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**“THEY SPOKE THE TRUEST OF WORDS”:
IRONY IN THE SPEECHES OF
HERODOTUS’S *HISTORIES***

RYAN S. SCHELLENBERG

Herodotus’s use of both direct and indirect speech is rich and varied. From the sparkling “conversationalized narratives” (Gray 1989.11) characteristic of the early books, to the long speeches that appear with greater frequency as the *Histories* proceed, Herodotus’s story is coloured by the voices of its characters. A particularly intriguing feature of Herodotus’s use of discourse is the frequent occurrence of speeches that are heard differently by Herodotus’s readers than by the characters to whom they are addressed. This difference is usually caused by the readers’ possession of knowledge that is not accessible to the characters; occasionally it simply results from the readers’ use of different criteria for evaluating the speech. The result in either case is irony.

As I hope to demonstrate, this use of irony allows Herodotus to insinuate himself among his readers by bringing them into a conspiratorial alliance against the speeches’ ironic victims. His ironic use of discourse is thus an appropriate correlate of his overt, even congenial, narrator. Further, this narrative manner reflects the extent to which Herodotus was influenced by an oral mode of storytelling and indebted to the conventions of tragedy.

I

Following his account of the battle of Thermopylae, Herodotus briefly turns his attention to the conduct of the Thebans (7.233): though for a while the Thebans were compelled to fight together with the Greeks,

as soon as they saw the Persians gaining the advantage, they attempted to surrender. As they approached the barbarians with hands raised, “they spoke the truest of words” (λέγοντες τὸν ἀληθέστατον τῶν λόγων), which Herodotus here reports as indirect or “transposed” (Genette 1980.170–72) discourse (7.233.1):¹

... ὥς καὶ μηδίζουσι καὶ γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ ἐν πρώτοισι
ἔδοσαν βασιλεί, ὑπὸ δὲ ἀναγκαίης ἐχόμενοι ἐς
Θερμοπύλας ἀπικοίατο καὶ ἀναίτιοι εἶεν τοῦ τρώματος
τοῦ γεγονότος βασιλεί.

... that, indeed, they were with the Medes and had been
among the first to give earth and water to the king, but had
come to Thermopylae under compulsion and were not the
cause of the harm which had been done to the king.

By saying this, the Thebans saved their lives—though certainly not their honor.

Herodotus’s narratorial evaluation²—λέγοντες τὸν ἀληθέστατον τῶν λόγων—poses as a verification of the truthfulness of the Thebans’ claim. But there is no need here for the narrator to invoke his own authority on the Thebans’ behalf; this simply is not a controversial claim. Herodotus has already told us in 7.132 that the Thebans were among those who initially paid tribute to Xerxes, and he reminded us in 7.222 that the Thebans stayed at Thermopylae against their will, held by Leonidas as hostages. There is no reason to reassure his readers that the Thebans are telling the truth.

To be more precise, the narrator’s evaluation is irrelevant to an understanding of the speech’s function vis-à-vis its *intradiegetic* hearers—that is, the Persians to whom the Thebans attempt to surrender. Admittedly the efficacy of the speech is still in question at this point in the story: it remains possible that the Persians will refuse the Thebans’ surrender. But that narrative possibility is not at all addressed by the narrator’s insistence on the speech’s truthfulness. If Herodotus had wanted to address the ques-

1 I follow A. D. Godley’s Loeb text; translations are my own except where noted.

2 A disclaimer is in order here: I have intentionally conflated Herodotus—the actual author—with the implied author and the narrator of the *Histories*—who are identical in this case (see Genette 1980.260); distinguishing them would fruitlessly complicate my analysis. Similarly, the actual reader is conflated with the implied reader/narratee throughout.

tion of the speech's efficacy, it would have been necessary to interject a comment about the disposition of the Persians, not the truthfulness of the Thebans. "The Thebans, aware of Xerxes' predisposition towards clemency . . ." (cf. 7.136.2) would have done nicely.

But although the narrator's evaluation is irrelevant to how the Thebans' speech is heard by its *intradiegetic* hearers, it does have a decisive role in shaping how it is heard by its *extradiegetic* hearers—the readers of the *Histories*. Ordinarily, the reader of a mimetic narrative hears a speech through the ears of the character to whom it is addressed.³ Thus in this case, the Thebans' speech normally would be evaluated from the perspective of the Persians, not from the reader's own perspective. The reader identifies with the addressee and ponders from the addressee's perspective what response to the speech is justified: Will *we*, the Persians, accept the Thebans' surrender? But the narrator's "superlative" insistence (ἀληθέστατον) on the Thebans' truthfulness short-circuits this identification of the reader with the Persian addressees, inviting the reader to evaluate the speech from his or her own perspective.

