ wife, but does hear about the seething interior of that body (kardias kukômenês, strôphômenê) — the emotion that Candaules has failed to see, precisely because it is invisible, hidden behind the surface of the object that he has proven to be desirable. What the audience sees as the queen tells her tale to the chorus does not transgress the erotic lines of possession drawn by Candaules and Gyges: rather, to reverse the perspective, the audience’s spectation defines the limit of Candaules’ own little drama: the audience’s consciousness that this male actor is not what Candaules showed Gyges does not go away. We find here, that is, dramatic irony: a gap has opened between what is said and what is meant; that gap has to do specifically both with the difference between onstage and offstage and with the difference between the interior and the exterior of the speaking subject. The queen’s narration of the events in the bedchamber represents the drama’s refusal to play out straightforwardly the scene of looking; and the drama locates its refusal precisely between sight and blindness: Candaules has seen the queen but been blinded to her interior; the audience have seen that interior but have been blinded to the scene of looking.

The crucial difference between historia and tragôidia is therefore not simply that one is enacted and the other narrated, since tragôidia has both an enacted and a narrated register. The difference is that the distinction itself between the registers allows in front of the tragic skêné a kind of spectation that historic narration does not allow. This intermediate scene of tragic spectation, the scene of blinded sight, forces the audience into the place of the queen in their imagination of what is narrated. This connection between spectation and identification represents the dividend of this essay, and will, I think, prove quite interesting and even important when argued more circumspectly about tragedy in general. It is when we consider historia from this perspective, however, that we come finally to the aim of the present essay, the outline of Herodotus’ psychology of spectation.

Just as we can deconstruct the enacted scene of tragedy into the privileged register of sight and the marginal register of narration, we can by keeping an eye on our tragic fragment deconstruct Herodotus’ narrative of the scene of looking into the same two registers of historia that I adumbrated at the start: the outer register of Herodotus’ sémainô — of the forward movement toward Croesus and the Persian Wars — and the inner register of erotic desire. What emerges in the fragment in the queen’s own narration of her interior occurs in Herodotus in the register of wisdom utterance and oracle: the reader’s own exposure, the lessons of historia. As the difference between the two registers of the tragic fragment forces the audience into the position of the queen, the difference between the two registers in Herodotus forces the reader into the position of Gyges, the observer whose desire to see is taken for granted and who is forced into the tyranny against his will and for whose transgression his descendant Croesus pays. To just such ineluctable payment, suggests Herodotus’ narrative, is the reader liable.
PLATO’S MAGIC RING

All this might seem far-fetched if we did not also have Plato’s tantalizingly sketchy version from Book 2 of The Republic.37 There, Gyges’ Ring of Invisibility installs at the heart of the story the very problem both Herodotus and our fragment treat so coyly: the power of erotic looking.38 Adeimantus adduces the story as a demonstration of the basic lack of restraint in human nature: Gyges finds in a tomb a ring which has the power to make him invisible. He uses it to gain access to the queen’s bedroom and seduce her, then to assassinate the king and usurp the tyranny. We have no apophthegms and no agonizing rhesis—only an aggressively, transgressively roaming eye that takes whatever it wants. There is no irony in Plato’s version: in its context it is a simple tale of an up-and-coming tyrant’s natural, naturally transgressive desires given free reign. Nor does the story tend to a narrative end, as Herodotus’ does in the fall of Croesus. The Gyges-logs as told by Adeimantus is a wonder tale that reifies the gaze into a magic ring: the relations of looking between the three characters of the Herodotean version, the spinning triangle of the bedroom romance, have no place in the Platonic story—they are subsumed into the embodied fantasy of the magic ring.

So much can we draw from Plato; but enough, I think, to tell us two things. First, that the version of the logos that seems consistent between our fragment and Herodotus was not the inevitable, objectively verifiable course of events in ancient Sardis. Second, that the politics of speculation in the fragment and in Herodotus must have to them something specifically non-reified and non-magical, since they accomplish by human means the same thing Plato’s version does by magic means. The specificity of the human motivation that persists between the tragic fragment and Herodotus is the triangular formation of spectators: when three characters converge in the bedroom, the effect is the same as that of a magic ring of invisibility. The magic realm of fantasy takes hold, and Candaules is blindsided through his misunderstanding of the drama he has set in motion: he thinks Gyges’ entrance into his chamber can be confined to a single occasion of his choosing; he does not realize that to invite Gyges in at all is to give Gyges the magic ring of the Platonic version.

