Alexander Heinemann

The Cave, the Gaze, the Bride, and her Lover
The Constraints of Narrating Desire on a Hellenistic Mirror

In the preface to his 1891 collection of short stories, *Life's Handicap*, Rudyard Kipling discusses his craft with old Gobind, a one-eyed holy man and former story-teller spending his last days in a monastery in Northern India.[1] Gobind's tales, Kipling remarks with characteristic sense for cultural specificity, "were true, but not one in twenty could be printed in an English book, because the English do not think as natives do". Nevertheless, Kipling asks him about the best manner to set out to their shared task, and after some hesitation Gobind ventures a reply, since, after all, his and Kipling's respective audiences – diverse as they may be – have one thing in common: "They are children in the matter of tales." The author of the *Jungle Book* remarks on the special difficulties of telling stories to "the little ones", i.e. actual children, and at this point this dialogue on the art of narrating reaches its climax with Gobind's advice.

> "Ay, I also have told tales to the little ones, but do thou this –" His old eyes fell on the gaudy paintings of the wall, the blue and red dome, and the flames of the poinsettias beyond. "Tell them first of those things that thou hast seen and they have seen together. Thus their knowledge will piece out thy imperfections. Tell them of what thou alone hast seen, then what thou hast heard, and since they be children tell them of battles and kings, horses, devils, elephants, and angels, but omit not to tell them of love and suchlike. All the earth is full of tales to him who listens and does not drive away the poor from his door. The poor are the best of tale-tellers; for they must lay their ear to the ground every night."[2]

Gobind groups stories according to two different criteria, individual experience and subject matter. The former distinction, incidentally, relates to Luca Giuliani's

1 Kipling 1891, vii–xiii.
2 Kipling 1891, xi.

between 'descriptive' and 'narrative' images: Those stories representing a world and events known to both, narrator and audience tend to make the storyteller (and his imperfections) obsolete, as everybody sharing that knowledge can step in and take his place.[3] The old man moves on to the telling of stories outside the audience's sensual experience and indeed increasingly removed from the narrator's, before shifting to subjects matters and advising Kipling to choose grand, spectacular and downright fantastic ones with, as modern literary studies would call it, a high degree of narrativity.[4] The relation between these subject matters and the criterion of collective experience versus remote hearsay is not spelled out, but clearly, there is a partial overlap. Eventually, before closing with a remark on the social sources of tales, Gobind singles out the subject of love. The old storyteller is too succinct to outline his reasons for according it a special place in his list, but Kipling's adversative clause ("but omit not") marks a deficiency of the subject matter as compared to battles and kings, and we may suspect this deficiency to be love's everyday quality. Anybody can be expected to be familiar with it, as is evident in the almost dismissive adjunct "and suchlike". Love is *eine alte Geschichte, doch bleibt sie immer neu*, still telling what is told.[5] In fact, in a paragraph preceding our quote, Gobind chides Western preoccupation with novelty and stresses that "the oldest tale is the most beloved".

This paper deals with images and narratives if not necessarily of love in a broad sense, then of erotic desire (the latter being possibly subsumed in Gobind's discreet "suchlike"). Focusing on the figural decoration of a Greek box mirror from around 300–280 BC it will attempt to sketch the iconographic traditions it evolved from before moving on to the social context its décor was appreciated in and thus try to pinpoint both experiences and expectations of its viewers. A concluding section discusses the role of narratives, social practice and the underlying dialectics in the appreciation of Greek erotic imagery of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods.

Images: Lust and Beauty on a Hellenistic Mirror in Berlin

What looks like the tritest of truisms is nevertheless worth stating: A Greek box mirror is made for being looked at. It is made of two metal disks joined by a hinge

[3] This quality is not to be confused with the criterion of novelty, cf. below. On Giuliani's distinction between descriptive and narrative, see below p. 374. On the relationship between narrative and experience (and, on a more abstract level, narrativity and experientiality respectively) see the contributions in Breyer and Creutz 2010.

[4] The second item in Gobind's list is "kings" and tellingly prefigures the non-ordinary subjects of the varying examples given by Edward Morgan Forster and Gérard Genette in their famous attempts to condense the defining elements of a story; see Weixler, in this volume p. 93–94.

[5] Cf. Heine's *Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen* and Shakespeare's sonnet no. 76, to name but two prominent reflections on the subject's lack of originality.

Fig. 1: Greek box mirror (lid relief, details). Berlin, Antikensammlung Misc. 8148. Bronze; 300–280 BC. © Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Johannes Laurentius.

Fig. 2: Greek box mirror (lid engraving, details). Berlin, Antikensammlung SMB Misc. 8148. Bronze and silver; 300–280 BC. © Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: Johannes Laurentius.

complete with a handle, and while one of the disks is polished in order to provide the actual mirroring plane, the other acts as a protective lid, the two of them forming a flat, pill-shaped case (hence the alternative terms of case or folding mirror).[6] The lid may carry decoration both on the outside, in high relief, and on the inside, where it takes the form of an engraved line drawing in order not to damage the surface it is supposed to sheathe. A richly decorated box mirror thus provides its user with a series of three images: the outside relief visible to everybody handling the object, the more intimate engraving uncovered as the lid is raised, and the user's actual reflection on the mirror's surface. Although there is as yet no systematic treatment of the poetics of mirror decoration it is evident from any brief survey of the material, that many of these objects play upon the succession and interrelation of these three images.

A well-known bronze mirror in Berlin, dated roughly to 300–280 BC, is a case in point (**Figs. 1** and **2**). It was acquired in Athens in 1890; with all likelihood, it had been previously been excavated as a grave offering somewhere in Greece.[7] Measuring some 13.5 cm in diameter, it consists of both lid and mirror proper; the hinge and handle have come off at some point.

The top side of the lid (**Fig. 1**) bears appliqué relief decoration showing Pan and a female figure seated on rocks facing each other; a bare tree is visible behind each of them respectively, the one on the woman's side markedly richer in branches. Pan appears in his conventional form of a mature human male torso complete with the hind legs of a goat and a head with an abundance of animal features: pointed ears, goat horns, and a snub nose. His beastly nature is also alluded to by a thin line of hair running down his chest and abdomen. He is sitting on an animal skin, supports his left on a knotty *lagobolon*, or throwing-stick, and smiles sheepishly – or rather, goatishly – at his female counterpart. The latter is clad in a *himation* mantle slung loosely around her; underneath she wears a high-girted *chiton* one of whose straps has slid off her shoulder, baring the left breast. She wears shoes, a tight-fitting necklace and her hair fixed in a bun. Her right hand is raised towards Pan with a pinching gesture, and indeed close inspection reveals her to hold a round, coin-sized

6 Chronology and typology of Greek case-mirrors are studied at length by Schwarzmaier 1997 superseding Züchner 1942; a general overview is provided is provided e.g. by Zimmer 1987. Etruscan mirrors have received much more intense treatment than their Greek counterparts, on them see below n. 40. Unfortunately, I had no access to two fairly recent exhibition catalogues: Campanelli and Alessandrini 2003; Bardiès-Fronty 2009.

7 Berlin, Antikensammmlung Misc. 8148; according to the inventory it was bought from some Xamatis, Chaniotis or similar. See Schwarzmaier 1997, 258–259 no. 59 pl. 83.2 with a complete bibliography up to the mid-1990ies; more recent treatments include: LIMC VIII (1997) 897 s. v. Nymphai no. 73 (M. Halm-Tisserant and G. Siebert); LIMC VIII (1997) 932 s. v. Pan no. 181 (J. Boardman); Stähli 1999, 87 Abb. 56; D. Grassinger, in: Grassinger et al. 2006, 188–189 fig.; Kreilinger 2007, 305 fig. 235a–b; Wardle 2010, 60; 62–64; 266 no. 3.

object between thumb and index (**Fig. 2**, detail). For now, it seems impossible to invest this detail with any specific meaning, but the overall composition certainly suggests friendly interaction.[8]

The woman's identity is difficult to assess; she is usually identified as a nymph on the grounds of the rustic setting and her interaction with Pan. This label is somewhat contradicted, however, by the abundance of garments she is clad in. The exposed breast is of course a motif recurrent with Aphrodite, but as it may designate female beauty in other contexts as well,[9] it does not provide a decisive clue. The relaxed setting of the two figures, presented very much as on a par, might suggest Aphrodite rather than one of Pan's foes, and actually the two deities appear together frequently on box mirrors.[10] At any rate, as we shall see, the issue of names might not be essential to the scene's actual function.

