

“GYGES”

ChitChatClub Essay of 13 June 2023 by Kenneth Quandt

In just a few hours, at the Catholic Institute on *rue d'Arras* in Paris, scholars and thinkers from all over the world will be gathering to celebrate the centenary of René Girard. Not everybody knows about Girard, but he was one of the most important thinkers over the last hundred years, who boldly posited a reversal of perspective as radical as the heliocentric hypothesis of Copernicus. Contrary to our most cherished hopes and wishes, our desires are not our own! Rather, we borrow them from others. Keeping up with the Joneses is the most basic rule of human nature.

In his most famous book¹ Girard says, “Once his basic *needs* are satisfied, indeed sometimes even before, man is subject to intense *desires*, though he may not know precisely for what. The reason is that he desires BEING, something he himself lacks and which some other person seems to possess. The subject thus looks to that other person to inform him of what he should desire in order to acquire that being. If the model, who is apparently already endowed with superior being, desires some object, that object must surely be capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being.”

This borrowing of another’s desire René called “mimesis,” imitation in Greek; and the watchword of his theory is “mimetic desire.” He began articulating this subtle pathology of mimetic desire in his study of the novel. His first great book, and my favorite, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (in French, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*)² divides the great novels that represent the truth of mimetic desire, like *Don Quixote*, from those that try to deny it and in doing so only perpetuate it, like *Madame Bovary*. The lie is that romantic love is between two persons who emulate each other; the truth is that their desire for each other requires overcoming a more successful lover who is their rival. The model is also the rival.

He boldly presented his theory as the most basic and primary truth about human nature, and then with equal boldness extended it to every field of study, from animal studies like those of Konrad Lorenz, to the archaeology of social forms, the evolution of man from ape, and the origins of myth and religion, and an interpretation of Christianity as the ultimate proof of his theory.

This fraught ambivalence between myself and the other, according to which my own self-definition derives from the esteem I accord to my model, who will inevitably become my rival in the course of my reappropriating an illusion of autonomy to myself,

¹ *Violence and the Sacred* (1977) (Eng. Tr of *La Violence et le sacré*, 1972).

² Published in French in 1961; Eng. tr. 1965.

is something I call “the Dialectic of Self and Other.” It is a big topic not only in Girard but also in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Gregory Bateson, and obviously a problem integral to the theory and practice of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, with its transference and counter-transference. I remind you also of the famous “dialectic of master and slave” in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, how the master is dependent on the slave so as himself to be his master.

This inner truth is famous from Hegel not because he discovered it but because he articulated it too clearly to be ignored, and also because in quoting it, as with the case of Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave, one seems well read and perhaps even above it.³ The problem is painfully obvious, however, and the denial, the hiding, the repression of it, according to Girard, only builds the amount of mimetic desire and rivalry we harbor within ourselves and in our relations with others, and ultimately leads to an explosion when society becomes its apparatus and becomes a mob focusing the collective anger upon a scapegoat; from this comes Girard’s theory of sacrifice as the way that society manages the violence, periodically channeling the burgeoning accumulation of rivalry that had been protected by denial, into a violent outburst in an act of lynching. With the slaughter of the victim everything becomes surprisingly peaceful, and the collective guilt recoils upon itself by deifying the victim for the effect he has had. The theory led Girard’s researches into both cultural and physical anthropology (monkey see monkey do), and finally into an interpretation of Christianity with the inference that the lynching of Jesus was a kind of sacrifice that revealed forever the falsity of the sacrificial mechanism since in the case of Jesus it was intensely and unbearably evident to all from the beginning that their scapegoat was innocent. Half the world thought Girard an atheist and the other half a major Christian apologist, including Pope Benedict who sought him out and consulted him. Girard himself, though born and raised a Roman Catholic, became observant and fully worshipful only late in life.

The theory is global and monomaniacal; it finds mimesis lurking everywhere; it adduces in support of itself the very fact that its truth is routinely and vociferously denied: All this smacks of the paranoid schizophrenic! For me, I do not swallow it whole, but am also aware that I do not want to swallow it and cannot completely ignore it because evidence for it persists anywhere and everywhere, and all the time.