The drama of sight and blindness that we find in the tragic fragment implies that even the king—especially the king—can never know what exactly he has seen. “Especially the king,” for the king seems, as a general rule, both in Herodotus

37. Rep. 359c-e. The textual problems surrounding the reference to Gyges do not materially affect my argument: if Glaucon is speaking about an ancestor of Gyges rather than Gyges himself, the connection of the story-pattern to the bedroom scene on the one hand and Gyges on the other warrant its being brought in to comment on Herodotus and the Gyges fragment.

38. For a reading of Plato’s Gyges in company with Herodotus’ that emphasizes the speculation as an economic metaphor, see Shell 1978: 11–62 (esp. 30–36). Shell’s conclusions are extremely broad, but they may find some support in this paper’s argument for the importance of looking to Herodotus’ historical psychology.
(think of Croesus, Cambyses, and Xerxes) and in tragedy (think of Agamemnon, Oedipus, and Pentheus) constantly in danger of misapprehending that upon which he looks, and most likely, in the particularity of the Gyges-logos, to fall in love with his wife and think her the most beautiful woman in the world. Placed in the superlative social position, he is most liable to fall victim to his own desire’s dependence on other selves, and to give voice to the fantasy implied by that dependence, which becomes in the Platonic version the source of Gyges’ magic ring.

Both the fragment and Herodotus demonstrate the potential dangers of that fantasy, but the queen’s narrative in the fragment makes clear exactly whence the danger emanates in the human drama both in Herodotus and in tragedy: in her person. She knows, but has not shown she knows; she will call Gyges to her chamber and put the knife in his hand. By installing blindness in Candaules, she gives, in effect, Gyges’ ring to Gyges. In the fragment this blindness becomes the more pronounced because the audience, precisely through their inability to see the bedchamber, are spared the blindness of Candaules; Herodotus, by contrast, emphasizes Candaules’ blindness by setting the queen in inscrutable motion as the enforcer of apophthegm and ethnography: she will make Gyges demonstrate both the shame felt by the foreign woman at being seen naked and the truth that one should look at one’s own things.

Plato’s version, then, gives us important clues to the importance both of the similarities between our two primary versions and their differences (the interrupted sight of the audience as opposed to the power of the ongoing narrative). In both the fragment and Herodotus’ Gyges-logos we find the agency of the queen in place of the magic of the ring; we can therefore surmise that there is a human psychology—on the one hand tragic, on the other Herodotean—to be found in each of the two recensions. The different ways that agency is produced, however, bring me first to the aim of this essay and second to its dividend.

**HERODOTEAN LOOKING**

I stated at the outset that I aim here to outline the Herodotean psychology of looking; I am now prepared to do so, first from the perspective of the Gyges-logos, then from the broader perspective of the whole of Book 1. We found by comparison with our fragment that whereas the fragment places the spectator in the position of the queen, Herodotus places the reader in the position of Gyges. That positioning carries certain inevitable consequences and implies certain other (possibly) evitable ones, and we can extrapolate both from the position itself and from those consequences a sort of “Gyges complex” in the register of sight. The histōr (Gyges), whether narrator or reader, by definition looks at the possessions of others in response to the imperative of the prosperous (Candaules), whose prosperity will never be complete without displaying it to that act of looking; the object of the looking (the queen), however, never fails to exact the penalty of
the transgression on the prosperous displayer, and simultaneously to threaten the
històr with a similar penalty, which he may postpone or even avoid by breaking
the triangular gaze through learning from the scene of looking and finding in it not
desire but destiny.

Like the Freudian Oedipus complex, the above formulation is incipiently
allegorical: it states that looking in Herodotus operates according to a universal
narrative psychology, and thus that specatation functions as a metaphor like
geography or the language of metals39 to demonstrate the universality of the
Inquiry’s historical programme. Like other universal narratives designed to cover
a wide range of phenomena, the formulation should be regarded skeptically, and
given credence only to the extent that we can prove that Herodotus’ psychology
itself also functions allegorically—that is, that we find this psychological structure
extended through as much of the Inquiry as we examine, linking together key
moments of spectacle to create a transcendent significance. The exercise of
delineating this function in spectacle throughout the Inquiry would be a worthy,
if mechanical, one, but I am content for the present to postpone it in favor of a
single but vital example.

