

## Sight, Storytelling, and Method in Herodotus: Sex, Murder, and a Magic Dolphin Lindsay Mahon

Political science continually grapples with how to study the varieties of human diversity without doing violence to the particularity of each. Yet bringing to bear an ancient perspective might cast new light on our common dilemma of experiencing and negotiating difference. Herodotus, the so-called 'Father of History', offers an alternative and suggestive way of thinking through this problem. In my reading, the opening chapters of his *History* - most emphatically in his version of the Gyges story<sup>1</sup> - offers a therapy of vision, a method of leading us to see for ourselves the ways in which our own sight might fail us. This will emerge through a close textual analysis of the opening sections of the *History*. A careful reading of these passages suggests that Herodotus' *History* is not only a record of what he has discovered, but is at the same time an account of *how* he has discovered it - a method of inquiry through which we might correct and clarify our own vision and, in so doing, train ourselves to see ourselves and others in a more balanced and nuanced way.

Herodotus begins his *Inquiries* with both broadly and personally: "I Herodotus of Halicarnassus, am here setting forth my history, that time may not draw the colour from man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians,<sup>2</sup> fail of their reports..." (1.1).<sup>3</sup> It is important not to underestimate the broadness of this scope. 'What man has brought into being' translates *ta genomena ex anthropon*, literally "the things that have come into being out of human beings." If we take this rather odd phrase seriously, it suggests that Herodotus means to set forth all of the things that human beings have brought into existence - be it events or deeds, cities or cultures, stories or songs, laws or thoughts. To say the least, this is a rather ambitious undertaking. We should also note that it is avowedly a *fair* one. In the very first sentence of this epic work, Herodotus identifies himself, the author, as a Greek, one who is investigating the recent, calamitous war between the Hellenes and the Persian Empire, for a specifically Greek audience. In these rather tense circumstances, Herodotus announces his intention to report the 'great and wonderful deeds' of Greek and barbarian alike. Although this sort of fairness is an admirable goal, it can also be quite difficult to achieve in practice.

This difficulty, I think, is underscored by Herodotus' invocation of his personal name - I use the term 'invocation' advisedly. It is important to remember here Herodotus' immediate literary context. The ancient Greeks were already familiar with a big book about a big war- we call it the Iliad. Homer, however, was able to 'guarantee' his work with the authority of a divine muse. One can imagine that Herodotus might have found this helpful. If we take seriously his claims as to the universality of his subject, his vision might needs be equally boundless, like that of the gods, looking down

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<sup>1</sup> Political theorists will recognize this name from Book II of the Republic. However, as we will see, Herodotus' version is markedly different in important ways.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word 'barbarian' generally referred to all non-Greek speaking people, supposedly imitating how their language sounded to the Greek ear. I will use this word throughout because Herodotus used it. Its evocation of linguistic might add something to Herodotus' exploration of the difficult of hearing other stories and seeing other lives.

<sup>3</sup> All references from David Grene's translation.

from their box seats on Mount Olympus.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, then, there is no divine illumination here. Herodotus is only one particular man, surveying the universality of human things through looking at the particulars. More specifically, he is a Greek, attempting to look both at things foreign and near; given his many explicit comments on the way that custom filters and even distorts human judgment,<sup>5</sup> we can conclude that Herodotus is aware of and deeply concerned with this difficulty. This concern will become especially evident as he leads us almost immediately into a story that deals with the failures and limitations of sight, but here it suffices to say that by omitting any divine inspiration and by offering himself as his own witness, Herodotus has effectively invited us to ask what it means for one man to attempt to see 'all that human beings have brought into existence. He asks us to look to his looking.

Because of this, then, in setting out his subject, Herodotus has simultaneously drawn our attention to the problem of his method. I contend that Herodotus is as deeply concerned with *how* we see as *what* we see, and that this is one of the great themes of the work. Importantly, the word that appears in the very first line of the book and gives it its title - history, from the Greek *'istorie'* - might be more accurately translated as 'inquiry' - meaning both what he has found and how he has uncovered it. Method and result here are inextricably intertwined. In order to 'set forth', to use Herodotus' term, what human beings have brought into being, we must pay attention both to how something might be shown, and what it means to see it. Inquiring, looking, is both a means of uncovering human activities and a human activity itself. Looking is something that humans do.

Fittingly, rather than telling us this, Herodotus shows us, in the intensely personal and almost claustrophobic drama of Candaules and Gyges, which appears early on in the book's first chapters. In his individual inquiry into the universality of human things, Herodotus almost immediately takes us into the personal drama of particular individuals. Each of the characters involved - Candaules, his queen, and his bodyguard Gyges - looks to their own, but Herodotus shows us how what they do depends on how they see, and how they see is often dangerously distorted. By beginning this record of his looking with a story that plays with the dangers, excitements, and failures of sight, Herodotus challenges us, his readers, to look to his own looking: he dares us to question what he shows us, rather than to accept blindly what we believe we see.