I’ll give a quick and easy example: while I was in Paris last month my daughter Zoe asked me to do her the great favor of buying her a purse from a store called Polène. She got the idea from her good friend Alina – her model – who conveniently moved to Boston last year: Alina was now far enough away that Zoe would be the only person in

³ In this connection I can testify I knew about this dilemma when I was 15 or so, and so did our recent initiate Wesley Higbie: he and I seemed already to know about the hazards of rivalry, spontaneously deciding to think of each other as what we called “Co-Idols” – and we’ve been best of friends ever since.

her circle who would have a Polène purse. I found the store on *rue de Richelieu* on the right bank, got there after work at about 5:30 and came upon a line outside the store consisting entirely of young tourists from Asia and the Middle East. Zoe will have followed Alina's instructions to the letter and yet will be the only person on the West Coast that could so scrupulously conform while seeming to be autonomous. She could thus in the near future, when the contagion of fashion got to the West Coast, seem to those around her too have been a step ahead of them so that they could borrow from her the desire she borrowed from Alina. Once I advanced to the line *within* the store, I got her on the phone (it was morning her time), while she was viewing the website and looking at all their purses. When she couldn't decide whether to get the exact purse Alina suggested since she saw some others on the website that she liked, I bought that one but another one, too.

In telling this story you might think I am betraying my daughter, and surely she would think so if she were here. We would in fact *expect* her to say "Dad! How can you betray your own daughter among these men you have only known for a year or two??" But her behavior, though she might be ashamed by it, is completely typical of the race, and indeed – for Girard at least – the very proof of her being a human being. The shame and indeed the sympathy you might feel for my daughter in imagining her feeling or being betrayed, is almost entirely due to the fact that we all know of this mortifying dilemma we all face as humans, and we conspire to hide it from everyone's view in order to hide it from our ourselves: it is a sort of conspiracy of denial to protect ourselves, the way we might forgive our neighbor of his shortcomings in order to be forgiven by him of ours – though with an implicit agreement not to expect himself or ourselves to improve – a counter-productive Golden Rule.

I was very lucky to get to know René about twenty years ago, before he was inducted into the Academie Française as an "*Immortel*," and subsequently passed away as all the *Immortels* have and someday will, though immortality itself will not. On Friday afternoons after lunch at home in Stanford, he would amble over to the Gould House and a few of us would meet him there and talk with him for the afternoon: to hear his new ideas, to ask our questions, and I have to admit there was a certain amount of rivalry among us as to who could say something to impress Girard, who had this wonderful way of expressing interest by widening his eyes and raising his eyebrows. The discussions always became lively and René, at eighty and after a good lunch, would fall asleep.

One day the big topic was Plato and Derrida's evaluation of him. Girard was suspicious of philosophy: in fact, the more idealistic and metaphysical the more he suspected it. He thought philosophers were trying to imagine themselves out of the mortifying disappointment of mimetic desire and rivalry by inventing an abstract world free of dependencies of that sort, as if trying to punch their way out of a paper bag, and Plato – whom he had not really read but, with most people, believed to be the most

idealistic of metaphysicians – came in for particular opprobrium. Given my own lifelong study of Plato, and my very different experience in reading his dialogues, I weighed in and got asked to make a presentation the next week.

What I thought to bring up was the story of Gyges the Lydian, of which there are two accounts, one by Herodotus in his *History of the Persian Wars* which illustrates and corroborates Girard's theory in a very particular way, including the aspect of denial; but then another, found in Plato's great work *The Republic*, which I thought would illuminate Plato's thinking in a way related to Girard's but different. I made the presentation and his eyebrows went up a couple of times.

I want to take you through these Gyges stories tonight in a new way, not to relate the thought of Girard to the thought of Plato or something like that – that's not what Chit Chat Essays are for – but really as an autobiographical confession among friends. I had been conflicted since my twenties about pursuing an academic career; though I earned a very legitimate PhD in Classics at Berkeley, there were very few jobs in Greek, my ideas were unpopular, and most of all my attitude was against the grain: for some reason I despised making money by teaching. I never gave up my studies and private teaching for free. After almost forty years, half a lifetime later, it was really René's gracious receptivity to my ideas and my analysis that gave me not only the courage but also a feeling of incumbency to put down the results of my life of study in writing; and I have been writing ever since. So really what I have to offer tonight is to "expose" you to Girard's thought and also to compare it with my own thought, for what it's worth.