The resulting irony is clear—certainly clearer than my laborious attempt to explain it. Herodotus nudges his Greek reader, giving a conspiratorial wink: "That's the truth!" Of course, the reader will now evaluate the speech using precisely the opposite criteria to those used by the internal addressees: whereas the Persians may be persuaded by the Thebans' claim that they have not been the cause of harm to the king and thus treat them with mercy, the implied Greek reader will look on the Thebans with added derision.

Importantly, however, the reader does not entirely abandon the default stance of association with the *intradiegetic* addressees. He or she inevitably remains cognizant of how the Thebans expect the Persians to respond. It is awareness of the gap, then, between the embedded addressees' evaluation of the speech and the Greek reader's own evaluation wherein lies the story's irony:⁴ though these words were intended to justify the

3 Though it will suffice for our purposes, this is undeniably an oversimplification of the process of reading reported discourse, which recent study has shown to be substantially more complex. See, esp., Bortolussi and Dixon 2003.200–36.

4 Fowler's definition of irony is helpful here: "Irony is a form of utterance that postulates a double audience, consisting of one party that hearing shall hear and shall not understand, and another party that, when more is meant than meets the ear, is aware both of that more and of the outsiders' incomprehension" (1994.295; emphasis mine).

Thebans before the Persians, yet by these very words the Thebans stand self-condemned as cowards and traitors. As we will see, Herodotus frequently exploits this gap between the reader's own evaluation of a speech and the reader's cognizance of how the speech's intradiegetic addressee will respond.

II

Herodotus's use of direct and indirect discourse—or, to use Genette's categories, reported and transposed speech (1980.170–72)—has been carefully surveyed by Mabel Lang.⁵ Lang delineates three “chief functions” of Herodotean discourse: motivating characters to take a certain course of action; explaining a character's situation or attitude; and prefiguring coming trouble, especially by having an advisor give correct but ignored counsel (1984.21).

Although Lang may indeed elucidate the primary functions of speeches in the *Histories*, her categorization is somewhat problematic. It is important to recognize that two of these functions concern the role of the speech vis-à-vis the *extradiegetic* reader: the explanation of a character's situation and the prefiguration of future events serve the reader, not the speech's intradiegetic addressee. Only one of the functions mentioned by Lang—the role of a speech in motivating certain actions—is properly an intradiegetic function.

Thus although Lang's categorization is generally accurate, her failure to distinguish extra- and intradiegetic functions results in a rather wooden analysis. She fails to recognize that a speech may operate simultaneously on two discursive levels—discourse between two characters within the narrative and discourse between the narrator and his narratee. Returning to the example with which I began, it is clear that the Thebans' speech functions intradiegetically to persuade the Persians to accept their surrender; according to the categorization of Lang, it has a motivating function. But, as we have seen, this is only the beginning. Of equal interest is its extradiegetic function—here the ironic censure of the Thebans' treachery.

A similar failure to consider the possibility that Herodotean speeches simultaneously may have intradiegetic and extradiegetic func-

⁵ Lang 1984.18–36. On Herodotus's speeches, see also Solmsen 1934 and 1944, Waters 1966, Hohti 1976, Pelling 2006, and now Scardino 2007.

tions can be observed in the dispute concerning the apparent anachronism of Socles' speech urging the Spartans not to reinstall Hippias's tyranny in Athens (5.92). It has been frequently noted that "much of what Socles says does not seem to fit his goal."⁶ The apparent irrelevance of certain sections of the speech has motivated scholars to look for the ways in which Socles addresses Herodotus's contemporaries, not his own. Thus according to Kurt Raaflaub: "Herodotus' story could only assume its full historical relevance if . . . the contemporary role and reputation of Athens were fully taken into consideration by the audience" (1987.224; cf. Węcowski 1996). Others take offense at such readings, insisting that Socles' speech should first of all be interpreted within the context of the *Histories* (Johnson 2001.3–4, Gould 1989.116–20).

A number of scholars do recognize that these interpretations are not mutually exclusive (Gray 1996.387; cf. Johnson 2001.24); however, the belief that Herodotus's "anachronisms"—a rather dismissive designation, unfortunately—are somehow problematic continues to underlie the discussion. In fact, as I will attempt to demonstrate, Herodotus's ironic exploitation of the disjunction in perspective between the internal addressees of his characters' speeches and his own audience accords perfectly with his congenially intrusive narrative persona. Herodotus, routinely in the forefront of his own narrative (Dewald 1987, Hornblower 1987), winks at us from the wings even while ostensibly turning the stage over to the dialogue of his characters.