If I am right and Herodotus aims partly at providing an education in sight, a type of gymnasium for the eyes, it is appropriate that (to stretch a metaphor), he begins with the gentlest sort of exercise: he simply listens to others and repeats their accounts, neither accepting nor rejecting what emerges. Immediately after promising to set forth his own inquiry, he instead presents what "the chroniclers among the Persians say" (1.1). He then proceeds to retell - without comment - the Persian take on the cause of the war, which appears to be simply a prosaic version of Greek epic. We have the rape of Io but no Zeus, and Helen of Troy without the Judgment of Paris (1.1-5). This is myth without gods and Homer without heroes. The effect is disconcerting, to say the least:

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<sup>4</sup> Herodotus' relationship with his poetic predecessors is fascinating and complex, and I do not have the room to get into it adequately here. It is interesting to note, however, that Herodotus at times seems to suggest that the poets in some ways 'created' the Greeks; fascinatingly, he sees these activities not as taking place in some mythical lost past, but only "the day before yesterday" (2.53), as it were.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most famously, his reference to Pindar's line that 'custom is king of all' - 3.38

with this narrative, we hear the most familiar stories of Greek myth cloaked in decidedly unfamiliar garb. Herodotus here asks his Greek audience to see their own through Persian eyes. In a gloss, he even explicitly underscores the way these stories conflict with the more familiar Hellenic accounts: "that is not how the Greeks tell it" (1.2). By presenting his audience with radically different tellings of familiar stories, Herodotus here shows the Greeks their own through the eyes of another. It is important to note, however, that these paragraphs are rife with distancing effects. Herodotus is forever repeating 'the Persians say', 'so they say', 'as they would have it'. (1.1-5). While it is striking that Herodotus begins his account to the Greeks with Persian stories, at this juncture they remain decidedly 'Persian stories'. This suggests that, this early on, Herodotus deems the effort to enter fully into alien stories to be too much for his Greek audience. So, instead of a story that fully immerses us into the deeds of the Persians, inviting us into their thoughts, he simply retells their own words. He does not ask his audience to envision their stories, but merely passes on barbarian hearsay. As an audience, we can remain outside, looking at what is foreign, secure in the knowledge that it is other, and therefore, that it must be wrong.

In some ways, then, it appears that Herodotus is doing what we will shortly see Gyges do. He merely accepts and unquestioningly repeats someone else's account of the truth of things. There are, however, telling discrepancies between Herodotus' behaviour and that of Gyges'. Unlike Gyges, Herodotus recounts the wisdom of elders that are not his own. Moreover, these stories serve, in fact, as the most stark contrast to his own that his Hellenic audience could imagine. Instead of the the doings of gods and heroes, we get a knocked-up teenager who skips town with a pirate. What really matters here, however, is that he recounts these competing accounts without condemnation. As he says, "these are the stories of the Persians and the Phoenicians. For my part I am not going to say about these matters that they happened thus or thus..." (1.5). Speaking in his own voice for the first time since the proem, he emphasizes that these accounts are the truths of another and that he will not oppose them (but neither will he approve them). Such toleration, if not sympathy, is shocking from a Greek who is inquiring into "the reason why they [the Persians and the Greeks] fought one another"(1.1) and speaking to Greeks who have fairly recently suffered through that war.<sup>6</sup> Instead of judgment, Herodotus displays curiosity. If this is not yet an examination, it is at least a 'glancing-around.' In contrast, Gyges had to be compelled to look at what was not his own, for the very thought of doing so made him let loose "a sharp cry" (1.8). Herodotus cannot yet truly examine that which he looks at, since his readers, like Gyges, are still so close to their own that they perhaps cannot bear to look at anything else. They need to be made familiar with looking at the unfamiliar. Otherwise, both their attachment and inexperience will prevent them from seeing others clearly. This is a kind of near-sightedness. To his inexperienced audience, it is shocking enough that Herodotus looks without censure, that he looks just for the sake of looking.

By opening with a Persian account of Greek stories, Herodotus has led his audience to look at what is foreign, while allowing them to remain coddled by the knowledge *that* it is foreign. This 'warm-up' prepares his readers for what comes next:

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<sup>6</sup> An interesting parallel could be drawn here from contemporary war films. Often, the 'enemy' might be given a sympathetic hearing, but, revealingly, the audience response is often filtered through or coached by a more familiar character's interactions with such characters and stories.

that is, a look at the foreign which is incredibly familiar. He takes us from what the Persians say to what the Lydians do. That is, from what would appear to his Greek audience as the ridiculously prosaic and banal stories of nameless barbarians, stories so obviously petty and wrong that a Greek audience might comfortably dismiss them outright, he turns to Candaules, his queen, and Gyges, individual actors grappling with universal yet intimate themes: desire, shame, and revenge. These are the human things that Herodotus spoke of in his proem. All feel these things, yet all experience them in a particular way: as my desire, my shame, or my revenge. They are profoundly universal because all human beings feel them and they are painfully intimate because all feel them as their own.