Let's start with the first Gyges story we have, which comes at the beginning of Herodotus's history of the Persian Wars. He is telling how the Heraclid monarchy of Lydia was succeeded by the line of the Mermnads, beginning with Gyges and culminating in the reign of Croesus. Herodotus was a great storyteller, as you will soon be reminded in my paraphrase. His style is not reflective or longwinded in the manner of Henry James but direct and swift, more in the manner of Hemingway: he uses direct statement with a minimum of subordinate clauses, and adds only enough interpretive coloring to keep the thread. So gird yourselves up for my paraphrase:

The last Heraclid king was Candaules, who felt great eros for his own wife. He loved her so much he thought she must be by far the most beautiful of all women. He would continually boast of her beauty, in particular to his favorite bodyguard Gyges, to whose wise counsel he also entrusted all his more serious matters as king. Soon enough, "for he was destined to a bad end," he said to Gyges,

"Please, Gyges, you seem not to believe what I am saying about my wife. Since hearing is less persuasive than seeing, I'll have you look upon her naked!"

"O my master," Gyges replied, "how can you suggest something so very wrong, that I should set eyes upon my queen, naked? Wise men have known many good things, among them that a man must look after what is his own! And that when

a woman lets go her clothes she lets go her decent reserve as well! As for me, rest assured I do believe she is the most beautiful of all. I beg you not to compel me to do this unthinkable thing!”

It was out of a fear something ill would befall himself that Gyges resisted his king, but the king replied, “Courage Gyges! I am not trying to test you in asking you to do this, nor must you fear my wife, that some harm will come to you from her. I have a scheme to keep her from even finding out you have seen her: I’ll bring you into our bedroom and have you stand behind the open door; then will my wife arrive. There’s a chair just inside the room: she’ll remove her clothes, one by one, and place them there, and you’ll have ample time to gaze upon her. As she walks over to the bed her back will be toward you and then you’d carefully make your exit so that she won’t see you going out the door.

There was no way he could get out of it.

When Candaules thought it time to go to bed he brought Gyges into the room, and soon enough his wife showed up. As she came in and undressed Gyges watched, and once she turned her back and made her way to the bed he sneaked out – and the wife saw him leaving. She caught on to what her husband was up to but neither let out a scream in her shame nor let on that she knew: she tucked away what Candaules had done away to avenge it later. For among the Lydians at that time, as among most of the barbarians, even for a man to be seen naked was a very shameful thing.

So that night she kept her calm and showed nothing; but at sunrise she summoned her own most trusted servants to her and once they were in place, she called for Gyges. He thought she knew nothing of what Candaules had done and answered her call straightaway. For in the past he would regularly come around when the queen would call on him for counsel. Once Gyges arrived, the woman said to him: “I give you two paths: either to kill Candaules and take me and the kingship of the Lydians, or else yourself to die on the spot at the hands of these men present so as not to see what you should not in your perfect obedience to Candaules. Either he who concocted this plot must die, or you must, for beholding me naked and doing what is unlawful.” Gyges was stunned and begged her not to force him to make such a choice. He failed to persuade her and saw he must either kill his king or himself be killed at the hand of the others. He chose survival and asked her, “Since you are forcing me to kill my master against my will, please tell me where and how we are to set upon him;” and she replied, “The approach will take place in the very place where he contrived to show me naked, and the attack while he is sleeping.”

The plan was set; and when night fell Gyges, having no chance for cleverness nor escape – it was him or Candaules – followed her into the bedroom. She gave him a dagger and hid him behind the same door. Candaules came to bed and Gyges emerged from behind the door and killed him, and took to himself both the queen and the kingdom.

That’s the story. It is depicted in at least ten paintings I’ve found, from medieval times up to Degas (see inventory in my Appendix). Typically the artist has used the story as an occasion to depict the female body: almost all of them show her to us from the rear, she facing the bed and Candaules lurking beyond, at the expense of – or

perhaps with the purpose of – putting us into the position of Gyges: indeed very few of them even try to show him, who of course is meant to be hidden.