The easy chitchat depicted on the cover is a far cry from the altogether more suspenseful atmosphere of the scene engraved on its inner side, where the bronze surface has been partially silvered, thereby improving the legibility of the drawing (**Fig. 2**). Within a cave marked by a frame of rocky outcrops, a naked woman is crouching by a low basin, squeezing the long tresses of her hair. The viewer's vantage point is from within the cave, looking towards its dark, gaping aperture. There, two wreaths – one made of twigs, the other of twisted cloth – come into view, as if fastened on the outside, above the entrance, suggesting the cave to be some simple place of worship. Bundled behind the woman, her clothing lies somewhat precariously against a ledge in the cave's wall, which is further characterized by ovoid enclaves. On the left-hand side, a small lion-head waterspout inserted in the rock gives forth a thin and irregular drain of water sprinkling into the basin. Above it, apparently unseen by the woman, looms Pan's head complete with horns, beard, beaky nose and an obvious voyeuristic intent.

The most unsettling, and indeed unsettled aspect of this scene is Pan's actual whereabouts, an issue the engraver has artfully avoided to fix. At first glance, the

---

8 It is hard to suggest any object Aphrodite (or a nymph) might want to hand over to Pan. Coined money is conspicuously absent from Greek myth both in the literary and visual record; a jewel does not seem to make sense in this context, and knucklebones (*astragaloi*) can, I believe excluded, too, since figures playing are usually depicted as crouching and holding or dropping more than one *astragalos*, see for instance the well-known terracotta group from Campania in London, British Museum D 161, Jenkins and Turner 2009, 126–127 fig.

9 E.g. the mirrors in Berlin, Antikensammlung, Mis. 3761a (lost) and Paris, Louvre Br. 1710; Schwarzmaier 1997, 256 no. 53 and 321–322 no. 214 pl. 36,2, where the same detail occurs with maenads or nymphs.

10 See especially the allegorical images listed in n. 13; also, Berlin, Antikensammlung Misc. 8393; Schwarzmaier 1997, 259–260 no. 62 pl. 47 (Pan, Aphrodite on goat, Eros); Geneva, Ophiuchus coll.; Schwarzmaier 1997, 335 no. 247 pl. 19 (Pan and Eros); Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 67/142; Schwarzmaier 1997, 278–279 no. 111 pl. 30.1 (Aphrodite with Eros and ithyphallic herm).

god might be taken to peek into the cave from the outside, but a rocky outline serving as a backdrop to his face appears to rule this out – but with the slightest margin of uncertainty. Rather, Pan's neck seems to grow out of the very rock. What is more, his head appears precisely at the height of a standing figure's head, and the silhouette of the rock below suggests exactly that: the upper body of an elderly male characterized by hanging pectorals and a protruding upper and lower abdomen. Within this anatomical reading of the cave wall the lion spout occupies the place, where Pan's genitalia were to be expected, giving (to say the least) an equivocal edge to the thin jet of liquid stemming from it. Pan is physically one with the cave – his cave, we might add: the wreaths hanging over the entrance denote the grotto as a cult place, and caves provide a privileged place of worship for the god of the wilderness.

The visual ambivalence of Pan's appearance is carried even further, as four single dots are visible along the edge of the entrance, above and to the right of Pan's head (**Fig. 2**, detail). Given their position on the ceiling they cannot be stones like the much larger egg-shaped elements on the floor; the only possible explanation is to understand them as the four finger tips of a hand (minus the thumb) holding on to the edge of the cave. It is hard to envisage how Pan should be able to grow out of the cave's wall while his (presumably right) hand reaches in from outside – but then again it is hard to envisage anybody growing out of a wall anyway. Evidently, the representation is not about a coherent physical space, but about adding suspense to the scene by combining different (if mutually exclusive) layers of Pan's intrusion: his voyeuristic ambush, his physical presence within the cave's walls, and the preying potential of his hand, just coming into view.

The object of all this attention, the nymph crouching in the middle of the cave and outlined against its yawning entrance has been oblivious to Pan's presence up to the very moment depicted. Bent above the shallow bowl and parting her long hair in order to wring it, her gaze must now hit the water's surface and see Pan's face reflected there.[11] Obviously, conjecturing this course of events is up to the viewer, but the composition itself is designed to encourage such an extrapolation. The very unusual occlusion of the nymph's eyes provides an additional clue, as it draws attention to her field of vision. The engraving depicts the crucial moment the naked nymph beholds her beholder, a moment where various possible scenarios of further development open up. Before dealing with them, however, it shall prove helpful to take a closer look at the iconographic tradition behind this quite extraordinary image.

[11] Pace Wardle 2010, 63–64: "Her streaming hair completely obscures her view."

Contexts (I): Visual Traditions and Making Sense of an Image

Pan and the Aphrodite-like figure in the outside relief conform to a general fondness of Greek box mirrors for similar juxtapositions of the – usually unambiguously characterized – love goddess and Pan.[12] As several of these images on mirrors appear to play on the potential of these deities for visual allegory,[13] it seems plausible to consider plainer depictions, too, not in terms of a specific narrative, but as paradigmatic figures embodying complementary notions of male desire and female erotic appeal. This assumption is somewhat confirmed by the engraving on the lid's interior, on which this study shall subsequently focus. This is not to say that the two images on the outside and on the inside are to be read sequentially;[14] nothing really implies such a connection, and if our tentative identifications of the female figures as Aphrodite and a nymph respectively are correct, any sequential reading must be ruled out.

The engraving's rendering of Pan embodied both within and without the cave points back to a long-standing visual tradition. Attic votive reliefs ranging from the late 5th to the 3rd century BC recurrently depict nymphs gathering or dancing in the grotto-like spaces they are regularly associated with.[15] The relief found in a cave dedicated to Pan on Mount Parnes (Attica) may serve as an example for this series of monuments (**Fig. 3**).[16] It was set up and dedicated to both the god and the nymphs by one Telephanes but a few decades before our mirror was manufactured. Its irregular frame and roughly hewn background indicate a cavernous setting, and again the relationship between the natural space and its divine inhabitants is unresolved at best. A small-scale Pan is depicted on the frame, accompanied by a

---

12 Cf. above n. 10; see also lids with a satyr sitting opposite to Aphrodite: Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 01.7494; Schwarzmaier 1997, 263–264 no. 72 pl. 9; London, British Museum 288; Schwarzmaier 1997, 290 no. 136. Cf. the anonymous couple in Cleveland, Museum of Art 29.910; Schwarzmaier 1997, 269–270 no. 88 pl. 9.

13 The most famous case is the interior of a mirror in London, showing Aphrodite winning at knucklebones against Pan, i.e. 'Love [= Aphrodite] conquers everything [= πᾶν = Pan]': London, British Museum 289, Schwarzmaier 1997, 290–291 no. 137 pl. 78,2. See also a) New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.259; Schwarzmaier 1997, 309 no. 186 (Eros whipping two Paniskoi fighting each other); b) lost, formerly Gréau collection; Herbig 1949 pl. 38,1; Schwarzmaier 1997, 334 no. 245 (Pan carrying Aphrodite on his back in the *ephedrismos* scheme); c) Athens, National Museum Karapanos 611; Schwarzmaier 1997, 251–252 no. 42 pl. 55,2 (Satyr carrying Eros on his back in the *ephedrismos* scheme).

14 As suggested by Wardle 2010, 62.

15 Feubel 1935; Fuchs 1962; LIMC I (1981) s.v. Acheloos 22–24 no. 166–196 pl. 36–41 (H.-P. Isler); Larson 2001, 258–267.

16 Athens, National Museum 1448; Svoronos 1908, 450–451 no. 147 pl. 74; Feubel 1935, xiv no. 27; Fuchs 1962, 243 pl. 65,2. The dedicatory inscription, IG II² 4646, reads: Τηλεφάνης ἀνέθηκε Πανὶ καὶ Νύμ|φαις.

Fig. 3: Attic votive relief dedicated by Telephanes to Pan and the Nymphs.
Athens, National Museum 1448. Marble; ca. 300 BC. © Dan Diffendale via flickr.

flock of goats whose heads show up along the upper rim (of the entrance?); at foot level, the large-scale head of the river god Acheloös grows out of the cave wall. The latter is a recurrent feature noticeable throughout the series of nymph reliefs, either as a lone head or as a protome. There is no hint to a voyeuristic element in these scenes, and indeed Acheloös is usually considered a benevolent father-like relation of the nymphs.[17]

Subsequent Hellenistic and Roman imagery omits Acheloös, but the small figure on the rim is carried on now in the role of an active onlooker. In some instances, including the Berlin mirror, the two iconographic strands merge and the old visual

[17] See for instance the reliefs in Athens, National Museum 1445, Svoronos 1908, 443–449 no. 144 pl. 73; Feubel 1935, xviii–xix no. A2. Inv. 2007; Svoronos 1908, 586–587-1 no. 237 pl. 99 (from the Vari cave); LIMC I (1981) s.v. Acheloos 23 no. 184 pl. 39 (H.-P. Isler). Inv. 2021, Svoronos 1908, 581–585 no. 235 pl. 98. Also the relief in Riehen, coll. Jean Druey, LIMC I (1981) s.v. Acheloos 23 no. 173 pl. 36 (H.-P. Isler). On the relationship between Acheloös and the nymphs cf. Larson 2001, 98–100.