One could argue, I am convinced, that Herodotus’ inquiry spends nine books
looking at, and causing the reader to look at, things that don’t belong to him or
them, exposing us to the queen’s retaliation. But thankfully only twenty chapters
after Gyges kills Candaules and lines his descendants up for inevitable woe,
Herodotus also offers a defense against the vengeful object. Solon, statesman-
poet of Athens, the city of tragedy, corrects Gyges’ aphorism about looking at
what belongs to one, and does so in such a way that the històr and his reader
can get on with the story.

Herodotus characterizes Solon first (1.29.1) as traveling kata theòriès pro-
phasisin, “on the pretext of sight-seeing,” in order to avoid being forced to change
the new nomoi of Athens.40 But just after that characterization, the narrator makes a
very subtle but very telling shift: Solon traveled autòn dè ón toutòn kai tès theòriès
ekdémènas... heineken, “So then on account of these things [the problem of the
new nomoi] and of sight-seeing” (1.30.1). The difference between kata theòriès
prophasisin and tès theòriès heineken is not stark, since a pretext can supply a valid
cause, but it is significant. In the former case, Solon’s looking at the things of
others is not invested with the force of psychological purpose, as the true purpose

40. Konstan 1987 pays careful attention to the nuances of theaomai and theòria, and in the
end differentiates them: for Konstan theaomai is dangerous, being associated with passion, while
theòria is productive and safe. Konstan seems to have overlooked 1.30.2 (cited below) where Solon
is described as theasamenos. While I think the distinction between the two cognates cannot be
maintained, I hope that my argument as a whole serves to reinforce Konstan’s overarching point, that
Persians and Greeks are differentiated in their modes of spectacle—though, as Konstan shows in the
case of counting the dead at Thermopylae (8.24–25), Greeks are always liable to fall into the Persian
trap.
has to do with the democracy-founding nomoi he has given the Athenians; in the latter, those nomoi stand on an equal footing with the sight-seeing.

When we compare this introduction of Solon’s acts of looking with the narrative leading up to Gyges’ own speculation we may notice a similar obfuscation of motive: as Gyges’ compulsion (I tried to show above) vacillates between the command of his sovereign and the erotic desire forced upon him, so Solon’s reason for theòria vacillates between the nomoi of Athens and the allure of speculation for its own sake. And Croesus as a new Candaules places Solon in a similar position to that of Gyges: Solon is conveyed around Croesus’ thèsauroi (1.30.1) until he may be described as theasamenos, “having speculated” (1.30.2), and Croesus addresses him, saying, “The story has come that you have come here on account of sight-seeing (theòrièthes heineken).” As Candaules took Gyges’ desire for speculation for granted, Croesus takes Solon’s. The oracular, narrative compulsion is upon Croesus as it was upon the king whose throne his ancestor usurped, and desire yearns within him as it did within Candaules: “Desire (himeros) has come upon me to ask whether you have seen any man most prosperous of all” (1.30.2), begs Croesus.

Croesus, like Candaules, appeals to an outside observer, begs for envy, demands to be told that he is in possession of the superlative object. The choice Croesus (on behalf of his mute treasury) gives Solon conflates the compulsion of Candaules with the crossroads the queen gives Gyges, containing both the command from the king and the threat from the object: envy or die. That Solon’s life is not immediately threatened like Gyges’ conceals, I think, that the stakes are higher rather than lower: if the law-giver of Athens consents to envy Croesus as Gyges did Candaules—if his theòria turns out to be as much for theòria’s sake as for the new Athens’—then the Greeks, Herodotus and the reader included, are in as much trouble as the foreigners.

But Solon’s theòria has a crucial difference from Gyges’: Solon is looking at the things of others in order to institute the nomoi of Athens, where Gyges’ looking transgressed his own nomoi. And this difference in their speculation springs from a structural difference between their stories: Solon is a Greek, coming to Lydia and the other stops on his theoretic tour as an outsider, where Gyges was Candaules’ most trusted retainer. Solon is therefore able to make a sort of answer to Croesus that Gyges could not make either to Candaules or to the queen. Instead of entering into the cycle of envy and doom, Solon regards the end, and chooses an Athenian from the plurality of Athenians.

I think it remarkably suggestive, though, that Solon’s answer mimics to a certain extent the psychology of the tragic fragment. Like the tragic spectator, Solon finds a way to look without looking. The real, democratic purpose of his sight-seeing gives him the same helpful blindness we find in the tragic theater, because, strange to say, by it he is enabled to look at Croesus’ treasury the way the tragic audience is forced to look at the queen. Solon’s nomoi for Athens, at least in the eyes of the Athenians of the fifth century, ensured the isonomia by
which the plurality of Athenian citizens, like Tellus whom Solon calls happiest of all, were enabled to live and die free from the cycle of envy and death that is so visible in the Lydian logos, and which Solon can recognize instantly in Croesus’ thēsauroi.