And there is also a literary *Nachleben* for the story. In addition to the second version of it conceived by Plato in his *Republic* only a few decades later, there followed over the centuries many versions and reminiscences, by Boccaccio, Fontenelle, de la Fontaine, Theophile Gautier, a ballet by the great Petipa, and perhaps most interesting of all a play by André Gide from 1901, which formed the basis for an opera begun by Zemlinsky but completed by others, *Der König Kandaules* (1996), which has made its way to the fringes of the standard repertoire (see performance history in my Appendix).

We also have a record of criticisms and discussions of the story, of which I will give you some examples, starting from later Roman authors and Greek authors of the Second Sophistic, down to Nikolaos the fifth century rhetorician, who goes to the trouble⁴ of arguing that Herodotus's story cannot be true: first of all, how can a man feel eros for his wife, Nyssia, when he already possesses her? How can he feel a want for what he has? But Nikolaos is a bit naïve about eros and desire, as a commentator on Suetonius's biography of Caligula had already seen: ⁵ said he of him, “mere overweening pride of ownership – the impulse that prompts the collector to exhibit some unique treasure – is quite sufficient in itself to explain the situation.” Still later, Plutarch accounted for Candaules's behavior by saying that “people want their sentiments supported by the testimony of others” and that “love is like drunkenness: convinced as such persons are, they want to persuade everyone that the object of their tenderness is sheer perfection.”⁶ Krafft-Ebing coined the sexual-psychological term Candaulism, in the nineteenth century, on the basis of Herodotus's story though his meaning has little to do with the real story. Most recently the story is retold by a woman in the movie *English Patient* (Catherine), in firelight, to a man (Almasy) not her husband but in her husband's presence, perhaps to seduce one or both of them: To the Herodotus narrative she, for her own purposes, adds, “and his wife was more beautiful than Gyges could imagine.” There is, moreover, a commonly accepted misinterpretation of Candaules's remark to Gyges that seeing is more persuasive than hearing, toning it down to an instance of the commonplace topic that the eyes are more accurate than the ears: it is desire, not accuracy, that is involved: we are dealing with the tempting concupiscence of the eyes as listed by Paul as the second of three sources of ruin for the heart, between pride and the concupiscence of the flesh.

Upon closer view – indeed by a Girardian way of seeing – the tradition is explaining away more than it is explaining; in other words, these are instances of the coverup – the *mensonge romantique* in Girard's French title of his book on the novel. And Girard equipped me to see this, and now I put to you the question I put to the Girard

⁴ *Progymn.* (*Rhet.Gr.* 1.287 Walz).

⁵ K.J.Smith (*AJP* 41 [1920] 26. Cf. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/289500>).

⁶ Plutarch *QC* I.5(622E-F).

group that day: it pertains to an aspect of Herodotus's scenario entirely left out and perhaps carefully avoided, in all the paintings and verbal accounts that I have seen.

What was Candaules doing? In particular, what was Candaules looking at?

He was not looking at the wife Herodotus tells us he so ardently desired, but rather at Gyges and at his eyes: he desired to see Gyges's face becoming enthralled by the beauty of Nyssia, to see Gyges gradually being stripped naked of his autonomy, the autonomy of reserve he had so eloquently seemed to display when he resisted to view this beautiful woman, with his advice of the sages of keeping to one's own and his prudential remark that a woman stripped of her clothes is also stripped of her self-reserve, as indeed his wife so truly was that she took revenge by having him killed.

We are left to ponder whether this detail is left out in Herodotus as a casualty of the swift sweep of his style (though it is alluded to by Candaules's remark that she will be taking her clothes off "one by one"), or whether Herodotus himself does not want to bother his readers with it; and yet it is the kernel of his entire story, regardless of the fact that he uses the story to explain the end of the Heraclids as morally deserved.