Fittingly then, he does not present this story as a folk tale, something that occurred to indefinite people at an indefinite time. These characters are not mere ciphers that his audience can read themselves into. Neither does he merely recount this drama, as he summarized the Persian view of things immediately preceding this tale. Instead, he shows us the whole. He invites us in, letting us hear the actors speak for themselves and allowing us to see each detail for ourselves: the slow striptease, the reluctant assassin, the king murdered in his bed. Sex and death: every human being can understand those themes. Yet this is the particular bedroom of a particular man. Herodotus emphasizes this by fully tracing Candaules' ancestry (Flory, 30). This is not just anybody, Herodotus suggests. This is a man with history and lineage, a man who actually existed in time and in relation to others. He lived in real time and as a real person. So too for his usurper: Herodotus precedes him with his descendant, making mention of Croesus before we even hear of Gyges. He gives us both ancestors and descendant so we can plot these men onto the matrix of real time. They are individuals, not characters: not all kings and all usurpers, but this king and this usurper.

He further cements the particularity of this story by having Candaules vividly describe its setting for us. As he tells Gyges: "there is a chair that stands near the entrance. On this she will lay her clothes, one by one, as she takes them off..." (1.9) When the king, in his obsession, lingers over the details of his wife's achingly slow striptease, he also describes, for both Gyges and his readers, the particular furnishings and arrangements of his own bedroom (Flory, 35). The erotic charge evident in Candaules' description brands these details on the reader's mind. This is not simply stripping, an abstract verb with no tie to a particular subject, but one woman discarding her clothing, piece by piece, onto a particular chair that is placed just so in one man's own bedroom. These details brilliantly render a private and individual scenario. As an audience, we are most definitely looking at a particular one's own - someone else's, at that. This very particularity places us squarely in Gyges' dilemma. We are being forced to look at another's own and we are compelled to see the tensions and conflicts- and yes, excitement- inherent in such looking. The form of this story thus reveals its content. We are looking at the problem of looking.

We begin with one who looks solely to his own, yet still mis-sees it. As Herodotus says, "this Candaules fell in love with his own wife; and because he was so in love, he thought he had in her far the most beautiful of women" (1.8). The use of the word 'thought' underscores Candaules' mistakeness. He did not have; rather, he thought he had. So as to completely emphasize Candaules' blindness to his wife's actual degree of beauty, we are later told that "he was forever overpraising the beauty of his wife's body"

(1.8). Herodotus specifically identifies the cause of his misapprehension, for it is 'because he was so in love' that he saw her beauty falsely. The vehemence of his passion distorts his looking; his eros colours his perception, and rather than seeing things as they are, he sees them as he wants to. He is over-attached to his own, and because of this, he cannot see it truly. It follows that his myopia distorts his view of other things as well. He focuses only on what is closest to him. All else blurs into obscurity. One of his relations- that of husband to wife- predominates, thus obscuring his other no less important ones, such as that of a king to his subjects. He is not blind, but he cannot see accurately. He can neither see the actual appearance of things nor his proper relation to them.

This relational myopia manifests itself in his interactions with Gyges. Gyges is his bodyguard and subject. A king rules over his subjects. Although he is a man, and thus by nature like other men, convention gives him power over them, like a god over men or men over animals. This is a conventional relation, not a natural one, an experience among one set of humans, but not another. This conventional quality would be immediately clear to a Greek reader, as they are reading a particularly barbarian story that takes place under a specifically barbarian form of government. However, the strength of conventionality rests on its being treated as nature, as an incontrovertible law. Convention interprets how things are for a people. For this to have any authority, it must be treated as a necessity: as a description rather than an interpretation. Thus, since Lydian convention has made Candaules king and Gyges subject, it also dictates what the proper relationship between them should be. Emotional distance befits the discrepancy in power between the two. One rules and the other must obey. Since one is above the other, it follows that they should not be close, so that familiarity will not compromise reverence. In a story that Herodotus later presents of another barbarian king, we see great insight into convention, power and necessity. Deioces, after becoming king and thus ascending from one man among many, to one man above the many, institutionalizes and sacralizes this difference, in an attempt to obscure the origins he has in common with his subjects (1.99). He thus transforms something made by men (structures of power) into something that men must obey. Thus convention, a thing made by men, gains the force and inevitability of law, a thing that rules men.

Candaules, on the other hand, made king by convention rather than through his own efforts, undermines this same convention through his behaviour. Even before he invites his bodyguard into his bedroom, he appears to invite him into his kingship. As Flory surmises, "Herodotus also hints that Candaules has been neglecting affairs of state in his infatuation and relying overmuch on Gyges," (Flory, 32) for he writes that "Candaules used to confide all his most serious concerns to this Gyges" (1.8) Rather than ruling from afar, Candaules shares all his 'most serious' thoughts with a person devoted to protecting his body. Candaules, as his bodyguard, already has exceptionally close access to his person. One would think that this necessary compromise in physical distance would invite increased emotional remoteness, so as to safeguard their relative positions in the conventional hierarchy. By sharing his private thoughts- his interiority- with a person already so close to his body, Candaules effectively treats Gyges as co-ruler, especially if these 'serious concerns' are political ones, the concerns that are his and his alone, through his role as king. Perversely, Candaules refrains from stopping there. After having already invited his subject into his kingly thoughts, he then invites

him into his royal bedroom. Candaules wants Gyges to see what he sees; he wants to illuminate the privacy of his marital bed.