Fig. 4: Greek box mirror (lid engraving). Toledo (OH), Museum of Art 66.111. Bronze and silver; ca. 320 BC. After Schwarzmaier 1997, pl. 82,2.

formula of the (horned) face in the cave wall is adapted to signal the skopic intrusion of a desiring male.[18] On a fragmentary Late Hellenistic relief from Tralleis showing a nymph crouching by a water-jar inside a cave, the beholder makes his appearance in yet a different manner. Pan is here present in iconic form, looking on in the guise of a little herm pillar, standing inside a niche of the cave; the latter is again marked as a place of whorship, this time through a little plaque attached to the rock.[19]

[18] Close to our mirror in terms of the situation depicted is a Hellenistic relief in Chatsworth; H. von Hesberg, in: Boschung et al. 1997, 72–73 no. 69 pl. 64,2; 65,2–3; again the emphasis is on the moment of the discovery of the *voyeur*, underscored by the presence of a barking dog. Compare also a very simple Hellenistic relief from Ionia in Berlin, Antikensammlung 1685, Blümel 1960, 23–27 fig. 1.

[19] Berlin, Antikensammlung Sk 1554; Blümel 1960, 24–26 fig. 2; D. Grassinger, in: Grassinger et al. 2006, 272–273 fig.

The washing nymph spied upon has a long and varied row of predecessors, too. As early as 520 BC the so-called Phineus cup had depicted two aroused satyrs stealthily approaching nymphs squatting by a water basin, or *louterion*.[20] Here as well as in later imagery, the lecherous disposition of the male onlookers marks the situation as one of lustful voyeurism. [21] In the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods, this subject matter comes to decorate mirrors, both Greek and Etruscan, and the sumptuous toiletry boxes from Central Italy known as Praenestine *cistae*. Within this tradition the type of the crouching woman, one knee raised, the other lowered, is perhaps the most frequently employed visual formula combining 'seemingly undisturbed intimacy, uninhibited bareness and erotic appeal'.[22] As all these features aim at appreciation through a desiring gaze, the very posture of the nymph already implies a male onlooker.

Of course, the subject matter of women grooming themselves by a water basin is particularly appropriate to the decoration of objects used for cosmetic self-fashioning. Rather less straightforward is the insistence both on the presence of males and on caves as the setting of several of these scenes. The interior reliefs of mirrors in Baltimore and Toledo, Ohio (**Fig. 4**), for instance, have a lone woman standing or crouching respectively by a basin, while globular boulders surround the scene in a manner roughly similar to the more detailed engraving in Berlin.[23] A mirror in Leipzig juxtaposes a largely naked man and a fully dressed woman sitting on the opposite sides of the cave-tondo, while a wreath and a sash hang down from the opening very much like on the Berlin piece.[24]

The rustic setting of untouched nature is in stark contrast with the refined make of the *louterion* featuring frequently in these scenes, strongly suggesting that these divergent elements, rather than depicting an actual space, serve as signifiers adding up to a wider notional complex: both water and grottoes are intrinsically linked to the habitat of nymphs, but their semantic potential goes well beyond that of

---

20 Chalcidian black-figure cup, Würzburg, Martin-von-Wagner-Museum L164; BAPD 18504; Simon 1975, 84–85.

21 For the iconographic tradition of crouching females washing themselves, see the list compiled by Wardle 2010, 49–51; 264–286. For another visual strand of women washing by a *louterion* without any unwanted witnesses being included within the image, see Stähli 2009.

22 Stähli 1999, 87–88, the quote p. 88: "Die Verknüpfung von scheinbar ungestörter Intimität, unbefangener Entblößung und erotischer Ausstrahlung wurde in der Figur der kauernden Badenden zu einem prägnanten Bild verdichtet, das breite Wirkung entfaltete und in unterschiedlichsten Zusammenhängen als Chiffre abrufbar war." The study of Wardle 2010 is less helpful in this context as it subsumes standing, crouching and even sitting types of Aphrodite under the same header of Aphrodite Anadyomene.

23 Baltimore, Walters Art Museum 54.1169; Schwarzmaier 1997, 254 no. 47 pl. 84,2; Toledo (OH), Museum of Art 66.111; Schwarzmaier 1997, 331 no. 237 pl. 82,2.

24 Leipzig, Archäologisches Institut M 48; Schwarzmaier 1997, 283 no. 122 pl. 86,1.

simply pointing to a mythical identity. While the water basin and the practices of beautification linked to it underscore the appeal of the naked female body, the grotto, in ancient Greek imagination, is the place *par excellence* for lustful encounters, especially illicit ones, taking place outside the normative framework of the polis.[25] A cave serves as love-nest for Selene's *tête-a-tête* with the shepherd Endymion; a cave is where Apollo rapes the Athenian princess Kreusa and where she will later give birth; and it is 'in the innermost part of lovely caverns' where, according to the archaic hymn to Aphrodite, it is nymphs who 'fondly mate with the Silens and the sharp-sighted Argos-slayer', i.e. Hermes.[26] The very formula of the tondo composition with a rocky border framing the cave's hollow is actually deployed in the interior of drinking cups depicting the amorous grapples of nymphs and satyrs, before being adapted to the mirrors discussed here.[27]

The references to cultic activity on the Berlin and Leipzig mirrors provide further allusions to the same effect. Premarital sex within the bounds of a sanctuary or during an all-night festival (*pannychis*) is a stock feature of several myths, and in New Comedy, whose heyday is contemporary to most of our mirrors' manufacture, the citizen daughter losing her virginity and begetting a child in the course of a *pannychis* is a recurrent element of the plotline.[28] Thus, both the cavernous setting and the wreaths hanging from its entrance contribute to frame the confrontation of the naked nymph and the onlooking god on the Berlin mirror in terms of the illicit sexual encounter.

A mirror in London provides a particularly close parallel.[29] Its much corroded outside relief depicts a youth or satyr[30] holding a rooster on his lap; a fully dressed Aphrodite sits facing him with Eros by her side and possibly a dove in her left. The engraved scene on the back (**Fig. 5**) is set inside a cave; a satyr sitting on a rock pulls the garment of an already largely bared maiden who pleads with him as she tries to keep hold on what little is left to cover her. Her bowing stance is similar to a type

25 Siebert 1990, 152–153; Buxton 1994, 106–107; see also Larson 2001, 9.

26 Hom. *h.* 5. 262–263: τῇσι [Νύμφαι] δὲ Σειληνοὶ καὶ εὔσκοπος Ἀργειφόντης / μίσγοντ᾽ ἐν φιλότητι μυχῷ σπείων ἐροέντων. Cf. also Eur. *Cycl.* 429–430. Selene and Endymion: Apoll. Rhod. 4.57–58. Apollo and Creusa: Eur. *Ion* 8–17; 887–901.

27 Dietrich 2010, 431–436.

28 Mythical instances of rape or sexual union inside a sanctuary are gathered by Dillon 2002, 257–260. On rape in New Comedy see Peirce 1997 and Lape 2004, esp. 92–93; 102–103; on stage the complications brought about by both the rape and the pregnancy are presented as ultimately ephemeral and circumstantial, since the persons involved turn out to be either already married or eligible for each other. The resulting dénouement consists in a happy (or even happier) marriage with citizen offspring.

29 London, British Museum 288; Schwarzmaier 1997, 290 no. 136 pl. 85,2.

30 Schwarzmaier 1997, 290 opts for the latter, and the bristled hair over the forehead points in this direction; a pointed ear would provide a definitive clue, but the relief is damaged in this very spot.

Fig. 5: Greek box mirror (lid engraving). London, British Museum 288. Bronze; ca. 300 BC.

used for Auge confronting lustful Herakles.[31] Both the London and the Berlin mirror then present similar configurations of male desire and female desirability: Their outside reliefs show the restrained opposition of a male characterized as sexually aggressive and an attractive female with traits of the love goddess herself, whereas the inner side of the lid places the actual assault – be it skopic or of a more palpable kind – inside the highly charged space of a cave held by an unruly, beastly male.

[31] On Auge and Herakles see Roussos 2005, 207–208 and Stewart 1997, 171–174 both rightly pointing out the differences between the depiction on mirrors and a contemporary drinking cup from Rogozen. *Mutatis mutandis*, the composition on the London mirror illustrated here (fig. 5) is closer to the outright assault on the cup, as compared to the mirrors, where Auge appears to be more in control.

Fig. 6: Greek box mirror (lid relief). Nafplio, Archaeological Museum. Bronze; ca. 250–200 BC. © Verena Hoft (photo and drawing).

Another mirror found in a grave in Palaia Epidauros and kept at the Nafplio museum has the encounter in the grotto decorating the outside of the lid (**Fig. 6**).[32] Somewhat later in date than the Berlin mirror, it features many of its elements: the crouching stance of the woman, Pan's watchful grimace coming out of the rock, the water basin (though the waterspout is less equivocally placed), and the emphasis on the moment of discovery. Squatting on the left is what appears to be a female attendant reaching out for her hair; her mistress seizes her wrist in terror as she becomes aware of peeping Pan.[33]

[32] Schwarzmaier 1997, 274 no. 98; Piteros 1990, 169; 171 no. 2, who already notes the similarity with the Berlin mirror.