What Candaules was trying to do was *to get his desire borrowed*, and it is an attempt to establish his own autonomy, his "being" as Girard puts it, by cancelling the autonomy of another in viewing Gyges enthralled with a desire only Candaules could enjoy. The only author I know of who had any inkling of this, besides Girard who led me to notice it, was André Gide in his play I mentioned a moment ago, *Le Roi Candaule*, which I discovered while preparing this essay.⁷ Gide's play very credibly depicts the escalating mimetic desire in Candaules, dependent upon the many courtiers he has around him. He is very rich and "generous" – in the sense that he surrounds himself with courtiers he continuously regales – but gradually comes to realize his generosity is only an attempt to buy friends, and more exactly that he is trying (again) *to get his own desires borrowed*, even the desires he should keep to himself. Early in the play he "generously" unveils his modest wife's face among his courtiers, but later contrives the even more "generous" act of showing Gyges his beautiful wife naked. But Gyges falls in love with her and actually sleeps with her (in Gide the lights are out and she thinks she is with Candaules, who in fact has returned to regaling his courtiers). And Gyges's love for her promises to be a love that would protect her from others rather than showing her off to them – Gyges is a poor man in the story – so she loves him back and has him kill Candaules.

Gide's elaboration of Candaules' dilemma is instructive. The autonomous master, who has all, finds himself needing the beneficiaries of his generosity more than they need him: Gide has one courtier can say to another, behind Candaules's back, "this

⁷ There is a special re-edition of this book in some kind of artistic form – my next project to track that down. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/350500>. For further info see also <https://www.andre-gide.fr/index.php/ressources/gide-de-a-a-z/78-r/192-le-roi-candaule>

single feast is dearer to me than Candaules,” and the other then answer, “And yet this single Candaules is the dearer to us since he will provide us with many feasts.” Candaules finds himself in the dialectic of self and other, like Hegel’s master and slave. Gide’s play shows how this dialectic can take a tragic turn.

Plato’s version is completely different: first of all it is not Plato that tells the story – indeed Plato never speaks in his dialogues but only his characters do, most prominently Socrates but also those Socrates dialogues with. In this case it is not Socrates who tells it but a certain young man, Glaucon, who tells a version of the story to Socrates in the course of showing him how very much he himself needs to be convinced that living a just life is better than living an unjust one. I need to explain:

There’s an argument going around that the keeps echoing in the young and upcoming Glaucon’s mind: “Acting unjustly is obviously preferable! It is only out of a fear of themselves being mistreated that the majority have invented ‘justice’ and conspired to call it good, merely to protect themselves from the strong: Nobody would actually choose to be just on the merits, even though this is the admonition of the wise.” And now Glaucon will make the argument take over Socrates’s mind, too, and put Socrates into the same dilemma he finds himself in – with a sort of thought experiment that he finds irresistible: Let’s hypothesize that the just man and the unjust man are given a capability to get away with whatever they want: their desires will take them to the very same place: to hogging a larger share for themselves (this, *πλεονεξία*, or *pleonexia* in English, being a synonym in Greek for injustice). Just such a capability came to Gyges the Lydian:⁸

He was a shepherd serving the king of Lydia, was watching his flock in the country one day when a huge storm suddenly came on and an earthquake along with it. Lo and behold the ground opened up right where the shepherd was tending his sheep! He looked down into it in amazement and climbed down inside. There he saw a big bronze horse according to the story. It was hollow and had little doors that he could look through and saw what seemed to be a corpse, larger than human size. His eyes were drawn to a ring on its finger: he reached in, snatched it, and climbed out. At the next regular meeting of the shepherds, when they assemble every month to put together their report to the king on the state of his flocks, he arrived wearing the ring. As he sat among the shepherds he was fiddling with it and turned the collet

⁸ There is a problem in the best manuscripts at this point, which read “the *ancestor* of Gyges the Lydian” rather than “Gyges the Lydian”. Socrates refers back to this passage near the end of the *Republic* and says the ring belongs to “Gyges” (to “the ancestor of Gyges”), which if we accept the reading here implies that this putative ancestor of Gyges is also called Gyges. But there is no other Gyges famous enough in Lydian history to be called “Gyges the Lydian” in this passage except for the person that here gets the ring and becomes the king, the first of his line (as Herodotus tells us) to become king of Lydia. With the vast majority of editors I cut the Gordian knot and read “Gyges the Lydian” instead of “the ancestor of Gyges the Lydian”. It is likely that Plato has introduced a red herring so as to own up to the fact that he is changing the story from Herodotus, and asking us to compare the two: historical anachronisms (i.e., feigned inaccuracies) are common if not the rule in the dialogues. After all, none of the conversations Plato depicts as having happened did happen!

inward. At that moment he became invisible to them – since they talked about him as if he had left. He wondered at this and, fumbling for the ring, rotated the collet back outward and became visible. He made a mental note and later tested the ring to see whether it really had this power – and it did: when he turned the collet inward he became invisible, and back outward, visible. Seeing this was the case he soon managed to get himself selected to be one of those who bore the shepherds’ report back to the king. He gained access to the palace, slept with the king’s wife, ambushed the king with her, killed him, and became king himself.