How Candaules phrases this invitation, this wish to reveal his wife to Gyges, effectively reveals himself to Herodotus' readers. It displays both his desires and his insecurities, both what he assumes about his position and what he forgets. He tells Gyges that "I do not think that you credit me when I tell you about the beauty of my wife; for indeed men's ears are duller agents of belief than their eyes. Contrive, then, that you see her naked" (1.8). This statement, which both commands a subject's submission and pleads for his approval, strips Candaules to Gyges and to us. He doubts both the legitimacy of his authority over Gyges and the accuracy of his own vision. Evidently, Candaules fears that Gyges does not believe what he says. Even more tellingly, that he desires Gyges' confirmation at all suggests that he doubts his own ability to discern the truth. Candaules' under-valuation of his own authority effectively corrodes it. A king's word is law. Just as he rules like a god over men, so should his words be taken as a revelation of truth. They are not to be looked at- that is, inquired into and debated- but heard and obeyed. By implying that he doubts the authority of his own words, and thus appealing to Gyges to use his eyes rather than his ears, Candaules implies that the authority granted to him by convention, by what has been heard rather than what has been demonstrated, is somehow lacking. He wants Gyges to look for himself rather than to obey. He whose position is based on unquestionable authority *orders* his favourite to question his authority; and the same man that proclaims that 'men's ears are duller agents of belief than their eyes' wants his own eyes confirmed by another man's report. Candaules emerges here as a mass of contradictions. He senses a dissonance between what convention holds to be the truth- namely, his own political superiority- and what is. In his attempt to affirm his own position by appealing to the eyes of another, he only undermines it. His authority relies precisely on that it should not, and cannot, be tested. By seeking to test it, even if with the intent of confirming it, he reveals his own fear that his authority isn't really all that authoritative.

Although Candaules acts in a way that suggests he doubts his own authority, he still assumes that he has sway over others. He orders Gyges to "contrive, then, that you see her naked" (1.8). From all this, then, it is evident that Candaules cannot even see himself clearly. Just as he mistakes his proper relation to his wife and to his subjects, he fails to see the contradictions inherent in his own actions. With the same command, he both assumes his authority and denies it. Perhaps it is this lack of self-knowledge that Herodotus refers to when he says that "it was fated that Candaules should end ill"(1.8). This is a very ambiguous statement. Who or what did the fating? Herodotus' phrasing is open-ended - 'for it was fated.' Who fated? The gods? But they are absent from this anecdote until its conclusion, and even then, they only appear in the form of a politically convenient oracle.<sup>7</sup> Was it Candaules himself, either through his particular actions or, more generally, through his contradictory, self-doubting nature? Perhaps. Given his

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, we must remember that Herodotus says that his account deals with 'all that which man has brought into being.' Might this include the gods themselves? There is much evidence that this is Herodotus' position- see his treatment of Homer and Hesiod's naming of the gods, his suggestion that 'all men know equally about the gods' - whatever that might mean - and the implications of the story of Phye, touched on briefly in this paper. Might the 'anthropic' (to use Herodotus' word, an unusual word that echoes Phye's name) nature of the Greek gods suggest their human origins?

particular context - that of a king, and a Lydian one at that, this has plausibility. His actions contradict both the universal rules of kingship- inequality between the ruling and the ruled- and the particular conventions of Lydia- the great shame surrounding nudity. A Lydian king who undermines principles of both kingship and Lydian beliefs instantiates insurrection in his own person, located in the very heart of power. This creates such a massive dissonance in the logic of these laws that it demands resolution. Either this king survives and thus proves fallible the laws and conventions, the *nomos* that make sense of his particular existence, or he dies and with his death demonstrates the inevitability of these things. Either they underlie and frame human things, and are thus prior to them both in time and in importance, or they themselves are the things that humans create, and thus can be created and re-created again, so as to suit the humans that make them. The important thing here is precisely that Herodotus himself refuses to answer this. He specifically leaves it open-ended as to whom or what fated Candaules to destruction, and why. This episode is not a cautionary tale with an easily extricable moral. If it was, as Seth Bernadete pointedly remarks, "all the rest of Herodotus...would be superfluous." (Bernadete, 17). Herodotus leaves this open so as to prompt us to think, and look, for ourselves.

Fittingly, Gyges' response to Candaules' command reveals himself almost entirely. Indeed, everything else we learn about him in this episode further confirms and expands upon what we can observe here. It is worth laying out in its entirety, for it contains much to be parsed. He cries out in violent protest, saying

Master, what a sick word is this you have spoken, in bidding me look upon my mistress naked! With the laying aside of her clothes, a woman lays aside the respect that is hers! Many are the fine things discovered by men of old, and among them this one, that each should look upon his own, only. Indeed I believe that your wife is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg of you not to demand of me what is unlawful. (1.8)

With his first word, Gyges reminds Candaules of the proper order of things (Arieti, pp. 18-19). Candaules is his master, and should remember what is appropriate to that relation, even- especially- when giving orders. The word Candaules has spoken is 'sick' because it is an order that undermines his basis for ordering. It allows for an intimacy that upends the hierarchical distance which enables one man to rule another.