Fully cognizant, like Herodotus, of the power of nomos, Solon looks at the object thought by the possessor (remember that Candaules enomisde, “held as custom,” his wife the most beautiful of women) the most desirable and refuses to desire it. As Candaules’ and Croesus’ dooms come from the oracular narrative compulsion that will eventually sweep the Ionian world into war, so Solon’s power of denial comes directly from the narrative compulsion provided by the nomoi of Athens: his theORIA has other, Greek (and particularly Athenian) motives, which cause him to look (horo [1.33.1]) not at the thēsauros but at the end. It is well worth noting that Solon’s word for looking at the end, skopeeIN (1.32.9) (as opposed, crucially, to a form of theaomai), is the same word used in Gyges’ apophthegm (1.8.4) for looking at one’s own possessions.41

By narrating Solon’s solution, which we may also perhaps call the solution of Athens, by regarding the end and showing the consequences of desirous spectation, as tragedy is also wont to do, Herodotus accomplishes by narrative means what tragedy accomplishes by literal ones. For this reason Herodotean narrative finally partakes of the tragic whether or not Herodotus was taking notes in the theater. Like Solon, the tragic audience are on a theoria motivated by the preservation of their own nomoi:42 over the course of the tragic festival, they can look at a great many things not their own and return at the end of each tetralogy with a renewed sense of the superiority of their own customs and laws. Like these fruitfully blinded Athenians, Herodotus and his reader can gaze upon the things of others and look to the end, as at the very end of the Inquiry (9.122), Cyrus (conqueror of Croesus) tells the Persians that to envy more fruitful lands and to inhabit them would be to ask to be conquered themselves.

CONCLUSION: LOOKING AT THE END

The end of the Inquiry can serve as a final instructive counter-example, because it expresses much the same mechanism as I am delineating here in Herodotus’ psychology of spectation not in the register of sight but in the register of military strategy. The ultimate point is the same in both registers, that the object of desire, whether the queen, the treasury, or a land of luxury, whether looked at or schemed at, poses a deadly threat to him who desires it. Cyrus’ solution in Book 9 is the solution Gyges proposes to Candaules: don’t look at what isn’t yours. But back in Book 1, in the same register of military strategy,

41. I owe this important observation to one of Classical Antiquity’s referees.
42. A referee points out that Redfield 1985: 98, 116–18 corroborates this view of theoria as a confirmation of the spectator’s own nomoi.
Herodotus demonstrated that that solution becomes untenable, when Croesus persuades Cyrus to do precisely what he, Croesus, did wrong: that is, to cross a river and invade the land of the Massagetae, for which Cyrus pays with his life, as Croesus would have without Solon and Apollo to help him.

If we find a similar psychology at work in spectation and in military strategy, why treat looking separately? I can think of three reasons. First, from the specific perspective of the Lydian logos, spectation undeniably binds the Gyges-logos and the Croesus-logos into a programmatic statement about historia, a point well worth emphasizing. Second, although acts of looking never again attain the same prominence they have in the Lydian logos, there are important moments of spectation throughout the Inquiry, which an understanding of the psychology I outline here may help us elucidate; some years ago, Konstan noted several of these moments, and this paper hopefully adds to our understanding of how they fit together.43

More importantly, it may be possible to see the looking of Xerxes atop Aigaleos during the battle of Salamis (8.86: “Each Persian thought that the king would be watching [theēsesthai] him”; 8.90: Xerxes sees and records the deeds of the battle) as the most significant manifestation of Herodotus’ psychology of spectation: Xerxes, having taken the best possible, most singular position from which to spectate,44 displays his superlative navy to the Athenians and other Greeks, and undergoes the fate of Candaules and Croesus. And so third and most suggestively, given the importance of Croesus to Herodotus’ programme and the prominence of Xerxes’ spectation, it is worth wondering whether the psychology of looking I have uncovered here gives us a fundamental metaphor, from which other metaphors like that of military strategy arise: although we find no physical looking in most of Herodotus’ moments of transgression and nemesis, nevertheless he is engaged in the apodexis, “display,” of a historia, “looking into,” and his first stated aim is that deeds great and thômasta, “worth looking at,” be preserved (1.1.1).

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