If there were two such rings, Socrates, and you gave one to the just man and one to the unjust man, neither would be so adamant as to keep his hands off other people’s property: he could go to the market and take whatever he wants, and enter whatever house he wants and sleep with whoever he wants to, and in general live as a god among men. And if he did not take advantage of the situation he would seem to others an utter fool and a loser, if they found out, even though in public they would praise him for his behavior out of their fear of being treated unjustly themselves.

Glaucon wants to be convinced otherwise; he believes Socrates can convince him; and yet he is also sure Socrates will be stymied the same way by his story of Gyges! It is the strength of his conviction, his candor, the risk he takes in tempting Socrates, all of which is enveloped by his hope for something better, that gives Plato’s *Republic* the dimensions it possesses and achieves, and I can say that in the end, two hundred fifty pages of dialogue later, Glaucon will indeed be convinced.

I’ll say a bit more about how that comes about – but for now let’s make the comparison with Herodotus’s story Plato is implicitly asking us to make. We again have Gyges murdering the king and “marrying” his wife, but this time it is on Gyges’ own initiative rather than against his will and at the behest of the wife that he kills the king. In Herodotus the queen’s modesty was exposed to Gyges by her husband but in this case Gyges seduces her – or rapes her – without her husband’s knowledge. In Herodotus Gyges is a wise and temperate counselor, but the man Glaucon depicts is an impulsive nobody living in the wild and away from society, with neither conscience nor moral compass nor self-control. In both cases the entire plot is predicated upon Gyges being invisible, but in very different ways: invisible to the queen in Herodotus (which failed) and absolutely invisible in Glaucon’s story (which succeeds).

In the Herodotus story all the actions were motivated and understandable – the most telling being the behavior of Candaules which only Gide and Girard help us to understand – whereas in Plato all that matters to his storyteller, Glaucon, is the magic and the outcome. The story he tells has many problems that he himself does not notice. First, when the earth opened up Gyges climbed down and found this totally weird bronze horse with windows through which he saw a large corpse with a ring, took the ring, and climbed back out: Why? What was he thinking? What did he think he was doing? Moreover, if you believe this part of Glaucon’s story you’re ready to believe anything! Second, Gyges wore the ring for weeks but only discovered it made him

invisible when he came among men: does he not reflect on the fact that the sheep did not notice but only men did? Third, he gains entry to the king's bedroom but how does he "seduce" the wife? Does this rude and idiotic shepherd become visible and cajole the wife to commit adultery? Or does he simply rape her, invisible or visible? The next day, does anybody ask what became of their king?⁹ Or do the Lydians now have an invisible king? If it is his invisibility that protects Gyges from reprisals by those he wrongs, mustn't he remain visible in order to remain unassailable? Does he care about or think about being invisible all the time?

Just as Herodotus's story leaves it to us to discover who Candaules was looking at, Plato's leaves us to discover what Glaucon is *not* looking at. It is really the prospect of being invisible to *himself* that disables him from seeing these problems in his story, and I would wager most of us did not see them either: the magic of the story bore us along, and the bewildering dream of something like this happening to us. And in fact exactly this is what Glaucon hoped would happen in Socrates. Just as Candaules is trying to achieve an increment of relative autonomy by seeing Gyges becoming enthralled by a desire he cannot enjoy, Glaucon is trying to mitigate his own loss of autonomy to the temptation of the devil's advocate by spreading it to Socrates.