Gyges goes on to speak particularly to the contents of that order, namely, that he should see his master's wife naked. Bernadete brilliantly unpacks the implications of this order, pointing out that to see human bodies naked "is to see them as they are, stripped of the concealment of clothes. And laws are like clothes: they too conceal from us the way things are." (Bernadete, 12). Clothing functions as a perfectly dexterous metaphor for understanding laws and their relation to human things. Clothing covers our raw, delicate humanity. But this covering is not merely an encrustation, a dead weight to be sloughed off so that one can be free - although perhaps it is that at times. Importantly, however, clothing protects us from the elements of an often hostile world, cushioning and warming us, providing a means for fragile human beings to act and live in a world that is large, hostile, and dangerous. Clothing humanizes the world, in that it makes it

safe for us to enter into it. Nowhere is this more keenly felt than in Canada in January. An unmediated experience of the world, equipped only with what inheres in our human nature, is a dangerous endeavour indeed. Clothing protects us and thus enables us to interact with what is outside. So too do the laws. They provide a basis for acting and a framework for understanding the world. Laws bring the world down to a human scale by dictating what must be and what is right. They limit the world by carving out the boundaries between one's own and not one's own, between should and should not, between proper and improper. Both clothing and the laws make the world hospitable for humankind by acting as a buffer. The cost is real, unmediated experience.

Paradoxically, as much as both clothing and laws obscure the universally human, they both reveal the particular. What one wears says much about what is current to one's time and place and one's position within a particular context. Clothing can display one's class, income, values, and taste. It shows one's own to the world. A clothed queen displays herself qua queen; crown and cloak mark out her status for the world to see. Naked, she is just another body. She can be any-body. Clothed, she appears as the *nomos* of the land has made her: separate, distinct, and elevated. Compare Phye, who briefly parades through Herodotus' narrative. Dressed up as a goddess, her Athenian audience reads her as one (1.60).<sup>8</sup> *Nomos* has taught them what to look for in a goddess, and when it manifests, they recognize it as such. Or rather, they interpret her according to the expectations inculcated in them through *nomos*. Clothing thus simultaneously obscures one's physis and reveals one's *nomos*. However, by placing one in a context, it effectively locks one into it. Greeks appear as Greeks, and barbarians as barbarians. The cues that clarify within one's own context mislead within another.<sup>9</sup> What is human appears foreign and inscrutable.

Continuing his protest, Gyges tries to rebut Candaules with his reverence for the "fine things discovered by men of old" (1.8). These tell that one should look to one's own, and Gyges, in looking to what he considered his own, that is, received opinion and the authority that governs him, believes what he has been told without needing to look for himself. He believes Candaules' wife to be the most beautiful without needing to see her, for he believed Candaules' word to be true because convention holds it so. As Bernadete so succinctly puts it, "Gyges believed in the beauty of Candaules' wife in the same way he believed in ancient maxims: they were both equally beautiful and equally unseen" (Bernadete, 11). Gyges feels no need to test either. Of particular note here is his use of the word 'discovered'. This discovery was something done by 'the men of old' and is therefore the fruit of human activity- yet Gyges holds these findings to be 'discoveries', not inventions, and thus in some indistinct way, they are natural. This ambiguity in Gyges' words is important, in that it suggests the ways in which we can both see and not see the artifice in our own conventions. 'Discovery' suggests both that these 'fine things' are natural, but that there was a time that they did not yet exist for us. Human agency, then, is responsible in some indistinct way for them. Both necessity and

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<sup>8</sup> And for falling for this stunt, Herodotus lambastes the Athenians as 'simple-minded' (1.60). Much work could be done unpacking all the incidents where Herodotus spells out his judgment on a particular story, in comparison with those many incidents where he explicitly draws our attention to his refusal to comment. It might be that Herodotus thinks that there are certain kinds of human folly his narrative might correct, and others that are simply beyond his power.

<sup>9</sup> Here's a generational example. I might be able to read the social cues that reveals someone of my age and income group as a hipster, whereas to my grandmother, we all just look like silly young people.

choice are involved here. Gyges here wants to make a choice to uphold the 'fine things of old' - yet he simultaneously wants to deny in some ways the human agency involved in these things. The verb he uses, 'discovered', is in the past-tense. This describes its position in time, but also connotes his attitude towards this activity. It is a thing finished. Gyges does not want to look too closely at what men have discovered, he accepts unquestioningly their validity. He refuses to look directly at these commands, just as he refuses to look at Candaules' wife. In both cases, he is content with report; he wishes to only look upon his own.

