

ADAPTATION OF TRADITIONAL MATERIAL IN THE GLAUCUS-DIOMEDES EPISODE

JULIA HAIG GAISSER

Cambridge, England

Oral poetry is characterized by the presence of self-contained digressions that are not organically related to the main plot of the poem.¹ It is the purpose of this study to examine Homer's use and probable adaptation of traditional material in such an episode—the encounter of Glaucus and Diomedes in *Iliad* 6.

A most instructive discussion of Homer's use of myth in digressions is given by M. M. Willcock in his article, "Mythological Paradeigma in the *Iliad*."² Willcock demonstrates that Homer is by no means bound to the "standard" form of a myth, that he often modifies tales to suit the context in which they are to appear. In the *paradeigma* of Niobe, for example, the detail of Niobe's eating is added to the story, because Achilles is encouraging Priam to eat.³ The traditional legend of Meleager also, in his opinion, has been modified by the addition of the wrath motif, withdrawal of the hero from battle, and catalog of suppliants, in order to make the Meleager story parallel with that of Achilles.⁴

In the present discussion I will try to determine how far this idea may be valid for the Glaucus-Diomedes episode, and will suggest that the poet has modified traditional material not only to achieve a resemblance of detail on the plot level (as in Willcock's examples), but also to secure an artistic effect.

The encounter of Glaucus and Diomedes takes place between

¹ J. H. Gaisser, "A Structural Analysis of the Digressions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *HSCP* 73 (1968) 1-43.

² *CQ* n.s. 14 (1964) 141-54.

³ Willcock (above, note 2) 141, following J. T. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches* (Lund 1949) 99.

⁴ Willcock (above, note 2) 148-53.

Hector's departure from the battlefield and his arrival at the city gates, when the regular action of the poem is resumed. The meeting is not referred to again in the poem.

The episode falls naturally into three sections that will be considered separately: Diomedes' challenge and the story of Lycurgus (119-43), the genealogy of Glaucus (144-211), and Diomedes' reply and the exchange of armor (212-36).

DIOMEDES' CHALLENGE

Diomedes' challenge takes the form of a *paradeigma*, the myth of Dionysus and Lycurgus, which he adduces as proof that it is dangerous to fight against the gods. The story is one of the traditional rejection myths associated with the coming of Dionysus to Greece.⁵

Diomedes' telling of this story has special point, coming as it does on the heels of his *Aristeia* in Book 5. In fact, there seems to be a definite disparity between Diomedes' present reluctance to oppose a god and his ichor-thirsty conduct in Book 5.⁶ This apparent contradiction, however, can be resolved by examining Diomedes' circumstances and behavior in the *Aristeia*.

In Book 5 Diomedes is raised to a special plane of strength and insight by Athena.⁷ For a time he is allowed to exceed his mortal lot—to distinguish gods from mortals and even to wound the gods Aphrodite and Ares. Yet even at the height of his *Aristeia*, Diomedes is seen to be well aware of his limitations as a mortal.

This is shown particularly in his various encounters with gods. He is tempted to flee Aeneas and Pandarus, but will not, because of his fear of Athena (5.251-56). He wounds Aphrodite (330-51), having been given a special dispensation by Athena to do so (130-32), and understanding Aphrodite's limited powers in war (330-33). He refrains from attacking Apollo and Aeneas (440-44). He gives way before Hector, recognizing and fearing the god Ares beside him

⁵ For a discussion of rejection myths, see E. R. Dodds ed., Euripides' *Bacchae* (Oxford 1960) xxv-xxviii.

⁶ Walter Leaf (*Iliad*², vol. 1, p. 256) calls Diomedes' statement a "crying contradiction—a contradiction perhaps the most patent in the *Iliad*, and one which can in no way be palliated."

⁷ 5.1-8, 124-32, 826-34.

(596-606). Later, with the aid and permission of Athena, he wounds Ares.