III

The disjunction between the evaluation of discourse by an internal addressee and by the reader who overhears it is often a function of the reader's possession of knowledge that the internal addressee lacks.⁷ So far as the *Histories* are concerned, perhaps the most significant piece of knowledge possessed by Herodotus's readers but not by the character-addressees is the final outcome of the war, the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks. Herodotus frequently puts aspirations in the mouths of Persian monarchs—

6 Johnson 2001.6. As we will see, Johnson himself contests this verdict.

7 Of course, it is possible for an embedded addressee to have knowledge that the *reader* lacks, as when Philip Marlowe responds knowledgeably to a statement that remains cryptic for the still unenlightened reader of a Raymond Chandler detective story. But this simply does not occur in Herodotus.

and warnings in the mouths of wise but ignored advisors—that play off the reader’s foreknowledge of the war’s eventual outcome.

Xerxes’ attempt to justify his intention to campaign against Athens in a speech to his assembled nobles provides a good example (7.8). By the conclusion of his speech, Xerxes’ imperial designs have swollen to a remarkable degree (7.8γ.1–2):

εἰ τούτους τε καὶ τοὺς τούτοισι πλησιοχώρους
καταστρεψόμεθα, οἱ Πέλοπος τοῦ Φρυγὸς νέμονται
χώρην, γῆν τὴν Περσίδα ἀποδέξομεν τῷ Διὸς αἰθέρι
όμουρέουσιν. οὐ γὰρ δὴ χώραν γε οὐδεμίαν κατόψεται
ἥλιος όμουρον εὐόσιν τῇ ἡμετέρῃ, ἀλλὰ σφέας πάσας
ἐγὼ ἅμα ὑμῖν μίαν χώραν θήσω, διὰ πάσης διεξελθὼν
τῆς Εὐρώπης.

If we subdue these people and also those on their borders,
those who dwell in the country of Pelops of Phrygia, we
will show the Persian land to be sharing the borders of
the heaven of Zeus. For, indeed, the sun will not look
down on a single country bordering on ours, but I will
establish them all together into a single country for you
by crossing through all of Europe.

The Persian nobles addressed by Xerxes cannot know that his grand aspirations will never come to fruition. But Herodotus’s readers do know where this god-like posturing will lead and surely take some pleasure in hearing his ill-fated speech and imagining the credulousness of his intradiegetic audience. As Irene de Jong notes: “The readers know the outcome of the story, the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks; being told about the aspirations of the Persian kings adds to their satisfaction with this outcome.”⁸

This satisfaction is surely intensified for readers when they hear

8 de Jong 2001.102–03. In addition to this gap between the knowledge of the extradiegetic and intradiegetic audiences of Xerxes’ speech, there is also a difference in evaluative criteria. The Persian nobles’ silence may mask some uncertainty about Xerxes’ proposed campaign (7.10), but, as de Jong notes, the Greek readers are not merely uncertain, they are shocked by Xerxes’ presumption: “Accomplishing this mission would make him Zeus’ equal on earth. For the Greek narratees, simply formulating such a desire is courting disaster, and . . . they will take these words as ominous” (2001.109).

Mardonius's sycophantic response (7.9). Mardonius begins with an argument from the negative: "For it were strange indeed, that we, who have subdued and made slaves of Sacae and Indians and Ethiopians and Assyrians and many other great nations, for no wrong done to the Persians but of mere desire to add to our power—that we, I say, shall not take vengeance on the Greeks for unprovoked wrong-doing" (7.9.2; trans. Godley). Strange indeed, agree the Greek readers smugly. Clearly, Mardonius's "false foreshadowing" provides an opportunity for Herodotus's audience to bask in the unprecedented and surprising triumph of the Greeks, their successful battle for freedom against an empire that had enslaved mighty foreign powers. "What have we to fear from them?" (7.9α.1; trans. Godley), asks Mardonius scornfully. The readers, we must suspect, smile at Mardonius's naïveté.¹⁰

Mardonius's speech also introduces a theme that will recur in Xerxes' conversations with Demaratus later in Book 7 (7.9γ):¹¹

σοὶ δὲ δὴ μέλλει τίς ὦ βασιλεῦ ἀντιώσεσθαι πόλεμον
προφέρων, ἄγοντι καὶ πλῆθος τὸ ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίης καὶ νέας
τὰς ἀπάσας; ὥς μὲν ἐγὼ δοκέω, οὐκ ἐς τοῦτο θράσος
ἀνήκει τὰ Ἑλλήνων πρήγματα· εἰ δὲ ἄρα ἔγωγε
ψευσθεῖν γνῶμι καὶ ἐκεῖνοι ἐπαερθέντες ἀβουλίῃ
ἔλθοιεν ἡμῖν ἐς μάχην, μάθοιεν ἂν ὡς εἰμὲν ἀνθρώπων
ἄριστοι τὰ πολέμια.