[33] I consider the figure crouching on the left to be a woman, though doubts as to the its intended sex persist, the physical rendering and hairdo being inconclusive. Alternatively, one could think

There is further evidence to show that the subject matter of the Berlin mirror is far from being exceptional, but rather one particularly sophisticated treatment of a theme recurrent in late Classical and Hellenistic vanity items from Greece and Italy. A mirror in Palermo distributes the staring mask-like face of the satyr and the bathing beauty on the two sides of the lid.[34] A Praenestine *cista* has a satyr lying under the washing basin, from where he grabs the thighs of a winged woman looking at herself in a mirror.[35] The atmosphere is different again on a mid-4th century Etruscan mirror, where three figures, all of them naked, stand in the by now familiar cave-cum-basin setting.[36] One of them, a striking youthful male stands by the basin holding an extraordinarily long flask (*alabastron*) and a scraping tool (*strigilis*). A female attendant seems to avert her gaze as she pours water on a crouching woman washing her hair at centre bottom. The latter turns her head to the left and finds herself at eye level and close range with the youth's genitalia.

Any attempt to define a single point all these images converge upon would risk simplifying a deliberately wide range of notions and meanings. The scenes decorating the mirrors and other implements discussed here operate within a broader discourse on, firstly, the interrelationship of female beauty and male desire and, secondly, the way this relationship is established through the gaze, but they offer a variety of takes on the theme. They may present mortal and immortal couples, visual and physical assaults; they may completely omit the male beholder or place his ogling face prominently on the outside cover or, actually, turn the tables and have the male body beautiful become the object of female inspection.

Its variety and popularity on vanity items notwithstanding, this is not an iconography developed especially for these objects. As already hinted at, it has its predecessors in archaic and classical pottery devised for use in the drinking-feast, or *symposion*. This transferral from one medium to another brings about a change in the expected audience. Consequently, Andrew Stewart, in his discussion of scenes depicting Herakles' assault on Auge on mirrors and a drinking bowl respectively,

---

of a man assaulting the woman on the right in a symmetrical composition comparable to the London and Leipzig mirrors; the right-hand woman gripping the other figure's wrist would then signify a gesture of defence. The crouching posture, however, points to the figure on the left rather being a female attendant. A mirror once in Thebes (Archaeological Museum [lost?], Schwarzmaier 1997, 330 no. 235) further corroborates this reading as it depicts two bare-breasted women sitting side by side in a cave setting, the left one touching the other's hair.

34 Soprintendenza 34231, Di Stefano 1998, 404 no. G72 fig.

35 Rome, Villa Giulia 13133; Foerst 1978, 174–175 no. 75 pl. 48a–c. On toilet scenes on Praenestine *cistae* see Foerst 1978, 11–15.

36 Berlin, Antikensammlung Misc. 6240; Zimmer 1987, 29–30 fig. 18 pl. 20. A zigzagged line placed between the figured scene and the framing wreath very succinctly alludes to a cave. Two flowers hang down from the entrance. Similar lines occur on a mirror in New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 96.18.16, CSE USA 3 no. 5 figs. 7a–d, where they seem to denote the mountainous setting of Olympus (but see ibid. 44 for other explanations).

has described this as "a somewhat forced conversion" of "an *androcentric* – not to say phallocentric – subject into a *gynaikocentric* one".[37] With this issue, however, we move to another context, the social practices involving media like our mirror.

Contexts (II): Social Practice and Making Use of an Image

Chronologically, Greek box mirrors are a phenomenon of the fourth and third centuries BC.[38] Incidentally, in this very period the mirror acquires a marked iconographic relevance as attribute of women and, more specifically, signifier of female beauty.[39] Given their high value both in terms of material and of workmanship, mirrors are likely to have been among the most prized possessions of elite women. They constitute most suitable wedding gifts and are deemed appropriate grave goods characterizing the social persona of deceased women. Similar social functions can be surmised with some confidence for their Etruscan counterparts.[40]

A privileged context for appreciating the décor of mirrors will have been the grooming practices of elite women. Far from being moments of secluded privacy, these take place in the company of female attendants; to judge from the frequency of their depiction on painted pottery the moments dedicated to the mistress' *kosmesis*, or adornment are actually the most significant feature of her social life within the household.[41] Theophrastus, in a fragment roughly contemporary to the Berlin mirror speaks of the intense chattering going on in men's perfumeries and barber shops, calling these venues 'wineless symposia' for their high degree of social interaction.[42] If we may transfer this to the sphere of women's grooming taking place inside the *oikos*, it is not difficult to imagine an intensely communicative situation

37 Stewart 1997, 174 and 173 (his italics). The altogether four mirrors and two vessels depicting Herakles' and Auge's struggle (and a struggle I take it to be, *pace* Stewart) are discussed independently by Schwarzmaier 1997, 104–108, whose treatment is, however, focused on issues of style and chronology exclusively.

38 See Schwarzmaier 1997, 60–170 with a detailed and rather confident study of the stylistic developments.

39 Cf. Cassimatis 1998, esp. 311–316 and 316–350 on the iconographic evidence from Attica and Southern Italy respectively, with an eschatological-religious interpretation I do not endorse. For reasons possibly of graphical clarity, vase painters and others visual artists putting mirrors in the hand of female figures choose to depict the old, lidless type, a polished disk atop a vertical handle. The poignancy of this signifier will be such, that – via the astronomical sign for Venus – it denotes the female gender to this day: ♀. Mirrors then are, ideally, used by women, the way weapons (♂, i.e. Mars' shield and spear) are used by men.

40 De Puma 2013 provides a useful introduction to the subject of Etruscan mirrors (on their use as wedding gifts see esp. 1056). Grave findings point to a prevalently female ownership: Carpino 2009; de Grummond 2012, 309–10; De Puma 2013, 1049.

41 Cf. Reilly 1989.

42 ap. Plut. *symp*. 5.5, 679a.

where the decoration of toiletries is not only taken in individually, but also shared and commented upon. Contemporary male imagination envisaged women frequently conversing about sentimental and sexual matters when in private. Most famously perhaps, two short dramatic scenes, or *mimiamboi* by the Hellenistic writer Herondas have women discussing conjugal infidelity and the quality and supply of leather dildos respectively.[43] The female protagonists of these texts are indebted to comic stereotypes and seem to depict rather lowly strata of polis society, but they testify to those spaces of all-female interaction items like our mirror would be appreciated in.

Within the cultural and social context of early Hellenistic Greece, the insistence of mirror iconography on female attractiveness and grooming practices must be understood to reflect both the actual occupation and mental preoccupation of the women using these mirrors.[44] Insofar as their imagery stresses both the desirability of the female body as exposed to the male gaze and the respective attention dedicated to body-care and adornment, it provides positive role models and normative protocols of behaviour for the owners and beholders. Against this affirmative function of the mirrors' décor, the choice of the male onlookers may at first seem surprising: Goat-like Pan, terrifying in his sudden appearance and unrestrained in his pursuit of erotic satisfaction, is hardly an appropriate stand-in for the female viewer's actual or fantasized partner. His usefulness as a signifier lies not in the normative values attached to his persona, but must be sought in his effective embodiment of the male desire the beautification going on both in front of the mirror and in its figural decoration is actually aimed at.

As always, the viewers' hermeneutic adaptation of mythical *topoi* does not apply to their totality, i.e. viewers will not follow protocols supplied by mythical narratives *à la lettre*. We may surmise with some confidence that the early Hellenistic owner of the Berlin mirror was not expected to daydream about being taken advantage of by the goat god in the rocky recesses of a remote cavern. Rather, the object's visual rhetoric uses the hyperbolic language of myth, including the established semantics of the cave and Pan's prototypically lecherous attitude to make a point about the complementary relationship between female grooming and male desire.

The perspective reconstructed here is of course reinforcing existing social structures, including patriarchy, as rightly analysed by Andrew Stewart in his critical assessment of these iconographies.[45] Nevertheless, qualifying their depiction on female accessories as strained adaptations, or "a phallocentric *story* […] replotted

43 Herond. 1 and 6.

44 Cf. Roussos 2005; on the role assigned to sexuality in married life during the Hellenistic period see the discussion in Stähli 1999, 128–142.

45 Stewart 1997, 171–181.

through gynaikocentric *discourse*"[46] seems to neglect the workings of myth as a symbolic system for the construction of meaning – including meanings not envisaged by whoever told the story for the first time. The problem lies not in the supposed androcentrism of the stories available; from Hera's seduction of Zeus on Mount Ida, to Aphrodite's affair with Anchises and Eos' autonomous pursuit of young lovers, Greek artists had plenty of narratives at their disposal in order to depict conjugal sex or autonomous female desire.[47] The fact that in some instances they preferred to depict scenes of male aggression, both voyeuristic and physical, should be understood as the result of a positive choice: rather than publicizing the safety of marital relationships *ex negativo*,[48] these scenes were deemed the most effective – and established – means of visualizing the sheer power of female attraction.