Diomedes' special powers in Book 5, however, are only temporary. They are associated with the special favor of Athena and are revoked when she departs from the battlefield with Hera at the end of the book (907-9). By the time of his challenge to Glaucus, then, Diomedes has returned to his mortal footing.⁸ Now he tells the story of Lycurgus, who scored a temporary victory against Dionysus, but ultimately was ruined because the gods resented his insolence.

In telling this story, Diomedes is neither hypocritical nor inconsistent. Even in his *Aristeia*, as we have seen, he was wary of offending the gods. The *paradeigma* of Lycurgus confirms this position and gives the rationale for his behavior. Perhaps it is too much to claim that Diomedes is introspective here; clearly, however, he is expressing one of the fundamental aspects of his own nature.

Homer, then, has deepened the characterization of Diomedes by putting into his mouth one of the traditional rejection myths, a myth, which, as we shall see, probably was familiar in an entirely different context. Much of the art of the passage lies in its proximity to the *Aristeia* of Book 5, to which it forms both a pendant and a commentary. It must be emphasized, however, that the connection of the *paradeigma* with Book 5 is not an organic one. The effect is achieved not by relating or subordinating the one to the other, but rather by juxtaposition of the episodes as independent entities.

THE GENEALOGY OF GLAUCUS

Glaucus' immediate reply to Diomedes is the famous comparison (6.146-49):

οἷή περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν·
 φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἅλλα δέ θ' ὕλη
 τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἑάρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη·
 ὥς ἀνδρῶν γενεή ἣ μὲν φύει, ἣ δ' ἀπολήγει.

Men, as fragile as the leaves, perish and are replaced in a constant

⁸ One clear sign of Diomedes' loss of superhuman power is the fact that he is no longer able to tell a god from a mortal (6.123-29).

cycle of growth and decay.⁹ Clearly this simile is appropriate to the genealogy that follows, since a genealogy is in its very nature a reminder of the cyclic quality of human life, and of the relative insignificance of any one individual.

The genealogy is a typical device in Homer.¹⁰ It is generally used as a means of presenting a character's credentials—to impress either himself or his audience with his stature as a hero. In the genealogy of Glaucus, however, we see an obvious difference of function, for this pedigree, unlike the others, has an application beyond the narrow one of presenting the character in the context of his ancestors and the heroic tradition. It is used, not for glorification of Glaucus himself, but as a specific illustration of the general theme, which is the cyclic and transitory nature of life.

Moreover, the episode is substantially longer than the other three Homeric genealogies. It is 62 lines long, compared to 14, 29, and 35 lines for the genealogies of Diomedes, Aeneas, and Theoclymenus. It also differs from the other genealogies in the degree of emphasis placed upon a single ancestor, Bellerophon. It is not uncommon for the poet to pause over the exploits of one ancestor in a pedigree,¹¹ but in the other examples no single character is allowed to become dominant to the same extent as Bellerophon, whose tale takes up 51 of the 62 verses of the episode (6.155–205).

Thus it appears at the outset that the genealogy of Glaucus, though conventional in type, deviates significantly from the tradition as exemplified by the other Homeric genealogies.

Moreover, the story of Bellerophon as Homer gives it omits several interesting details given in other sources. In order to understand the nature and significance of these omissions, it will be convenient to consider first the story as told by Homer, and then the versions of other authors.

Glaucus tells us here that Bellerophon was the son of his remote

⁹ The comparison of mankind to the leaves appears (with somewhat different emphasis) in *Iliad* 21.463–66; Semonides, frag. 29.2; Aristophanes, *Birds* 685.

¹⁰ For example, the genealogies of Diomedes (14. 113–26), Aeneas (20.213–41), and Theoclymenus (*Od.* 15.223–57).