Though Glaucon is intoxicated by the prospect of being invisible, Socrates *does* see him, and will next invite him to embark upon a search for what justice really is and what injustice really is, and what effect choosing the one or the other really does have in the soul, whether for better or worse, but he proposes to find it not by looking for it and viewing its operation in the soul but on the larger canvas of "the city" – giving the excuse that it is harder to see in a single soul. This is something of a kindly joke: in truth it is harder to see justice in one's soul not because the soul is small but because it is hard to look *inward!* This is what Jesus seems to mean by his parable about the little "mote" you can see all the way across the room in your neighbor's eye even though you having to look around a "log" in your own (and "log" is exactly what the Greek says!). In the event, Socrates will invite Glaucon to join him in constructing an imaginary city from the ground up; Glaucon's own concupiscence will soon intervene and foul up the construction and introduce a need for "guardians" whom we will need to be able to govern themselves or else the construction will fail; and this in turn will necessitate a conception of a self-governing soul, a sort of soul with which, through the internalizing alchemy of dialogue and dialectic in partnership with Socrates, Glaucon will in the end identify. By transposing the question of personal morality out of his interlocutor's own soul onto the impersonal canvas of politics, Socrates gives Glaucon a chance to view morality with an objective theoretical leisure: a chance, that is, not to be threatened by the implications about himself along the way.

⁹ In the Herodotus story the populace does indeed challenge the legitimacy of their new king and the matter is settled by a visit to the Delphic Oracle – again confirming the Candaules's guilt and the justice of the succession.

It was out of this presentation to the Girard group that I reached my interpretation of Plato's *Republic*, which I then fully spelled out in my commentary on the Greek text, the first thing I wrote when I began writing twenty years ago, now on my ninth book. On the basis of this interpretation I tried to convince Girard that Plato is not a metaphysician living in the clouds and in denial, but, as a writer of dialogical dramas, a great psychotherapist (and this is not the contrary of being a philosopher, for surely our George Hammond is a philosopher but really I think a psychotherapist at the same time!) – a psychotherapist who creates conversations for his great interlocutor Socrates, for a self with an other, who engages his other on the other's own terms and within his own horizon, in other words in his soul; and in this, Plato's entire project – his discovery of the soul as sensorium of truth and his invention of the dialogue form – is aimed exactly at breaking out of the “dialectic of self and other” – a dialectic that can only weaponize argumentation into a technique to master and defeat the interlocutor in the manner of the Sophists of Greece, with whom Socrates would predictably be identified when the going got difficult with the more recalcitrant of his interlocutors, and for which he would be executed as Jesus was, in my opinion for similar reasons. The prideful autonomy of Socrates's interlocutor is in each case brought down: it is the logos that is autonomous if we join in it and share it, following out the implications of our sayings and thinkings examined “in common” through one man questioning and the other answering. But more on that in another essay!

I will close with a remark about the “autonomy” so much at stake in the “Dialectic of Self and Other” and so fundamental to Girard's psychology of mimetic desire, which is also at work in both Gyges stories. The very notion blindly presumes that a man can be, or should be, or would like to be, autonomous – in short, that there *is* a self that can stand and exist on its own, this “I” that we are worrying and fretting about. In this day of “My Yahoo” and other internet siloes one constructs around oneself to the benefit of the capitalists who exploit such readily gathered troves of “personal” information, the chimera of autonomy might even have a satanic element to it.

Please note that this dialectic of self and other relies upon an asymmetry: it is not a matter of the relation of one person to another person, but of an “I” to an other. The asymmetry is crucial, for instance, to Levinas, who seeks to mitigate it by asking the I to adopt a discipline of viewing the other as if the other were the real I. And yet are we to ignore the question, Who gets to say “I”? or fail to ask, What it is that says “I”? Who is the First Person, after all? We have taken the question for granted, even though for some time now “I AM” has been said to be the greatest of names, while it is surely the name of somebody else than me and you. You can check your Thomas Aquinas on this problem: he will tell you that God is the being whose very *nature* it to *be*, to *exist*, whereas everything else exists only by being *what* it is. We, these I's we contemplate and worry

over in the dialectic of self and other and that imitate in the Girardian mimesis of desire in search for more “being”, are at best but images and likenesses of the Being whose essence is to exist. Our existence, I at least believe – but it is an old belief – is created, derivative, dependent – like that of an image in a mirror. One of the invitatories in the Episcopal morning office we pray every couple of days says, “Be ye sure that the Lord he is God; *it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves*; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.” I have come to believe that who or what we are is what God sees, the God “to whom all desires are known and from whom no secrets are hid,” as I hear each week in church.