It is for this rather selective appreciation of myth that the actual identity of the females depicted is beside the point. We have hitherto called them nymphs, and the term is particularly appropriate as it highlights a specific feature of the women depicted without framing them all too specifically. The Greek word *nymphē* may denote both a mortal woman of a certain age group, that is the young bride and wife up to the birth of her first child and a virtually never-aging mythical female of the same age group. All *nymphai* share a distinct appeal of youthful, unfolding sexual attractiveness with close ties to the natural sphere; with mortals, this is but a fleeting blossoming, while it marks an almost perpetual state of being in their mythical counterparts.[49] Within the Greek pantheon, mortal brides relate especially to Aphrodite as both support and role model (while *parthenoi* and *gynaikes*, younger women and mature wifes look towards other goddesses respectively). The female figures depicted on our mirror are therefore closely associated to its owner's social status (if not in the present at least in the past) as a bride. In this perspective, it makes sense that the woman depicted on the outside relief carries no attributes specifying her as Aphrodite and at the same time displays a rather mundane apparel echoing civic dress codes. On the inside, it is the nymph's engagement in body care to mirror, quite literally, the activities of the female viewer.

As compared to other media, grooming utensils bearing depictions of women grooming themselves, are apt to add further twists to the relationship between

46 Stewart 1997, 174 (his italics).

47 Subjects of this kind are indeed attested, though rarely; see a possible depiction of Artemis/Selene and Endymion on a mirror in Athens, National Museum 16111; Schwarzmaier 1997, 249 no. 35 pl. 50,1.

48 Envisaged by Stewart 1997, 174–177, esp. 176 as one of the contradicting messages of these scenes; see also Roussos 2005, 208: "perhaps […] a romantic praise of the secure state of marriage".

49 Andò 1996, esp. 48–55; 60–62. For a nutshell appraisal of the term, see Larson 2001, 3: "The crucial point is that, when applied to a mortal woman, the term *numphê* points to her status as a sexual being."

image and social practice. After all, beauty is a quality experienced sensorily, in particular visually. While others will witness beauty through seeing it, the beautiful subject can experience its own attractiveness only by means of a mirror – or by way of mediation through the appreciating looks of others. Having the figural scenes on the mirror depict female beauty being seen and desired by males underscores this intrinsic link between specular self-scrutiny and being scrutinized. In this context, it is crucial that the male in question be Pan, as both uncessant desire and the observing gaze are characteristic features of his. His frequent use of the *aposkopōn* gesture, a raising of the hand shading the roaming eyes marks him out as a hunter preying on his foes first and foremost through visual means.[50]

Thus, a mirror lid in New York features a striking image of a beautiful young Pan (**Fig. 7**). Instead of the generic female head often placed on the lid, the craftsman here has opted for the depiction of a dangerous, wild male whose averted gaze, accentuated by the indication of iris and pupil, is expressely not looking at the female viewer – yet.[51]

The Nafplio mirror (**Fig. 6**) brings this insistence on seeing and being seen to bear on the situation of a woman with her attendant, thereby reflecting the kind of venue we have posited for the appreciation of these luxury items, all-female gatherings dedicated to the grooming of the mistress. The relief focuses on the moment the main figure is whirling around to realize that Pan is looking on. On the Berlin mirror, this turning point comes when the nymph, while wringing her hair over the basin, suddenly beholds Pan reflected in its water plane. The objects' owner then, when using her mirror during cosmetic practice is looking at a woman engaging in cosmetic practice and looking into a watery mirror to discover herself being looked at. What this *mise en abîme* implies, is that being looked at with desire is all that looking into a mirror is about.[52]

---

50 Herbig 1949, 23.55; Jucker 1956, 62–69.

51 Compare, by contrast, the full-frontal female face on the lid of New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.256; Schwarzmaier 1997, 308 no. 183 pl. 60.2.

52 Balensiefen 1990, 29 in discussing depictions of mirrors in fourth century Southern Italy and Etruria, had already noted ties between the gaze into the mirror and erotic relationships: "Diese Bilder können bezeugen, daß gewisse Bedeutungsbezüge zwischen der Liebeswerbung oder der Liebesbeziehung und dem Spiegel, besonders aber dem Blicken in den Spiegel bestanden haben müssen, die über die primäre Aufgabe des Spiegels als Schönheitsgerät der Frau hinaus auf eine symbolische Bedeutung schließen lassen." (see also ibid., 44). In a wider perspective, this harks back to John Berger's classic essay *Ways of Seeing* (already referred to by Stewart 1997, 181) which is worth being quoted at some length here: "A woman must continually watch herself. [...] From earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. [...] One might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear.

Narratives: Visualizing and Specifying Erotic Encounters

The engraving on an Etruscan hand mirror in New York dated to the mid-fourth century BC, depicts a scene not entirely dissimilar from the one we have been discussing (**Fig. 8**).[53] A man on the left approaches a woman intent at trimming her coiffure while examining herself in a mirror. Her loose garment leaves much of her body exposed to view, including her right breast and her pubes. On the lower right, a seated companion handling some jewellery serves to stress the standing woman's high status and so do the orderly arranged shoes, clothing and toiletry box. By contrast, the man's unruly body language and bristled hair are borrowed from contemporary satyr iconography, highlighting his unabashedly desirous attitude. The mirror held by the woman, finally, reflects her face to the viewer, but the positioning of the figures implies she must realize the presence of the man at her back any moment, again emphasizing the instant of mutual discovery. All figures are named through inscriptions; it is Peleus (Etruscan, *pele*) beholding Thetis (*thethis*) attended by her sister Galene (*calaina*), and these names allow the viewer to tell precisely what will follow. In his desire for the goddess, the mortal Peleus will overcome her fierce resistance; their son, stronger even than his father, will be Achilles; he will, reluctantly, go to Troy; there he will meet his end as a great hero, but not before… – to the knowing, this scene is the starting point of a virtually unlimited number of specific stories to tell.

Other mythical encounters with a goddess grooming herself take a very different course and lead to developments rather more disadvantageous to the male *voyeur*. Teiresias and Aktaion stumble upon the virgin goddesses Athena and Artemis respectively, and are subsequently punished.[54] The situation depicted on the inside of the Berlin mirror then opens up a fork of basically two narrative completions. Either Pan will overcome difficulties and take possession of the nymph or his voyeur-

Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger 1972, 46–47). For Berger's place in cultural studies of the gaze and his prefiguring of the classic essay by Mulvey 1975, see Woodward 2015, 40–57, esp. 42–44.

53 New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 09.221.16; CSE USA 3 no. 14 figs. 14a–d.

54 The earliest attestations of these related stories are in Pherecydes (FGrH 3 F 92), who explains Teiresias' blindness by his having seen Athena bathing, and Callimachus (*h.* 5.110–115), detailing Actaeons death at the hands of Artemis after witnessing her 'graceful ablutions' (v. 113: χαρίεντα λοετρά). Lacy 1990 argues forcefully for Callimachus' version having indeed been archaic in origin as well; the Teiresias episode is absent from the visual record and while Actaeon's death is depicted early on, the first visual allusions to his voyeurism and/or desire towards Artemis date to the 4th century and remain rare before the imperial period, cf. LIMC I s.v. Aktaion 468 (esp. 462 no. 88 pl. 358).

Fig. 7: Greek box mirror (lid relief). New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 25.78.44a-d. Bronze, ca. 320–300 BC. Creative Commons Zero.

ism will be frustrated by her evading him in one way or another. As both narrative patterns occur in the Bible, too, and from there have reverberated throughout European art history, we may call these diametrically opposed developments the Bathseba and the Susanna scenario respectively. King David sees Bathseba bathing on the top of her house, later has sex with her and in the end does away with her husband in order to marry her. By way of contrast, the two Elders spying upon Susanna and subsequently blackmailing her, are eventually found guilty and put to death.[55]

[55] Bathseba: 2 Samuel 11:2–12:24. Susanna: 13 Daniel. The Susanna story belongs to the deuterocanonical books and may in itself be Hellenistic in origin.

Fig. 8: Etruscan hand mirror. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 09.221.16. Bronze; ca. 350 BC. Creative Commons Zero.

A remarkably straightforward reflection on these contrasting options is provided in the story told by Herodotus about the wife of the Lydian king Candaules.[56] The latter wants his bodyguard Gyges to witness the queen's beauty; from Gyges' objections it becomes abundantly clear, that he, Gyges, considers this request to be against the law (*anomos*), for, as the guard points out to his king, 'together with her clothes a woman takes off her *aidōs*', i.e. her modest countenance. His reluctance notwithstanding, Gyges watches the queen undressing from behind the chamber door; she notices his presence and summons him the following day:

[56] Hdt. 1.8–11.