¹¹ For example, the story of the mares of Erichthonios (20.219–29) in the genealogy of Aeneas, and the story of Melampus (*Od.* 15.225–42) in the genealogy of Theoclymenus.

ancestor, another Glaucus. The young Bellerophon was favored by the gods in looks and strength, but the king Proitus contrived against him and drove him from the land of Argos. He did this on the false testimony of his wife Anteia, who claimed that the virtuous Bellerophon had tried to ravish her. The truth of the matter, of course, was that he had refused her amorous advances, and she, consumed by rage and disappointment, had lied to her husband.¹² Proitus was angry with Bellerophon, but, fearing to kill him, sent him to his father-in-law in Lycia, bearing "baneful signs" on a folded tablet, so that the father-in-law should see to it that he died. For nine days Bellerophon was royally entertained in Lycia, but on the tenth he showed the tablet to the king. Thereupon he was submitted to a series of ordeals. After he had performed all of these successfully, the king recognized his power, and gave him his daughter and half the kingdom.¹³ Bellerophon had three distinguished children by her. Later, however, he lost favor with the gods and wandered alone on the Aleian plain. The gods also killed two of his children.

The scholia¹⁴ tell us that Bellerophon was in reality the son of Poseidon and that he was called Bellerophon from his murder of Bellerus, a prince of Corinth.¹⁵ Fleeing the consequences of this homicide, he came to Argos to seek purification. After Proitus sent him to Lycia, he killed the Chimaera with the aid of the winged horse Pegasus. He later incurred the wrath of the gods by attempting to fly up to heaven on Pegasus' back in order to spy upon them. Zeus

¹² This is the first of several common folk-tale motifs occurring in the story. A detailed analysis of folk-tale themes in the Bellerophon story is given by Reinhold Strömberg, "Die Bellerophon-Erzählung in der Ilias," *CM* 22 (1961) 1-15.

¹³ Strömberg (above, note 12) 8.

¹⁴ Wilhelm Dindorf, *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* (Oxford 1877) 3.287. A similar version, including a murder committed by Bellerophon, is found in Tzetzes, *Scholia in Lycophron* 17 (M. Müller, ed., Tzetzes' *Scholia in Lycophron* [Leipzig 1811] 3.292-96.)

¹⁵ The correct interpretation and derivation of the name Bellerophon is a matter of dispute. But it is not important here whether the name is Greek (P. Kretschmer, "Bellerophon," *Glotta* 31 [1951]; Rhys Carpenter, "Argeiphontes: A Suggestion," *AJA* 54 [1950] 179-80), or Anatolian with a false Greek etymology ascribed to it later (L. Malten, "Bellerophon," *JDAI* 40 [1925]; "Homer und die lykischen Fürsten," *Hermes* 79 [1944]). The point here is not the ultimate origin of the name, but rather the name as it would have been understood by Homer and his Greek audience.

sent a gadfly, which stung Pegasus, and Bellerophon was thrown to earth. Maimed by his fall, he wandered on the Aleian plain.

Hesiod¹⁶ says that Bellerophon was in reality the child of Poseidon, and that he killed the Chimaera with the help of Pegasus.

Pindar mentions Bellerophon twice. In *Olympian* 13 he tells how Athena helped Bellerophon yoke Pegasus, and how Bellerophon vanquished the Chimaera, the Amazons, and the Solymoi. The hero's end is passed over with a brief reference (91): *διασωπάσομαι οἱ μόνον ἐγώ*. No reason for his downfall is given, but this cryptic line implies that the story was well known. In *Isthmian* 7 Pindar completes the tale with the story of Bellerophon's flight to heaven and subsequent fall from the back of Pegasus.

In all, then, Homer has omitted several elements of the story that appear elsewhere. First, and most important, in Homer we hear nothing of the winged horse Pegasus, who has an important role in two of Bellerophon's adventures in the other accounts—the killing of the Chimaera and the flight to heaven. This second exploit is not mentioned at all in Homer, although its omission creates a gap in the story, so that no reason is given for Bellerophon's loss of divine favor and his miserable punishment. Pegasus appears in all our three additional sources, and the flight to heaven is mentioned both by Pindar and the scholiast.

In all probability the horse Pegasus was not unknown to Homer. The fact that Pegasus is prominent in the accounts of Hesiod and Pindar is evidence that he belonged to an early tradition.¹⁷ It might be said that Homer omits Pegasus on the ground that he is too fantastic a creature to belong in epic. Yet fantasy is not altogether absent from the *Iliad*, as the presence of the Chimaera in this very episode and of the talking horse Xanthus¹⁸ later on in the poem attests.