But who is going to resist you of all people, O king? Who would bring a battle against you who are leading both a multitude that has come from Asia and all these ships? As for myself, I think that the deeds of the Hellenes have not arisen to such courage. But if I am mistaken, and they are foolish enough to come against us in battle, they shall learn that we are the bravest warriors among men.

9 The phrase is that of George Duckworth 1933.21, cited by de Jong 2001.102.

10 The reader is left to wonder whether Mardonius—who contrary to the impression he gives in this speech (οὐδεὶς ἠντιώθη ἐς μάχην) failed in his march on Athens (6.45, 6.94)—is truly this naïve or, instead, is willfully distorting the truth.

11 See 7.101–04 (Δημάρθε . . . νῦν ὧν μοι τὸδε φράσον, εἰ Ἑλληνες ὑπομενεύουσι χεῖρας ἐμοὶ ἀνταειρόμενοι), 7.209.

Xerxes, the internal addressee of the speech, is taken in by Mardonius's flattering account of his power. But Herodotus's readers, of course, remember Thermopylae and Salamis. Their knowledge of what is to come allows them to delight in Mardonius's and Xerxes' underestimation of Greek courage. As in our introductory example, irony is generated by the disjunction between the anticipated response of the internal addressee and the reader's own evaluation.

If Mardonius's speech amuses the reader because he is wrong but nevertheless heeded by the internal addressee, Artabanus's speech is amusing because the reader knows he is right but he is nevertheless ignored (7.10ε):

οὕτω δὲ καὶ στρατὸς πολλὸς ὑπὸ ὀλίγου διαφθείρεται
κατὰ τοιόνδε· ἐπεὶ ἂν σφί οἱ θεὸς φθονήσας φόβον ἐμβάλλῃ
ἢ βροντὴν, δι' ᾧν ἐφθάρησαν ἀναξίως ἐωυτῶν. οὐ γὰρ
ἐᾷ φρονεῖν μέγα ὁ θεὸς ἄλλον ἢ ἐωυτόν.

And thus also a great army is destroyed by a small one
in this way: when god, being jealous, throws fear or
thunder upon them, by which they meet undeserved ruin.
For god does not permit any but himself to have haughty
thoughts.

Artabanus, of course, plays the part of the "tragic warner," a figure Herodotus frequently employs (Lattimore 1939; cf. Lateiner 1977). What is interesting for our purposes is the bond this prefiguration or prolepsis effects between the narrator and the narratee. Herodotus and his readers share knowledge that Xerxes and even Artabanus do not; neither Xerxes nor Artabanus understands the full truth of Artabanus's dire prediction. Herodotus and his readers thus become co-conspirators, chuckling together at the irony that even Artabanus does not know how truthfully he speaks.

Speeches such as these create irony by exploiting the disjunction in knowledge between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic addressees. However, as my introductory example illustrates, at times the reader and the imbedded addressee have precisely the same information and simply *evaluate* that information in different ways. In that example, both the Persian addressees and the reader know that the Thebans have done the Persians no real harm; irony is engendered by differing evaluations of that datum. Another example occurs in Xerxes' analeptic reference to Darius's defeat at Marathon (7.8β.3):

δεύτερα δὲ ἡμέας οἶα ἔρξαν ἐς τὴν σφετέρην
 ἀποβάντας, ὅτε Δατίς τε καὶ Ἄρταφρένης ἐστρατήγεον,
 τὰ ἐπίστασθέ κου πάντες.

And secondly, what they did to us when we disembarked
 on their shores, when Datis and Artaphrenes were gener-
 als, these things you too all know.

Xerxes is able merely to allude to this incident because his addressees can be assumed to know what happened at Marathon; and Herodotus need not explain to his readers, since this story has already been narrated (6.102–17). But this reminiscence is experienced very differently by the intradiegetic and extradiegetic audiences. As de Jong explains (2001.105): “Xerxes only alludes to this painful event from the past . . . No Persian likes to be reminded too much of the exact details . . . However, the ‘I think you all know’ is also addressed by the narrator to his Greek narratees, who, on the contrary, will only too gladly remember Marathon.”

IV

Herodotus does not employ irony only to establish this smug and self-congratulatory bond between himself and his readers. He also utilizes his readers’ awareness of their own contemporary political situation in order to infuse his characters’ speeches with a soberer irony. As a number of interpreters have noticed, the growing power of contemporary Athens is often lurking in the background of Herodotus’s narrative (Strasburger 1955, Fornara 1971, Raaffaub 1987, Węcowski 1996, Blösel 2001, Fowler 2003).