Yet he is stuck. The law in this case demands two opposing things from him. He cannot both follow his king and remain within the law that demands that "each look only upon his own". A choice must be made, and Gyges eventually betrays what he professes to hold most dear, that is, his own laws, and follows the unlawful commands of Candaules. Because of the contradiction in the law here, however, Gyges could protest to us that he was still looking to his own; in this case, his own loyalty to the king. Perhaps. But by placing his loyalty to the king above his loyalty to the laws, Gyges strips himself of any defence for his later actions, in which he relents to the queen's demands and avenges her shame (1.11-12). He cannot say that he was acting to right the wrong done to *nomos*, as Mrs. Candaules might, since he himself was the agent of that harm. More damningly, as Herodotus says, he was "in dread lest some evil should come to himself out of these things" (1.9), and then, later, "he chose his own survival." (1.11). When seen in the light of his later choice to kill the king rather than be killed, his original decision to obey the king reveals itself less as a careful choice of one loyalty over another, but rather as the blind animal impulse to survive. He does not act *qua* man but rather *qua* animal. Compare his behaviour to Arion's, whose story follows shortly upon Gyges'. Arion, when faced with death at the hand of Corinthian pirates, chooses to be most fully and completely himself. He dresses himself in his heavy bardic costume, which is guaranteed to be an incredibly effective anchor, and sings his 'shrill tune', that which he is most known for, that which is most fully his. He is loyal to what is most truly his own - his own beliefs and talents- when he is closest to the extinguishing of these particularities in death (1.24). Because of this, Arion is saved from drowning by a dolphin.<sup>10</sup> Whenever Gyges is faced with a choice, however, he chooses not what is particularly his, those 'fine things' of old, but what he shares with all men, animals, and plants: life. It may be the most inextricably his own, but it is the least uniquely him.

It is difficult, then, to speak of Gyges as 'acting'. Instead he is used. First by the king, who uses Gyges to confirm his own judgment, and then by the queen, who uses him to rectify Candaules' breach in *nomos* by committing a far more fundamental crime, that is, regicide. Both wield him as a tool in order to achieve their respective ends. Gyges' own desires or concerns, such as those 'fine things' he cited to Candaules, have no role to speak of. His identity consists in that he has almost no identity of his own at all. Whether it is the dictate of *nomos*, the order of his king, or the illegitimate command

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<sup>10</sup> This is one of the more famous episodes in Herodotus. Bernadete has suggested that this dolphin suggests the way in which Herodotus' art might save his narrative (Bernadete, pp. 14-16; Norma Thompson reads it as the saving power of culture and creativity in moments of crisis (Thompson, p.167). The beauty of the tale partly lies in its elegant simplicity and its suggestive symbolism; Arion's dolphin seems able to carry a whole host of fecund readings on its back. Cf. the Arion imagery that opens Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which resonates beautifully with that play's fascination with the arts of music and comedy.

of his queen, he never actually does; he only obeys. The only action he is capable of is that which he was compelled to do.

Consider Herodotus' descriptions of Gyges' part in both crimes. In both cases, he is led into the room (1.10, 1.12). In his first crime, all that Gyges has to actually do is keep his eyes open. For the second, which admittedly requires active participation on his part, Herodotus emphasizes his passivity. The queen originates all action: "she gave him a dagger and hid him behind the very door" (1.12). The action hinges on her will; Gyges only acts because he feels "that necessity truly [lies] before him" (1.11).<sup>11</sup> From this, it is evident that Gyges' love for the laws results from his unwillingness - or inability- to think about them, to test them for himself. He loves them insofar as they can compel him and thus relieve him of the burden of choice. When their force is challenged by a more immediate and direct force- like the order of a king whose power he is in, or a threat to his own physical person- he always follows the stronger. Indeed, the strongest force exerted upon him is the life-force, which is in the end what drives him. Although this originates within him, this too is a kind of compulsion. At no point does Gyges act for himself. This is why "Gyges was content with report", as Bernadete surmises (Bernadete, 11). He considered the specific activity of discovery, of looking for oneself, to be a thing finished, because he had no wish to engage in any activity whatsoever. He was content with report because he was content to be compelled, rather than to act.

We see this manifested when the queen calls for him. Herodotus writes that "he gave never a thought to her knowing anything... and came on her summons, since he had been wont before this...to come in attendance whenever the queen should call" (1.11). Gabriel Danzig sees this as Herodotus' hint that Gyges had already been conspiring with the queen (Danzig, 182). Rather, I see this as more proof of Gyges' slavishness. He does whatever he is commanded, giving it little thought. Moreover, he has a long history of doing so, having 'been wont before this' to obey. Even his kingship was more given to him than taken by him, since it was only after the oracle proclaimed him king that he truly became so (1.13). Gyges is moved first by the laws, then by the king and the queen, and finally by the gods. He never moves himself. As though to underline this, Herodotus quickly sketches us for us the remainder of his kingship. His only real act is an invasion, the uniqueness of which Herodotus immediately erases by mentioning that this was done "like others" had (1.15) After this, "no other great deeds [were] done by him, although he reigned thirty-eight years." (1.15). Gyges does nothing that he is not compelled to do.