The asymmetry of the dialectic of self and other, I will hazard to say, is answered and corrected in the *Our Father*, which goes one better than the Golden Rule – I brought that rule up at the beginning when I suggested that sometimes we forgive each other in order to conspire in ignoring our guilt, something of a reciprocal zero-sum game, closed off on itself. In the *Our Father* I do not ask God to see to it that the two of us obey the Golden Rule, but I ask God to forgive my trespasses “as” I forgive those who trespass against me. I look to God’s grace from beyond to give me the strength and love to forgive the person who dealt me wrong. But I have digressed from my theme!

* * * * *

I am proud to say that when I brought Gyges into the discussion that afternoon at Gould Hall, René, for the first time anybody could remember, did *not* fall asleep! One of my greatest treasures is a little book I will now pass around. When Girard was inducted into the Academie Française a few of us helped him defray the cost of the uniform he was required to buy – the famous *habit vert*; and when his inaugural lecture was finally published he gave us copies. In mine he wrote,

“To Ken, hoping for more conversations about Plato – René.”

GYGES – K. Quandt – 6/13/23 – Appendix

1. Inventory of Paintings on the Subject of Gyges and Candaules

1520. Avelli: *Candaules shows his wife to Gyges*
1646. Jordaaens: *King Candaules of Lydia Showing his Wife to Gyges*
1660. van der Neer: *Candaules' Wife Discovering the Hiding Gyges*
1675. Verkolje: *Gyges in the Bedroom of King Candaules*
1787. Strutt: *The Imprudence of King Candaules of Lydia*
1830. Ety: *Candaules King of Lydia shews his wife by stealth*
1841. Boissard: *Héteaire offert*
1846. Moench: *Wife of King Candaules*
1855. Degas *Esposa de Candaules*
1859. Gérôme: *King Candaules*
1864. Hue: *The Myth of King Candaules*
1901. Guérin: *Le Roi Candaule* (frontispiece to the Gyde play)
1927. Galanis: *Le Roi Candaule* (etchings in a limited edition of the play)

See also <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/lydian-king-candaules-paintings/>

2. Partial performance history of the opera, *Der König Kandaules* (Zemlinsky).

- April 1996 Hamburg Gerd Albrecht conducting (video: May 1997 at the Vienna Volksoper, Asher Fisch conducting)
- July/August 2002 at the Salzburg Festival, with Kent Nagano conducting the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (see also section Recordings)^[1]
- February 2004 at the Festival de Música de Canarias (concert performance) with Antony Beaumont conducting the Orquesta Sinfónica de Tenerife
- September 2005 at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Günter Neuhold conducting^[3]
- January/February 2006 at the Opéra Royal de Wallonie in Liège, Belgium, Bernhard Kontarsky conducting, taken in March to Opéra Nationale de Lorraine
- November 2007, a concert performance at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, with Bernhard Kontarsky conducting the Radio Filharmonisch Orkest^[5]
- January 2009 at the Pfalztheater in Kaiserslautern, Uwe Sandner conducting^[6]
- June 2010 at the Bielefeld Opera, Peter Kuhn [de] conducting
- May 2011 at the Vienna Volksoper
- May 2012 at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Asher Fisch conducting
- September 2015 Augsburg Domonkos Héja conducting
- June 2016 at the Maestranza (Seville) conducted by Pedro Halffter
- February 2023 at the Dessau Anhaltisches Theater Markus L. Frank conducting

YouTube Resources:

Hamburg 1996 (premiere) <https://www.operaonvideo.com/konig-kandaules-hamburg-1996/>

Salzburg 2002: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pCzOmUw7iU> (part one)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwdMICDjIe0> (part two)

Available recording: September 2021(?) Hamburg Staatsorchester Gerd Albrecht conducting (Naxos)

Review of Feb.2023 Inhaltliche Theater production:

<https://www.mdr.de/kultur/theater/dessau-koenig-kandaules-kritik-102.html>