Wolfgang Blösel draws our attention to an intriguing example (2001.189–90): shortly after Salamis, Themistocles besieged the island of Andros and demanded tribute, threatening the Andrians with two great gods who favour the Athenians—Persuasion and Necessity (πειθώ τε καὶ ἀναγκαίην, 8.111.2). The witty answer of the Andrians is, according to Blösel, “an egregious anachronism” (2001.190):

κατὰ λόγον ἦσαν ἄρα αἱ Ἀθηναὶ μεγάλαι τε καὶ
 εὐδαίμονες, αἱ καὶ θεῶν χρηστῶν ἥκοιεν εὔ, ἐπεὶ
 Ἀνδρίους γε εἶναι γεωπείνας ἐς τὰ μέγιστα ἀνήκοντας,
 καὶ θεοὺς δύο ἀχρήστους οὐκ ἐκλείπειν σφέων τὴν
 νῆσον ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ φιλοχωρεῖν, πενίην τε καὶ ἀμηχανίην,
 καὶ τούτων τῶν θεῶν ἐπηβόλους ἐόντας Ἀνδρίους οὐ

δώσειν χρήματα· οὐδέκοτε γὰρ τῆς ἐωυτῶν ἀδυναμίας
τὴν Ἀθηναίων δύναμιν εἶναι κρέσσω.

With reason, then, the Athenians are great and prosperous, since they are fortunate to have useful gods. It is, however, the Andrians' lot to be poor as regards land; and two useless gods do not leave our island alone but forever haunt it, Poverty and Impotence; and being in possession of these gods, we will not give anything. For the ability of the Athenians will never be more powerful than our own inability. (8.111.2–3)

Blösel notes that “no one could possibly have characterized Athens in the autumn of 480 as ‘rich’; after all, the Persians had burnt it to the ground just a few weeks earlier” (2001.190). According to Blösel, this anachronism allows Herodotus “to make it clear that his criticism is really directed at the wealthy and imperialistic Athens of Pericles” (2001.190).

I concur with Blösel that contemporary Athens lurks in the background here, but I suspect he has oversimplified matters. To use the Genetian categories introduced earlier, Blösel implies that the intradiegetic function of the speech is suppressed by its extradiegetic resonances—in this case, the speech's anachronism signals that it is largely irrelevant to its intradiegetic addressees. What is ignored here is the evident sarcasm of the Andrians' speech. The Andrians wryly speak of having gained possession (ἐπηβόλους ἔοντα) of the gods Poverty and Impotence and note that their inability (ἀδυναμία) is mightier than the Athenians' power (δύναμις). Their references to the Athenians' might and wealth should therefore also be understood as ironic and not, in the first place, anachronistic.

But what the Andrians say sarcastically of Athens in 480, Herodotus's readers know to be true of Athens in, say, 432. Interestingly, then, the speech is ironic on two counts: intradiegetically, the Andrians refer ironically to Athens' greatness; extradiegetically, Herodotus's readers see that the Andrians speak more accurately of the Athenians and their *πλεονεξία* (8.112.1; cf. Thuc. 1.77.3–4) than they realize.

As mentioned above, the speech of Socles in 5.92 has also frequently been accused of anachronism. And indeed, the narrative told by Socles does have numerous contemporary resonances for Herodotus's readers. Socles, a Corinthian, addresses the Peloponnesian League after the Spartans propose reinstating Hippias as tyrant in Athens—a plan of action

calculated to quell the growth of Athenian influence that resulted from her liberation from tyranny (5.90–91). Socles is strongly opposed to reinstating Hippias; he argues forcefully: “In truth, heaven will be beneath the earth and the earth aloft above the heaven, and men will dwell in the sea and fishes where men dwelt before, now that you, Lacedaemonians, are destroying the rule of equals and making ready to bring back tyranny into the cities” (5.92α.1; trans. Godley).

As a number of scholars have noted, the entire incident bears an uncanny resemblance to the council of the Peloponnesian League in Sparta in 432 (Raaflaub 1987.223–24, Węcowski 1996.242, Pelling 2006.107–08). As Thucydides reports it (1.66–88), the allies at this meeting were united in their resentment of Athenian hegemony and, at the urging in particular of the Corinthians, agreed to go to war. According to Kurt Raaflaub, Herodotus’s audience would surely have seen the “profound irony” of the fact that “[Athens], the same city . . . that was then saved from tyranny . . . soon thereafter subjected the liberated cities to its own tyranny” (1987.224). And Vivienne Gray notices the irony that it was a Corinthian who preserved Athenian democracy: “[The contemporary audience] might appreciate the ironical way in which the city which leads the movement against crushing the growth of Athens in the name of freedom is most destined to be harmed by it” (1996.384).