So far in this anecdote, Herodotus has unfolded competing ways of seeing. Candaules looks to his own, but because he is too close to it, too erotically attached to it, he is unable to see it clearly. Gyges wants to look only to his own, but really prefers hearing about these things from others to looking for himself. Herodotus here contrasts myopia and blindness. Yet there is another seeing within the confines of this story which is unlike both of these. Everything Herodotus relates to us about the queen suggests that she sees more keenly than both Gyges and Candaules. Quite literally, she sees Gyges as he exits their bedroom; her sight reveals that she has been shamed

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<sup>11</sup> Again, the question of the role of choice vs. necessity in Herodotus is intriguing, and far too complex to be addressed here. One interesting starting point would be Themistocles' speech to the fleet at Salamis at 8.83- this coheres with an overall Herodotean tendency to advocate for the exercise of beautifying choice within circumstances of necessity- face necessity, but do it in style.

(1.15). However, not only does she see Gyges' presence clearly, but she sees through the agent to the perpetrator. She can recognize the hand of Candaules through the body of Gyges.

Clearly, she sees her husband better than he sees her (Flory, 35-37). His thoughts are so transparent to her that she knows immediately that her shaming "had been done by her husband" (1.10). Through her insight, we know her. She is clever enough to see into the natures of both her husband and Gyges. She knows Candaules is an insecure braggart who would expose her to satiate his own 'sick' desires. Furthermore, she also intuits that Gyges is defined by his obedience, and thus could not be capable of such insurrection on his own accord. This same quality, instrumental to her shame, also enables her revenge, since she knows that the tool wielded against her can be used by her in turn. With all revealed to her, she too knows that she must reveal nothing, since "though she was so shamed, she raised no outcry nor let on to have understood, having in mind to take punishment on Candaules." For her to have revenge, she must cloak her intentions, although she could not cloak her body.

All that she sees, however, is illuminated by her particular *nomos*. At the moment of her insight, Herodotus interrupts with a gloss emphasizing the exceptionality of the barbarian shame surrounding nudity (Munson, 39-40). He stops the narrative to explain that "for among the Lydians and indeed among the generality of the barbarians, for even a man to be seen naked is an occasion of great shame." (1.10). Herodotus withheld this information earlier. He only now unveils it, at the moment of the queen's nudity. Perhaps he had earlier forgotten, and now the queen herself has reminded him. However, by revealing this particular detail so close upon the queen's reaction, Herodotus shows how inextricably her response is tied to the particularity of her culture. Without this knowledge, to Herodotus' Greek audience her revenge appears outside the bounds of all common sense (Munson, 39-40).

Indeed, modern critics often perceive it this way (cf. Flory, 37). The twinning of her response with its conventional explanation suggests how deeply, for Herodotus, *nomos* shapes 'what man has brought into being'. Her actions can make sense only when illuminated by the conventions she lives with. Perhaps if this story had unfolded elsewhere, her shame would not be as great and thus her revenge would be less severe (Bernadete, 13) or more troublingly psychotic. The explicative necessity of this ethnographic detail demonstrates how *nomos*, out of which human things appear, can also obscure them. Without knowledge of other laws and conventions, human behaviour can appear so decidedly foreign, so inscrutable, as to not be recognizable as human. This suggests that if one wants to truly understand human things, looking to the other and attempting to understand it, to enter into it, is necessary. Herodotus here reminds us that the human things appear in a myriad of ways. One must look to all of them if one even hopes to catch a glimpse of the full horizon of human possibilities and limits. However, looking to the beliefs and resultant actions of others can only be effective if we have reflected on ourselves, having seen how our own sight exists through a particular lens.

Perhaps then, from this it follows that *nomos* fated Candaules' doom. Unlike Gyges, however, we cannot so quickly trust what we think we have heard, even if it appears that Herodotus himself suggests it. For although the queen acts to repair what she sees as an insult to her own - both the laws of Lydia, and her own dignity as defined

by those conventions- her actions also fundamentally undermine rather common laws concerning kingship and marriage. In most circumstances, one should not destroy one's own spouse, nor murder one's own king. Both of these relations demand loyalty. Although the Lydian *nomos* can explain her actions, it cannot fully account for them.<sup>12</sup> These conventions, then, can contradict themselves. Blind adherence to them cannot adequately explain human action, although it can highlight the contradictions and cross-currents eddying under every act. Perhaps something mediates - or is mediated by- these competing influences. Reason? Irrationality? Herodotus does not say. Instead, he does display the contradictions inherent even in the keenly-sighted queen. Consider the results of her revenge. By destroying the man who had exposed her to another, she averred that only one man might see her naked, thus affirming the power of Lydian shame. However, in doing this, she shamelessly flaunted her shame to the world. She avenged a breach of her privacy by making it public; she toppled a regime to uphold the intimacy of the bedroom. Rather than being known to only a few people, she revealed her shame to all the world. Would Herodotus been able to tell this story had she simply closed her eyes to one convention and chosen to uphold another? If the queen was angry at Candaules, she must be furious with Herodotus. She keenly sees the details of her own context and yet seems unable to see the consequences of her own actions. She has precise knowledge of the private and personal but cannot understand the further, public ramifications of her own actions. In aiming to protect the sanctity of shame, she opens it to the world.