> When Gyges came, the lady addressed him thus: "Now, Gyges, you have two ways before you; decide which you will follow. You must either kill Candaules and take me and the throne of Lydia for your own, or be killed yourself now without more ado; that will prevent you from obeying all Candaules' commands in the future and seeing what you should not see."

Illicitly spying upon a woman in the intimacy of her nakedness represents a disturbance of social order that calls for a decisive action to re-establish this order. In the mythical world depicted in the images discussed here this must either lead to actual consummation of the union so far forged only visually (Bathseba scenario), or to the woman's successful withdrawal and consequent defeat of the man (Susanna scenario). Whichever way, something is going to happen. In the marital sphere our mirror is appreciated in, these options need not be spelled out, as indeed both apply. The bridegroom first setting his eyes on his beautiful bride will make her his own, as Peleus did with Thetis. At the same time, the image acts as a useful reminder of the social norms governing male access to a married woman's beautiful looks. As far as other men in the future are concerned, anything but the Susanna scenario is unthinkable, to the bridegroom at least.

Still, the erotic tension between the characters depicted both on the inside and on the outside of the Berlin mirror does not make for a complete story, or to put it in the succinctness of jargon: narrative inferences by the viewer are merely contingent. It is possible to take these images as starting points for tales to tell, but nothing they depict necessarily calls for such an act, nor determines its course of events. Ancient tradition knows of Pan's successful union with Echo as well as of his approaches thwarted by Syrinx and Pitys, who morph into reeds and a pine tree respectively, but neither the outside relief nor the inner engraving provide clues for naming the females involved. The interior scene as the attentive viewer will understand it, pushes Pan's voyeurism up to the dramatic point of mutual discovery. But what will happen after the nymph has realized she is being looked at is impossible to tell – and is actually irrelevant for the image's social function of highlighting the interlocking of cosmetic practice, (self-)scrutiny and desire as we have reconstructed it in the preceding section. Yet, in evoking these notions the image is heavily informed by established narrative patterns. It is the viewers' awareness of Pan's other attempts on beautiful nymphs that makes for the image's inherent element of suspense and enables the viewer to conjecture further developments. And indeed, as the known stories of Pan's assaults differ mainly through their endings, the stage depicted here is not apt to develop any referential specificity.

Choice of moment is crucial, however: The decision to depict an unspecific moment of a narrative is tantamount to not referring to a specific story at all.

Rather, according to the terminology introduced to visual culture studies by Luca Giuliani, the Berlin mirror's engraving is *descriptive* in that it shows the world 'as it is', without marking out anything about the event depicted as specific. It confronts the viewer with a situation that has occurred many times in history and is likely to occur over and over again: a man gazes lustfully upon a naked female, thereby violating her intimacy; typically, this happens in the highly suggestive space of a grotto and in a sacred space. As a descriptive image the scene allows for reading stories into it, but does not privilege any of the possible readings over others. By contrast, the depiction of a horse with wheels and windows, though in itself rather static, can be termed *narrative*, since it enforces an explanation through one specific story at the hands of the knowledgeable viewer.[57]

A few general remarks are in order here, before we move to the principles governing the viewer's response to the subject matter on our mirror. Giuliani's distinction between descriptive and narrative images has met with some reluctance, one reviewer going so far as to call it Procrustean.[58] To move this accusation towards a typology is, actually, to denounce its efficiency. For the sake of clarity, it is however worth pointing out, that the categories of 'descriptive' and 'narrative' are not in fact aimed at formal features of any given image (for instance, its degree of 'drama' or indications of elapsing time), but rather at its frame of reference. Put in less controversial (but somewhat clumsy) terms, in essence this is a distinction between images potentially polyreferent versus those necessarily monoreferent, the crucial parameter being the absence or presence of those irritating signs prompting the inference of one particular event or story. Giuliani's opposition therefore is about the semiotics, not the formal poetics of visual narrative.[59]

Put to use as a hermeneutic method it relies heavily on our familiarity with the stories known to the ancient viewer. We may shrug at the coin-like object held out by Aphrodite on the mirror's outside relief, but to the ancient viewer it might – theoretically – have provided the clue needed to place this otherwise generic scene within a specific narrative known to him, but lost to us. Still, the fragmentary state of our sources is no argument against a basically sound and fruitful distinction between two fundamentally different types of images.

Important though it is, the distinction between narrative and descriptive images proves less helpful when it comes to dealing with stories lacking any specific and defining features easily visualized. As whole genres of stories people tell each other

57 Thus, in a heavily abridged form, the distinction argued for in Giuliani 2003, 77–81 and in his contribution to this volume, p. 33–41.

58 Schmaltz 2004, 174.

59 The latter being the main interest of the scrupulous study of Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999. For a slightly different assessment and comparison of his and Giuliani's work see Lorenz 2016, 163–165.

make use of a rather limited set of elements, their depictions would necessarily classify as descriptive. This holds true for the majority of classroom anecdotes or hunting recollections, but also the gossipy rendition of how this or that faculty member actually got his chair. These narratives, juicy as they may be to their audiences, are far from being unique in the way the fall of Troy or the life of Oedipus are.[60] Very much like the events depicted on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18, they are apt to confirm and develop a typified view of the contemporary world, describing things known to happen. Greek myth, too, abounds with repetitive or stereotypical elements, and we should be wary of an essentialist view of mythic narratives as being by all means distinctive and suspenseful. If one of the primary functions of myth lies in making sense of the world we live in, it must necessarily and at varying degrees reflect social practice.

A prominent, and early case in point, apt to demonstrate the ensuing ambivalences, is the figural decoration of a large bowl (*dinos*) designed for the mixing of wine, produced in Athens around 740–730 BC (**Fig. 9**).[61] On one of its sides it shows a man holding a woman by the wrist while boarding a warship; the couple is singled out through size, action, the wreath held by the woman and its very distinctiveness as compared to the mass of identical oarsmen inside the ship. Whether the man's gesture connotes a departure as suggested by its use in contemporary Greek epic, or a nuptial abduction – it is used in this sense in later iconography – shall not matter here. In modern scholarship, the scene has attracted – and defied – a great number of attempts to refer it to a specific myth.[62] Simply put, it fits various mythical narratives very much in the same way as it fits contemporary practice. Doubtlessly, this is no trivial good-bye scene, but a person of high social status leaving on a warship, whether with or without his consort. For the interregionally connected elites of the 8th century BC such an event was – like warfare itself, or the stately funeral of a peer – one in a set of defining biographic moments that different viewers could expound on in different ways, drawing both on individual or family experience, and mythical tradition.

But by what means could the painter of the London *dinos*, or the craftsman manufacturing the Berlin mirror have conferred specificity to an act both crucial and recurrent? The Late Geometric painter had no expedient at hand allowing him to visually specify a mythical couple, and when it came to identifying single nymphs an early Hellenistic engraver was in no better position.[63] It should indeed

60 Many of them, including both fairy tales and urban legends do not even need names to provide their protagonists with an unequivocal identity.

61 Giuliani 2003, 54–56 fig. 5.

62 Listed in Giuliani 2003, 330 n. 61–64.

63 He could have used inscriptions to label the figures represented, but widespread as this practice is in Etruria, it is not followed by Greek mirror-makers.

be acknowledged that some Greek myths and their cast lend themselves better to a narrative, i.e. unmistakably monoreferent depiction than others. Generally speaking, these highly specifiable narratives belong to two distinctive types: trickster myths and what would be termed counterintuitive myths. Trickster stories need no long explanation; blinding the one-eyed giant, seducing the princess by approaching her in the shape of a swan, or hiding a rogue platoon inside a wooden horse are measures specific to their given narratives and will allow for easy recognition when depicted. Counterintuitive narratives contain situations that run contrary to the audience's experiences and expectations from social reality. The shepherd approached in his loneliness by three beautiful women is but one example, the warrior rushing aggressively towards a woman while dropping his sword, another. Both situations call for a complex sequence of preceding events explaining how Paris came to be the arbitrator in the Olympian beauty contest in the first place, or why Menelaus, when Troy eventually fell, could not bring himself to kill Helen.[64] By consequence, their depiction enforces narrative completion at the hands (or words) of the viewer.

One could probably argue for trickster stories being a subset of counterintuitive myths, but rather than establishing taxonomies our present focus lies on understanding visual renditions of stories too stereotypical to allow for a narrative depiction in Giuliani's sense. Stories about "love and suchlike" – set apart also in our introductory passage from Rudyard Kipling – seem to a large extent to fall into this category, and for two reasons. For one thing, the actual enactments of love, seduction and conquest tend not to be overly differentiated; for another, the protagonists often lack a specific iconography beyond their characteristic deeds. Theseus is recognizable when depicted slaying the Minotaur, much less so, however, when chasing a young woman.[65] Still, even if one partner is clearly identifiable as most male gods are thanks to their attributes,[66] the promiscuity of this very group often makes it hard to name their unspecified love interests in any given instance.