But contemporary resonances do not relegate this speech to pure anachronism; that is, the ironic extradiegetic function of Socles’ words does not suppress their intradiegetic irony. The intradiegetic function of the speech has been assessed most carefully by David Johnson (2001). Its framing by Herodotus is particularly noteworthy: before the speech is delivered, the other allies remain silent, even though they do not approve of the Spartans’ plan; but after Socles’ address, the allies express their unanimous disagreement (5.92.1, 5.93.2; trans. Godley):

τῶν δέ συμμάχων τὸ πλῆθος οὐκ ἐνεδέκετο τοὺς λόγους· οἱ μὲν νυν ἄλλοι ἡσυχίην ἦγον, Κορινθίος δὲ Σωκλῆς ἔλεξε τάδε . . . οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ τῶν συμμάχων τέως μὲν εἶχον ἐν ἡσυχίῃ σφέας αὐτούς, ἐπεῖτε δὲ Σωκλέος ἤκουσαν εἴπαντος ἐλευθέρως, ἅπας τις αὐτῶν φωνὴν ῥήξας αἰρέετο τοῦ Κορινθίου τὴν γνώμην, Λακεδαιμονίοισι τε ἐπεμαρτυρέοντο μὴ ποιέειν μηδὲν νεώτερον περὶ πόλιν Ἑλλάδα.

But their words were ill-received by the greater part of their allies. The rest then keeping silence, Socles, a Corinthian, said . . . But the rest of the allies, who had till now kept silence, spoke out when they heard the free speech of Socles and sided with the opinion of the Corinthians, entreating the Lacedaemonians not to harm a Greek city.

With this framing of the speech, Herodotus highlights the way in which Socles addresses power dynamics *within* the Peloponnesian League; indeed, its setting indicates that this speech is as much about the balance of power between Sparta and her allies as about the relationship between Athens and the Peloponnesians (Johnson 2001.7–8). Socles' bold words give the allies the courage to express their misgivings, releasing them from their cowed silence. Thus the irony here arises from the disjunction between the intradiegetic audience's¹² concern with Spartan hegemony, which motivates them to prevent the weakening of Athens, and the extradiegetic audience's growing concern with the power of Athens.

V

Irony is a delicate matter: if one is too explicit, clever subtlety quickly degenerates into dull and artless polemic; if one is too subtle, the barb easily goes unnoticed. The trick, then, is to provide one's readers with sufficient cues without being overbearing—that is, to give one's readers the satisfaction of “discovering” the irony themselves while also ensuring that they take the time to look for it. Thus Herodotus's ironic use of discourse is necessarily a matter of winks and elbow nudges, small cues that prompt readers of these speeches to disengage somewhat from their identification with the intradiegetic audience and thereby make room for their own extradiegetic evaluative perspective.

The most explicit of such cues are Herodotus's metanarrative interventions—glosses in the narrator's own voice which guide the reader in

12 Though he ostensibly addresses the Spartans, as Johnson notes: “Socles' most important audience is the allies.” “Socles is diplomatic enough to address himself overtly to the Spartans, but this is largely to preserve the appearance that they are being persuaded to change their mind instead of being vetoed by their allies” (2001.5–6).

interpretation (see Munson 2001.20–44). The example with which I began is a case in point (7.233): Herodotus's own intrusive—and gratuitous—evaluation of the truthfulness of the Thebans' speech functions like a derisive reviewer's "[sic!]," drawing the reader's attention to an unspoken but shared criterion for evaluating a quotation.

A similar narratorial evaluation accompanies the report of the Athenians' reasoning in 8.3 that a quarrel over leadership would result in universal Greek defeat (εἰ στασιάσουσι περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας, ὥς ἀπολέεται ἢ Ἑλλάς). Herodotus agrees (ὀρθὰ νοεῖντες), expresses his own belief that "civil strife is as much worse than united war as war is worse than peace" (trans. Godley), and proleptically¹³ narrates the Athenians' subsequent quarrel with Pausanias and the Lacedaemonians concerning τὴν ἡγεμονίην.¹⁴ It is difficult to miss the point here; however, like a joke that is explained rather than told, the explicitness of the evaluation robs the irony of its spark.