Secondly, Homer makes no reference to the story of the murder of Bellerus. Of our three sources, only the scholiast tells about the

¹⁶ *Theogony* 325; frag. 43a, 81–83, in R. Merkelbach and M. L. West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford 1967).

¹⁷ Further evidence is given by the appearance of Bellerophon and Pegasus on archaic vases, some of the seventh century (M. L. Schmitt, "Bellerophon and the Chimaera in Archaic Greek Art," *AJA* 70 [1966] 341–47; Frank Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage* [Marburg 1956] 168–78).

¹⁸ *Iliad* 19.404–17.

murder and the flight to Argos for purification. Walter Leaf was extremely critical of this version:

But this of course is not Homeric, the whole conception of purification being later. In fact, with the single exception of the name *Ἰππόνοος* it is merely made up from the story itself to explain how Bellerophon, a Corinthian, is found with the Tirynthian Proitos.¹⁹

In the absence of other evidence it is impossible to make a final judgment about the scholiast's tale. Leaf's objection to it seems to be based on the theory that purification for blood-guilt is un-Homeric. The allusion to purification by itself, however, does not necessarily show that the whole of the story of Bellerus is a late invention on the part of the scholiast. Murder is by no means uncommon in the poems; its usual sequel is that the murderer is forced to flee his homeland in order to escape the vengeful kinsmen of the murdered man. The stories of both Patroclus in the *Iliad* and Theoclymenus in the *Odyssey* follow this pattern of murder and flight.²⁰ Bellerophon's story might well belong to the same category; certainly (purification aside) the flight to Proitos would be the reasonable sequel to murder, especially in view of the fact that Bellerus supposedly had been a powerful man in Corinth.²¹ In any case, Homer gives no explanation for Bellerophon's presence in Argos.

Finally, Bellerophon is represented as the son of Glaucus, not Poseidon, as in Hesiod and the scholia.²² Pindar also (*Ol.* 13.67-69) seems to consider him at least a descendant of Poseidon:²³

*Εὐδεις, Αἰολίδα βασιλεῦ;
ἄγε φίλτρον τόδ' ἵππειον δέκευ,
καὶ Δαμαίῳ νιν θύων ταῦρον ἀργᾶντα πατρὶ δεῖξον.*

¹⁹ Leaf (above, note 6) 269.

²⁰ Patroclus, *Iliad* 23.83-88; Theoclymenus, *Odyssey* 15.271-78.

²¹ Dindorf (above, note 14) 287.

²² There is a sea god Glaucus who is interchangeable with Poseidon, but this god is probably not meant here (Rolf Peppermüller, *Die Bellerophontessage: Ihre Herkunft und Geschichte* [Diss. Tübingen 1961] 52). As Peppermüller argues, the whole point of a genealogy is to point out the divine ancestry of a hero. Once this had been accomplished, as it would have been if Bellerophon's father Glaucus was the sea god, there would have been no point in carrying the pedigree back to Sisyphus, the son of Aeolus.

²³ The difficulty lies in the exact sense of the phrase *Δαμαίῳ πατρὶ*. Leaf (above, note 6) 272 says the phrase is consistent with the story that Bellerophon was the son of Poseidon, but that it does not necessarily imply it. J. E. Sandys' Pindar, Loeb ed., 139) translates it as "grandfather."

It must be noted, however that there is a line in Homer's account which recalls the story of a divine parent or ancestor. After Bellerophon had completed the ordeals in Lycia, the king received him kindly because "he knew that he was the strong son of a god" (6.191):

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ γέγνωσκε θεοῦ γόνον ἦν ἔοντα.

The question now is why these important elements are lacking in Homer's version of the Bellerophon story. The stories of Bellerus and the flight to heaven have one point in common: they concern the wrongdoing of Bellerophon.