Obvious exceptions need to mentioned, first and foremost, the love adventures of Zeus, whose indeed very refined seductive techniques set him apart within the Greek pantheon (and fall squarely into the abovementioned category of trickster myths). A further case in point are those love stories ending with the object of desire undergoing metamorphosis (which can be safely considered an unexpected, i.e. counterintuitive turn of events). Beyond these prominent instances, however,

64 The earliest depiction of the Judgment of Paris is analysed by Giuliani in this volume, see p. 31–33. On scenes of Menelaus re-falling in love with his faithless bride, just as he is about take his revenge, see Wannagat 2003, 65–68 and Strawczynski 2003, 43–44.

65 On the hermeneutic challenges posed by anonymous erotic pursuits cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1987; Servadei 2002.

66 On the issue of attributes see now Dietrich 2018.

Fig. 9: Attic geometric bowl. London, British Museum 1899,2-19.1. Clay; ca. 730–720 BC.

Greek myth is full of erotic encounters of Greek gods or mortal heroes meeting and impregnating fecund nymphs and princesses without any specific tricks or twists allowing unequivocal visualization. Even for Paris setting his eyes on Helen, a case of fatal attraction if ever there was, Greek and Roman artists never developed an unequivocal iconography comparable, for instance, to that of Romeo under Juliet's balcony. Without name labels (as on the New York mirror, **Fig. 6**) or a larger narrative context, Paris and Helen, and other amorous couples alike, display a remarkable lack of visual specificity.

This holds true also for the myriads of generic encounters of nymphs with Pan or satyrs; flings, moreover, that usually do not result in any prominent offspring to capitalize on aetiologically. Rather, images of beastly males lusting for their nature-bound female counterparts depict paradigmatic constellations; they provide mythically amplified representations of gender roles, focusing less on the actual outcome than on the elements of surprise, intensity and *pathos* characterizing the specific kind of *erōs* prevailing in the wilderness.[67] As opposed to literary exempla with their high degree of specificity, these scenes present visual patterns of behaviour

[67] Stähli 2003, 250 n. 35 speaks of "topische Situationen", i.e. situations exploiting existing *topoi*, and rightly stresses their importance in myth and epic. See also Heinemann 2016, 180–200.

Fig. 10: Statue of Hermes with infant Dionysus. Olympia, Archaeological Museum. Marble; 340–330 BC. © Carole Raddato via Wikimedia Commons.

whose discoursive strength lies in their very openness and their descriptive relationship to the world as it is: That's the way love goes – and desire, too.

Conclusion: Narrative Specficity and Dialectic Tension

If contrasting the décor of the Berlin and the New York mirrors (**Figs. 2** and **6**) highlights the workings of descriptive versus narrative images, another comparison brings out the same typology's limits: A mirror in Toledo (**Fig. 4**) features a cave setting with a naked woman crouching by a *louterion*, but without any male onlooker as on the Berlin specimen (**Fig. 2**).[68] Both the Toledo and the Berlin engravings qualify as descriptive, but while the former acts as a straightforward affirmation of female – more specifically: nymph-like – beauty and the care devoted to it,

[68] The argument that with the Toledo mirror the voyeuristic viewer is provided by whoever beholds the image, will not hold: The viewer's gender and disposition, both clearly defined on the Berlin mirror, make for a decisive difference, as does the fact, that the Berlin nymph is realizing she is being spied upon.

the latter introduces a dialectic element, for, as discussed in the preceding section, female grooming and male desire are interlocked in a complementary relationship, both in front of the mirror and within its figural décor.[69] The presence of the spying god and his discovery does not trigger a specific narrative, but creates a tension demanding for a viewer response beyond complacent appreciation of the status quo: This is neither about what *happened* in that most momentous boudoir encounter of Greek myth (cf. the New York mirror, **Fig. 8**), nor about *being* beautiful (Toledo, **Fig. 4**), but about *how to resolve* one of those crucial constellations when beauty is actually seen and eyes meet.[70] It signifies the acknowledgement of two opposing behavioural models within the *Lebenswelt*.

Bringing to bear the categories of 'affirmative' and 'dialectic' on the understanding of imagery means assessing the relationship between its normative contents and the disposition of the viewer. It aims to describe the type of moral response prompted by a given representation. As our discussion of the Berlin mirror has shown throughout, its appreciation requires the viewer to establish a balance between differing courses of action laid out in the engraved scene inside its lid. I call this quality 'dialectic', and it is important to recognize that it does not refer to just any image pitting two adversaries against each other. For all we know about the cultural background of ancient Greek viewers, blinding the man-eating giant does not spark a process of evaluation, whereas killing women and children during the fall of Troy does. Very much in the way narrative images always entail some elements of generic description, dialectic images should not be understood as being by default non-affirmative and subverting social norms. Rather they encourage the reflection of these norms as they highlight the underlying faultlines.[71]

The viewers of the London *dinos* (**Fig. 9**), to return to this example, witnessed a fundamental dialectic between the mobility of the male world of war and the inherent stillness of conjugal life. Both departures and abductions are key situations bringing these contradicting aspects of elite life to the fore. Like the engraving on our mirror, the *dinos* scene qualifies both as descriptive and dialectic, but other combinations are conceivable, too. Not surprisingly, many narrative images exploit

---

69 One could argue that on the Toledo mirror the voyeur is implicitly present and to be identified with the viewer of the object itself, and the woman's crouching stance encourages such a reading (see above p. 361). Still, the Toledo nymph has no means of realizing she is being looked at as her Berlin counterpart has.

70 Cf. Stähli 2003, 263–264 on statues of sleeping Ariadne and bathing Aphrodite and the viewer's involvement through imagining the temporal continuation of his act of viewing.

71 Another case point are the dozens of mirror lids decorated with a woman's head in relief as opposed to the New York specimen showing instead a head of Pan (fig. 7). By replacing the affirmative image of female beauty with a depiction of this paradigmatic onlooker, the New York mirror creates a dialectic tensions similar to the effect of the Berlin engraving.

dialectic constellations. Yet, to name but one chronologically close example, Hermes carrying the infant Dionysus (**Fig. 10**) conclusively makes reference to a specific narrative, but presents an affirmative constellation from which the background story of Hera's wrath against yet another illegitimate offspring of Zeus is quite removed.

Ultimately, both the descriptive/narrative dichotomy and the distinction sketched here between affirmative and dialectic contents relate to the agency of images, to the way they encourage, enforce and determine responses and interactions by and through their viewers.[72] As elucidated in the previous section, this aspect must be seen in the light of the specific mediatic context the images appear in. Engraved on the intimate inside of a mirror, the paradigmatic instrument for both achieving and confirming female beauty, the Berlin engraving takes its viewer into a self-reflexive vortex of seeing exposed beauty and of beauty looking back, highlighting the dialectic between female modesty and male desire against the backdrop of female grooming practices, practices ultimately aimed at a male addressee.

What is perhaps most surprising about this iconography is that it is first encountered not on vanity items, but on drinking crockery aimed at male users. Exploring this distribution of one basic type of iconography over differing social rituals and milieus (the Hellenistic votive reliefs mentioned above providing yet another venue) goes well beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say, that the evidence appears to reflect the widespread relevance accorded to the issues raised by these scenes. Their acknowledgment of contrasting protocols within social reality – termed a 'dialectic' content for the sake of brevity – seems equally distant from both androcentric 'locker room banter' and exclusively female preoccupations. Depending on medium and social context, the depiction of a bathing woman spied upon by Pan or a similar intruder could take on a specific bias or focus. Above all, it was informed by differing stories, but , in the case of the Berlin mirror, it neither told nor suggested a specific one. It did not need to; as it related to "love and suchlike", it was to retain its topicality over a long time. But in terms of social practice and codes of behaviour, it threw wide open the question of what these stories were actually about.

[72] On this topic cf. Gell 1998 and recent engagements with his work by Osborne and Tanner 2008 and van Eck 2015; in this volume, see esp. the article by Caroline van Eck, p. 309–320.

References

Andò 1996

V. Andò, *Nymphe. La sposa e le Ninfe*. Quaderni Urbinati di cultura classica 52 (N.S.), 1996, 47–79.

BAPD

Beazley Archive Pottery Database (refered to with entry no.). http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/XDB/ASP/default.asp.

Balensiefen 1990

L. Balensiefen, *Die Bedeutung des Spiegelbildes als ikonographisches Motiv in der antiken Kunst* (Tübingen 1990).

Bardiès-Fronty 2009

I. Bardiès-Fronty (ed.), *Le bain et le miroir. Soins du corps et cosmétiques de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance* (Paris 2009).

Berger 1972

J. Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London 1972).

Blümel 1960

C. Blümel, *Drei Weihreliefs an die Nymphen*, in: F. Eckstein (ed.), *Theoria. Festschrift für Walter-Herwig Schuchhardt* (Baden-Baden 1960) 23–28.