But Herodotus is not always so patronizing; subtler cues also appear, particularly when direct rather than indirect discourse is used. Exaggerated or superlative speech functions as one such cue, alerting the reader to the possibility that bombast is making someone ridiculous. Thus Xerxes' pompous talk of worldwide empire is susceptible to ironic reading (7.8), but no one would think to ponder the irony of Xerxes' eventual defeat had he held forth instead on his ambition to conquer some minor city.¹⁵

The chronological displacement that is too often derided as anachronism similarly alerts the reader to the possibility of multiple levels of interpretation. This was already noted with regard to the contemporary resonances of Socles' speech (5.92) and that of the beleaguered Andrians (8.111). As has been seen clearly by R. V. Munson (2001.218–19; cf. Fornara 1971.82–84), Gelon's anachronistic use of Pericles' not-yet-uttered parable ("The spring has been taken out of the year" [7.162; cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1.7.34, 3.10.7]) has a comparable effect (Munson 2001.219).¹⁶

13 Note the self-consciousness of the prolepsis here: ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ὕστερον ἐγένετο.

14 I am grateful to *Arethusa's* anonymous reviewer for this example and for a number of other insightful comments and bibliographic suggestions that helped refine this section of my argument.

15 On hyperbole as an ironic cue, see Kreuz and Roberts 1995.

16 Herodotus's explanatory gloss of this phrase, according to Munson, "merely draws attention to the oddity of the metaphor in this context" (2001.219)—and thus perhaps encourages the reader to seek clarity on another level of meaning.

By appropriating the metaphor . . . Herodotus guides the listener to establish vertical analogy with an extratextual context . . . The point of the narrative, at the level of meaning I am talking about, is that the mythical and rhetorical themes of hegemonic propaganda, here mobilized by the various contendants to establish their primacy over the others, are an ominous symptom of discord; that they will recur in the political discourse, fueling later inter-Greek conflicts; and that these conflicts . . . will “take the spring out of the year” for Greece.

Finally, Herodotus guides his readers into habits of interpretation that multiply the potential for ironic readings and minimize the need for other cues from the narrator. When once it has been established that, given the contemporary threat of Athenian hegemony, Athens’ past commitment to resisting Persian hegemony is ironic, readers will see that irony punctuating Athenian discourse throughout. Once the “tragic warner” is established as a Herodotean character type, readers, with little urging from the narrator, will be alert to the irony of true but ignored counsel. Thus readers’ confidence in deducing Herodotus’s irony rests on the cumulative effect of manifold hints and ambiguities.¹⁷

VI

More examples surely could be adduced of Herodotus’s ironic treatment of the disjunctive perspectives of the intradiegetic and extradiegetic addressees of his characters’ speeches. Indeed, it appears that this is a characteristic feature of Herodotean discourse—and one that has only occasionally been remarked. A number of significant implications of this narratological analysis are worthy of discussion. First, it is commonly assumed that discourse which appears to have had additional resonances for Herodotus’s contemporaries—resonances that could not have been appreciated by the internal addressees—should simply be considered anachronistic. As I have demonstrated, this approach is clearly inadequate. Extradiegetic resonances

17 The cumulative process by which readers gain confidence in their ironic interpretation is well described by Lilian Furst (1992.67–81) with regard to Kleist’s masterfully ironic *Die Marquise von O-*.

do not suppress but instead coexist with a speech's intradiegetic function. Indeed, it is precisely the reader's simultaneous apprehension of a speech's evaluation by its internal addressees and that reader's own evaluation that creates the potential for irony.

Herodotus's penchant for this ironic use of discourse coheres with recent assessments of his narrative persona. Herodotus gives us, as has often been noted, "an extraordinarily self-conscious performance" (Fowler 1996.76). To use a metaphor favoured by Carolyn Dewald, Herodotus himself occupies a central place on the "stage" where his characters perform.¹⁸ Indeed, at times it seems as if he himself is the hero. According to Dewald: "The histories Herodotus has given us are the record of his heroic encounter: his exploits in capturing the *logoi* and his struggles to pin them down and make them speak the truths they contain" (1987.147).

Irony, then, is one of the ways in which Herodotus makes himself present to his reader. Irony is always a conspiracy; it cannot be enjoyed alone. As Wayne Booth explains: "[Irony's] complexities are . . . shared: the whole thing cannot work at all unless both parties to the exchange have confidence that they are moving together in identical patterns" (1974.13). Herodotus's ironic discourse engenders intimacy between narrator and narratee, who share their enjoyment of the ironic victim's ignorance. According to Booth: "Irony is the key to the tightest bonds of friendship" (1974.14); it is thus perfectly suited to the purposes of Herodotus, who ceaselessly strives to make himself our intimate.

It is worth pondering the relationship between this congenial and intimate narrative persona and Herodotus's likely oral performance of his work. Taking their cue from Lucian's depiction of Herodotus's public readings (*Herodotus* 1–2), most scholars believe that Herodotus's *logoi* were shaped and refined through oral performance.¹⁹ K. H. Waters opines: "The fact of the audience, of oral delivery . . . is crucial for the appreciation of Herodotean technique . . . The object was, as it were, to get people laughing while you sent the hat around" (1974.6). As is suggested by Waters' somewhat whimsical quip, this oral mode involves a very different relationship

18 Dewald 1999.223–33. In narratological terms, Herodotus is an overt and self-conscious narrator. See, further, de Jong 2004.102–04.