From this, it is evident that serious and potentially debilitating tensions exist within any given set of conventions. Perhaps there is something to be said for Gyges' reluctance to look too closely into things. Shame, which averts our eyes, protects these contradictions from being discovered and thus minimizes the strife and confusion that results from an experience of these tensions. Shame acts as a sort of mental saran-wrap: it keeps fresh the conventions we have received from the 'men of old'. Peel it away and these leftovers can start to smell. When shame loses its hold, that is, when these conventions become detached from their sense of inevitability, of being an inescapable part of the nature of things, this can unroot the human from its place in the world. Conventions that appear arbitrary lose their worth as a map and guide. They lose their power to either compel or inform. Witness the experience of the Corinthian sailors that attempted to murder Arion (1.24). Once they leave port, and with it the norms and conventions of home, they turn pirate. Bernadete writes that "they lost all sense of justice as soon as the possibility of punishment disappeared." (Bernadete, 14) This is true. But they also illustrate the dangers of seeing what is not one's own. As travellers, they saw as many different customs as places. Having witnessed so much difference in what is held to be good or bad, they were overwhelmed by multitudinousness and concluded that since there was no one, universal account of good and bad, there must therefore be neither good nor bad. The myriad varieties of human things they saw blinded them to the human underlying these diverse manifestations. Since they could not see anything that was truly human, they concluded that all human experience was relative. They ceased to be human themselves and thus became capable of great

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<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Candaules then is rather like Dirty Harry - going beyond the law in order to uphold it. Like Dirty Harry, however, her actions might destabilize those same laws by threatening their sovereignty. Hobbes would not be impressed.

crimes. They attempted to silence individual genius by murdering the inventor-musician Arion (1.24). Unanchored from the human, they held nothing sacred.<sup>13</sup>

Yet maintaining a sense of shame and looking only to one's own cannot protect one from the contradictions and tensions within any given *nomos*. As demonstrated in the Gyges-Candaules episode, loyalty to one's own can place an individual in direct conflict, not only with others, but with one's own competing loyalties. No matter how obedient one tries to be, one might experience conflicting demands from the same source: one's own. Candaules loved his own wife at the cost of his own power; Gyges loved his own life over his professed values; and the queen loved her own dignity more than her marriage or her king. In looking to their own, all three were blinded to the whole. The reader looking for a moral is left not knowing where to look.

This is a dilemma that makes itself. In looking for something in particular, some easy answer or teaching, one loses the ability to simply look. In seeking a simple, extractable moral from this story, one loses its meaning. Instead of looking to what Herodotus shows us, we should rather look to the manner in which he looks. Bernadete captures this perfectly: "The Inquiries of Herodotus continually show him looking at alien things... He agrees with Candaules and not with Gyges that eyes are more trustworthy than ears; but he does not look in order to confirm but to test the beliefs of others. He has lost his shame." (Bernadete, 12). Herodotus looks simply to see. He looks without expectations of what he will find, he looks to find and test his own limitations, and because of this, he has some hope of seeing things as they are, rather than according to what he wants. Free of shame, he looks at anything and everything; he can cast his eye everywhere and take in all the particularities of what is human. Perhaps through their differences, he can find the common.

And this is where his travels differ from those of the Corinthian sailors. Like them, he has looked at various manifestations of what is human. Both he and they have lost their shame; both he and they have been freed of love of one's own. But although he has lost his shame, Herodotus has not become shameless. Similarly, although he might be aware of the limitations of love of one's own, he has not simply lost his love.<sup>14</sup> The pirates saw that many things were allowable and thus concluded that all things were. They loved nothing in particular and therefore began to love nothing. Because of this, they were able to break the promise of safe-passage they gave Arion and they were capable of silencing the beauty of his song in death. In contrast, Herodotus seems to aspire to love almost all things human, or at least the things he deemed beneficial to the human. Nothing reveals this more than his revealing; rather than silence Arion, he

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<sup>13</sup> The fate of those who have gone travelling and thus have seen many things is a recurring trope in Herodotus - perhaps because of the ways in which these 'tourist' characters echo Herodotus' own experiences. Some come back and destroy the culture they return to; some come back and are destroyed by their own culture. Again, this is a topic that requires further investigation.

<sup>14</sup> Inquiry as a kind of attentive love recurs throughout philosophy, especially in the platonic and neo-platonic tradition. (Plato to Iris Murdoch, and many in between). This term seems to fit Herodotus nicely. One way to begin exploring this idea further would be to look at his extended discussions of other 'inquiring minds' and the disapproval he expresses of the way that certain kinds of inquiry can become utterly corrosive. The most striking example, to my mind, is the psychotically violent zeal with which the mad King Cambyses conducts his own investigations (3.1-3.38). Herodotus' own behaviour, in contrast, and moreover, his own stated intention suggests a dual concern with both knowing and saving. Indeed, given Herodotus' assertion of the shifting quality, the delicacy of human things, 'knowing' and 'saving' might be, in their fullest sense, one and the same for him.

preserves him for all time in his narrative, so that “time may not draw the colour from what man has brought into being” (1.1). Herodotus wants to see all, but moreover, he wants to save all. By his results and by his methods, he demonstrates his love for human things- whatever they may be- by saving them from time, for all time.

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