Bol 2003

P. C. Bol (ed.), *Zum Verhältnis von Raum und Zeit in der griechischen Kunst*. Passavant-Symposion 8.–10. Dezember 2000 (Möhnesee 2003).

Boschung et al. 1997

D. Boschung, H. von Hesberg and A. Linfert, *Die antiken Skulpturen in Chatsworth sowie in Dunham Massey und Withington Hall*, Corpus signorum Imperii romani Great Britain 3, 8 (Mainz 1997).

Breyer and Creutz 2010

T. Breyer and D. Creutz, *Erfahrung und Geschichte. Historische Sinnbildung im Pränarrativen* (Berlin and New York 2010).

Buxton 1994

R. G. A. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece. The Contexts of Mythology* (Cambridge 1994).

Campanelli and Alessandrini 2003

A. Campanelli and M. Alessandrini (eds.), *Attraverso lo specchio. Storia, inganni, verità di uno strumento di conoscenza.* 7 dicembre 2003 – 2 maggio 2004, Chieti, Museo Nazionale Archeologico la Civitella (Pescara 2003).

Carpino 2009

A. Carpino, *Dueling Warriors on two Etruscan Bronze Mirrors from the Fifth Century BCE*, in: S. Bell and H. Nagy (eds.), *New Perspectives on Etruria and Early Rome. In Honor of Richard Daniel De Puma* (Madison 2009) 182–197.

Cassimatis 1998

H. Cassimatis, *Le miroir dans les représentations funéraires apuliennes*. Mélanges de l'École française de Rome - Antiquité 110.1, 1998, 297–350.

CSE

Corpus Speculorum Etruscorum (various places, 1981–).

de Grummond 2012

N. T. de Grummond, *Etruscan Mirrors Now*. American Journal of Archaeology 106, 2012, 307–311.

De Puma 2013

R. D. De Puma, *Mirrors in Art and Society*, in: J. MacIntosh Turfa (ed.), *The Etruscan World* (London 2013), 1041–1067.

Di Stefano 1998

C. A. Di Stefano, *Palermo punica. Museo Archeologico Regionale Antonino Salinas, 6 dicembre 1995 – 30 settembre 1996* (Palermo 1998).

Dietrich 2010

N. Dietrich, *Figur ohne Raum? Bäume und Felsen in der attischen Vasenmalerei des 6. und 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Berlin and New York 2010).

Dietrich 2018

N. Dietrich, *Das Attribut als Problem. Eine bildwissenschaftliche Untersuchung zur griechischen Kunst* (Berlin and New York 2018).

Dillon 2002

M. Dillon, *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion* (London 2002).

Feubel 1935

R. Feubel, *Die attischen Nymphenreliefs und ihre Vorbilder* (Diss. Heidelberg 1935).

Foerst 1978

G. Foerst, *Die Gravierungen der praenestinischen Cisten* (Rome 1978).

Fuchs 1962

W. Fuchs, *Attische Nymphenreliefs*. Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts (Abteilung Athen) 77, 1962, 242–249.

Gell 1998

A. Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford 1998).

Grassinger et al. 2006

D. Grassinger, T. de Oliveira Pinto and A. Scholl (eds.), *Die Rückkehr der Götter. Berlins verborgener Olymp* (Regensburg 2008).

Herbig 1949

R. Herbig, *Pan, der griechische Bocksgott. Versuch einer Monographie* (Frankfurt 1949).

Heinemann 2016

A. Heinemann, *Der Gott des Gelages. Dionysos, Satyrn und Mänaden auf attischem Trinkgeschirr des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,* Image & Context 15 (Berlin and New York 2016)

Jenkins and Turner 2009
I. Jenkins and V. Turner, *The Greek Body* (Los Angeles 2009).
Jucker 1956
I. Jucker, *Der Gestus des Aposkopein. Ein Beitrag zur Gebärdensprache in der antiken Kunst* (Zürich 1956).
Kipling 1891
R. Kipling, *Life's Handicap. Being Stories of Mine Own People* (London 1891).
Kreilinger 2007
U. Kreilinger, *Anständige Nacktheit. Körperpflege, Reinigungsriten und das Phänomen weiblicher Nacktheit im archaisch-klassischen Athen* (Rahden/Westf. 2007).
Lape 2004
S. Lape, *Reproducing Athens. Menander's Comedy, Democratic Culture, and the Hellenistic City* (Princeton 2004).
Larson 2001
J. Larson, *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore* (New York 2001).
LIMC
Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (Zürich/München 1981–1999).
Lorenz 2016
K. Lorenz, *Ancient Mythological Images and their Interpretation. An Introduction to Iconology, Semiotics and Image Studies in Classical Art History* (Cambridge 2016).
Mulvey 1975
L. Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Screen 16.3, 1975, 6–18. doi:10.1093/screen/16.3.6.
Osborne and Tanner 2008
R. Osborne and J. Tanner (eds.), *Art's Agency and Art History* (Malden, MA 2008).
Pierce 1997
K. F. Pierce, *The Portrayal of Rape in New Comedy*, in: S. Deacy and K. F. Peirce (eds), *Rape in Antiquity* (London 1997) 163–84.
Piteros 1990
Chr. Piteros, *Χαλκινο πτυκτο κατοπτρο απο την Παλαια Επιδαυρο*. Archaiologikē ephēmeris 1986 (1990), 160–180.
Reilly 1989
J. Reilly, *Many Brides. "Mistress and Maid" on Athenian Lekythoi*. Hesperia 58, 1989, 411–44.
Roussos 2005
R. Roussos, *Female Passion? Some Motifs on Case-Mirrors of the Fourth Century B.C.*, in: N. M. Kennell and J. E. Tomlinson (eds.), *Ancient Greece at the Turn of the Millennium. Recent Work and Future Perspectives. Proceedings of the Athens Symposium, 18–20 May 2001* (Athens 2005) 199–214.

Schmaltz 2004

U. Schmaltz, *Review of Giuliani 2003*. Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen 256, 2004, 161–174.

Schwarzmaier 1997

A. Schwarzmaier, *Griechische Klappspiegel. Untersuchungen zu Typologie und Stil*, Athenische Mitteilungen Beiheft (Berlin 1997).

Servadei 2002

C. Servadei, *Scene d'inseguimento nella ceramica attica. Problemi metodologici e interpretativi*, in: I. Colpo, I. Favaretto and F. Ghedini (eds.), *Iconografia 2001. Studi sull'immagine* (Padua 2002) 163–178.

Siebert 1990

G. Siebert, *Imaginaire et images de la grotte dans la Grèce archaïque et classique*. Ktema 15, 1990, 151–161.

Simon 1975

E. Simon (ed.), *Führer durch die Antikenabteilung des Martin-von-Wagner-Museums der Universität Würzburg,* (Mainz 1975).

Sourvinou-Inwood 1987

Chr. Sourvinou-Inwood, *A Series of Erotic Pursuits. Images and Meanings*. Journal of Hellenic Studies 107, 1987, 131–153.

Stähli 1999

A. Stähli, *Die Verweigerung der Lüste. Erotische Gruppen in der antiken Plastik* (Berlin 1999).

Stähli 2003

A. Stähli, *Erzählte Zeit, Erzählzeit und Wahrnehmungszeit. Zum Verhältnis von Temporalität und Narration, speziell in der hellenistischen Plastik*, in: Bol 2003, 239–264.

Stähli 2009

A. Stähli, *Nackte Frauen*, in: S. Schmidt and J. H. Oakley (eds.), *Hermeneutik der Bilder. Beiträge zur Ikonographie und Interpretation griechischer Vasenmalerei,* Beihefte zum Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum Deutschland 4 (München 2009) 43–51

Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999

M. D. Stansbury-O'Donnell, *Pictorial Narrative in Ancient Greek Art* (Cambridge 1999).

Strawczynski 2003

N. Strawczynski, *La représentation de l'événement sur la céramique attique. Quelques stratégies graphiques*, in: Bol 2003, 29–45.

Svoronos 1908

J. N. Svoronos, *Das Athener Nationalmuseum*. Vol. 1 (Athens 1908).

van Eck 2015

C. van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence. From the Animated Image to the Excessive Object* (Boston 2015).

Wannagat 2003

D. Wannagat, *Plötzlichkeit. Zur temporalen und narrativen Qualität fallender Gegenstände in Bildern des 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.*, in: Bol 2003, 59–77.

Wardle 2010

A. E. Wardle, *Naked and Unashamed. A Study of the Aphrodite Anadyomene in the Greco-Roman World* (PhD thesis, Duke University 2010). https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/3120/NakedandUnashamedFinalSubmission.pdf.

Woodward 2015

K. Woodward, *The Politics of In/Visibility. Being There* (London 2015).

Zimmer 1987

G. Zimmer, *Spiegel im Antikenmuseum* (Berlin 1987).

Züchner 1942

W. Züchner, *Griechische Klappspiegel*, Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Ergänzungsheft 14 (Berlin 1942).