19 See, esp., Thomas 1992.124–26. Also Grene 1961.478, Waters 1974.6, Momigliano 1978.64–66, Lang 1984.5, Marincola 2001.23. But see also the contrary view of Flory 1980.

with one's audience from the rather distant relationship of modern text-based composition—or, for that matter, of composition that aims to provide “a possession for all time” (Thuc. 1.22.4; trans. Smith). Indeed, the immediacy of the narrator/narratee relationship presupposed by the narrative manner of the *Histories* is surely one of the reasons scholars have been so receptive to the image of Herodotus performing at dinner parties. The ironic disjunction between Herodotus's characters' understanding of speeches and his readers' richer appreciation of those same speeches is further evidence of this audience orientation.

Herodotus's audience orientation is also evident from the fact that his irony frequently encourages his readers to conflate their own situation with the historical events depicted, thereby making judgments about contemporary actors on the basis of their correlates in the narrative. Herodotus's contemporary Greeks are encouraged, for example, to celebrate *their* defeat of the Persians. And to a considerable degree, the Athens of Herodotus's narrative *is* the Athens of his own time. This is possible, as Robert Fowler explains, because in an oral culture “the present helps to create the record of the past” (2003.312). Though Herodotus did indeed write down his researches, the *Histories* are inevitably in dialogue with this essentially oral understanding of history (Fowler 2003.312–13):

Herodotos cannot use a word like “tyranny” and expect his audience to suppress the contemporary associations of the word, cleaving to some philological sense of its sixth-century force—if indeed either audience or performer was aware of the difference. The description of what the ancestors did cannot help but be a description of what the descendants might do, or are in fact doing in a different context . . . Present and past are herein so perfectly symbiotic as to be inseparable.

This is, to use Gordon Shrimpton's distinction, memorative rather than empirical history (1997.62).

Finally, Herodotus's ironic use of speeches evinces the close relationship of his narrative manner with the conventions of tragedy. As K. H. Waters reminds us, when discussing Herodotus, “we should bear in mind the almost incredibly lively interest of the Athenian audience (and no doubt of other Greeks) in the tragic drama” (1974.6). The response of Herodotus's audience to his storytelling was surely shaped by the “frames of expecta-

tion”²⁰ presupposed by tragic plots. It is therefore not surprising that, as Jasper Griffin amply demonstrates, Herodotus’s narrative is littered with episodes that would be at home in Aeschylus or Sophocles (2006).

As is the case in the speeches of Herodotus, dramatic irony is typically engendered in a tragic plot by exploiting the disjunction in knowledge between the audience and the ironic victim. As S. K. Johnson noted long ago, “an alliance between the dramatist and the audience” is frequently effected by his “remind[ing] us of something which we know, but of which some of the characters in the play are ignorant” (1928.209).

Indeed, Herodotus, like the tragedians, can assume that his audience is familiar with the broad outlines of his story—and that his audience knows the vagaries of fate. This helps explain his affinity for one narrative strategy particularly reminiscent of tragedy: the foreshadowing of disaster for the powerful and the arrogant as seen in the speeches of Book 7 cited above (cf. Griffin 2006.49–50, 53). Herodotus’s readers know the outcome of the story; thus, what Peter Burian notes regarding the Greek tragedians applies to Herodotus also: “[He] is relieved of the requirement of providing suspense at this level of the plot, but instead he must find ways to make fate work for him as a tool for building dramatic tension” (1997.183). As we have seen, ironic speech is one of the tools Herodotus uses to “make fate work for him.” And again, like the tragic theatre, Herodotus’s narrative—and particularly its ironic aspects—“depends upon a kind of complicity of the audience in order to be fully realized” (1997.179).

It is occasionally suggested that narratology merely provides “new words for old insights”²¹—and indeed, I am not the first to note that some of Herodotus’s speeches had ironic resonances for his contemporary readers. Nevertheless, I hope that my narratological analysis of Herodotus’s speeches has provided new clarity regarding the relationship between such extradiegetic irony and a speech’s intradiegetic function, and dispelled the notion that ironic resonances are adequately described as anachronistic. Herodotus’s ironic use of discourse is, instead, a function of his intimate narrative persona, itself a reflection of his continuing embedment in a narrative culture shaped by the conventions of oral history and tragic drama.

University of St. Michael's College

20 The phrase is that of Peter Burian (1997.187).

21 The quip is that of Simon Hornblower (1994.136), though he himself considers narratology a useful tool.

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