Homer's omission of Bellerophon's transgressions may stem from the characterization of Glaucus. That is, it is appropriate for the young hero to suppress discreditable details about one of his ancestors, especially when speaking to an enemy. From Glaucus' point of view, then, it is natural to gloss over these embarrassing details which would present his ancestor as a murderer and a spy upon the gods. Diomedes makes a similar omission in his own genealogy (14.110-27). He says that his father was a wanderer, but does not mention that he was forced to flee his native land after committing murder.²⁴ The reason for his wanderings is glossed over with the expression (14.120):

ὥς γάρ που Ζεὺς ἤθελε καὶ θεοὶ ἄλλοι.

More important, however, these crimes are specific reasons for Bellerophon's reversals of fortune—the flight to Argos, and the hatred of the gods at the end of the story. Because of the murder in Corinth, Bellerophon became a fugitive, under the power of Proitus. Because of the flight to heaven, he incurred the final enmity of the gods and lost his children. But in Glaucus' version the vicissitudes of Bellerophon are mysterious and inexplicable; but his happiness and his misfortunes seem to result from the arbitrary whim of the gods.

These unaccountable changes in the life of the individual Bellerophon are consistent with the original comparison of mankind to the leaves and illustrate the general pattern of human life. Success and failure alternate in the life of a man; nature conforms to the recurrent pattern of rebirth and death. This idea is relevant to Glaucus and the imme-

²⁴ Dindorf (above, note 14) 4.45.

diated danger he faces from Diomedes.²⁵ In a wider sense it may also be viewed as a comment on the tragic nature of the poem as a whole. Addition of the murder and the flight to heaven to the story of Bellerophon would change the focus dramatically. We would lose the picture of man as the plaything of arbitrary gods and see instead only a guilty individual who is responsible for his own misfortunes.

Evidently the poet has been at some pains to present the view of Bellerophon which I have described. For example, the horse Pegasus is omitted, not only in connection with the flight to heaven, but also from the slaying of the Chimaera. This is done perhaps because Pegasus was so closely associated with the illicit flight that any mention of him, even in another context, would evoke the spying expedition. Moreover, it seems that Bellerophon's connection with Poseidon is suppressed in order to lay stress upon his role as a helpless mortal, and to emphasize the chasm that exists between man and god. Bellerophon the son of Glaucus is more helpless, more believable in the role of innocent pawn of the gods, than Bellerophon the son of Poseidon. It is a small point and was evidently forgotten by verse 191:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ γίγνωσκε θεοῦ γόνον ἦν ἐόντα.

The same picture of man plagued by arbitrary deities is enhanced by the style of the digression. G. S. Kirk has a long discussion on the style as exemplifying what he calls "the abbreviated reference technique."²⁶ He lists several of the expressions whose cryptic character contributes a further air of mystery to Bellerophon's reversals of fortune. It is significant that many of these are connected with the gods and their role in Bellerophon's story:

159: Ζεὺς γάρ οἱ ὑπὸ σκήπτρῳ ἐδάμασσεν.

171: αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ Λυκίηνδε θεῶν ὑπ' ἀμύμονι πομπῇ.

183: καὶ τὴν κατέπεφνε θεῶν τεράεσσι πιθήσας.

200: ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ κείνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν.

Moreover, three of these verses are found in places where Homer has omitted important details from the story. Verse 159, for example,

²⁵ J. D. Craig, "ΧΡΥΣΕΑ ΧΑΛΚΕΙΩΝ," *CR* n.s. 17 (1967) 243-45, discusses the entire episode from the point of view of Glaucus and his fear of Diomedes.

²⁶ G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge 1962) 164-66.

seems to be used as an explanation for Bellerophon's presence in Argos and dependence upon Proitus, details which the scholiast accounts for with the story of the murder of Bellerus. Verse 183 occurs in the story of the slaying of the Chimaera, and perhaps is a veiled reference to Pegasus. Finally, line 200 is a bare mention of Bellerophon's final fall from the favor of the gods, at a point where our other sources tell of the flight to heaven.

It seems, then, that these lines have been used both to smooth over the gaps in the story left by the omitted details and to contribute to the impression of mysterious intervention by the gods in mortal affairs.²⁷

If this interpretation of the digression is correct, Homer has modified the traditional tale of Bellerophon to illustrate the general statement that "the generations of men are like the generations of leaves." The transitory nature of mankind in general is exemplified by the inexplicable vicissitudes of a single man. Homer's modification of this traditional material has taken the form of omission of details which would be inconsistent with the effect he is trying to produce.

DIOMEDES' REPLY

Diomedes replies, claiming Glaucus as a guest-friend by virtue of the fact that his grandfather Oineus had once entertained Bellerophon.

This final scene of the digression does not contain a myth comparable with those of Lycurgus and Bellerophon. The reference to Oineus' entertainment of Bellerophon is very brief (6.216-21), and does not occur elsewhere, so far as I have been able to determine. We have seen Homer's adaptation of traditional stories to his own context; this story may well have been invented by Homer, drawing upon the traditional figures of Oineus and Bellerophon and the traditional pattern for the guest-host relationship. The main point of the story is to illustrate the inherited friendship of Glaucus and Diomedes; its principal event is the exchange of gifts between Oineus and Bellerophon.

²⁷ This is the same impression created by the cryptic phrase *ὥς γάρ που Ζεὺς ἤθελε καὶ θεοὶ ἄλλοι* in 14.120, in the genealogy of Diomedes.

At this point we are reminded of the remarks of Willcock and Kakridis on the story of Niobe. "Niobe eats because Priam must eat."²⁸ In the present context, then, Bellerophon and Oineus must exchange gifts because Diomedes and Glaucus are to exchange armor.

The particular interest of the scene resides in its presentation of Glaucus and Diomedes together. In their speeches we have seen something of the *Weltanschauung* of each. Diomedes is fundamentally an optimist, a non-tragic hero.²⁹ In the story of Lycurgus he makes the point that the gods punish mortals who dare to oppose them; by implication, the man who does not oppose the gods will be safe from their wrath. Glaucus, on the other hand, is pessimistic; the story of Bellerophon, as he tells it, shows mortals as the victims of the gods. Diomedes' outlook is closely bound up with his own character and fate; that of Glaucus informs the poem as a whole.

I have suggested that the stories of Lycurgus and Bellerophon were artfully juxtaposed by Homer to present a special effect. Several scholars have proposed that the two stories were originally found together in another context. T. B. L. Webster suggested that the tales, together with Achilles' story of Peleus (24.534-42), were originally entries in a catalog poem describing the mutability of human fortune.

Yet it is still possible to see behind Diomedes' account of Lycurgus, Glaukos' account of Bellerophon, and Achilles' account of Peleus a shorter poem in which the three heroes were listed probably with others as instances of prosperity which turned into adversity. The Bellerophon story is linked to the Lycurgus story by the line "but when he *too* became hateful to all the gods." The Bellerophon story starts "on him the gods bestowed beauty and lovely courage," and the Peleus story starts "So also the gods gave Peleus glorious gifts." Peleus' transition to adversity comes in much the same form: "but on him too the god laid evil."³⁰

H. L. Lorimer took a similar view of the relation of the stories to each other.³¹ Similarly, Gilbert Murray proposed a relation between the stories of Lycurgus and Bellerophon based on the connectives, but

²⁸ See above, note 3.

²⁹ For a general discussion of Diomedes' character, see Cedric Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass. 1958) 164-69 and 222.

³⁰ T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London 1958) 186.

³¹ H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments* (London 1950) 471.

instead of a catalog he suggested that they originally belonged to the cyclic poem *Corinthiaca*.³²

Of course none of this can be proved, since the stories themselves are the only evidence for such a catalog, but some connection between the tales is an excellent explanation for the otherwise awkward *καὶ* which introduces Bellerophon's fall (6.200): *ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ κείνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσι*.³³ Omissions have been made in the story of Bellerophon, but a version which included the spying escapade would provide an excellent mate for the Lycurgus story, perhaps as part of a catalog relating the evil fates suffered by mortals who transgressed against the gods.

³² Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*², (Oxford 1907) 197–99.

³³ Leaf (above, note 6) 272–73 notes that “*καὶ* seems to indicate that they [lines 200–2] belong to another context, for it is not in relation with anything else.”