

# Plot Structures and Semantic Resonances in Ancient Greek 'Almost Incest' Narratives

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*Authors form characters based on types and . . . , given certain cues, we subsume characters under types. [Whether] the character structures activated in watching a film are the same ones that are activated in watching the world [or] . . . are particular to the film, our view of a character's ideas, motives, likely behaviours, our evaluation... and, our feelings about that character, are a function of both direct information and schemas—or, more likely, prototypes—cued by that information.*

(Hogan 129)

*[E.g., in the film Titanic,] the fact that Rose is marrying Cal for his money and is clearly disdainful of him...might very well trigger a gold digger prototype [or] ... even a "whore" prototype... or the feminist prototype, "independent woman." Thus, even in this case, the same elements in the narrative may fit into quite different cognitive structures, yielding contradictory assessments and feelings, depending on the propensities of the particular viewer.*

(Hogan 132)

*Blends can be constructed if two stories can be construed as sharing abstract structure.*

(Turner qtd. in Hogan 111)

*...the text's meaning can be grasped without identifying the intertext but is enriched, often quite substantially, by its discovery.*

(Doležel, *Heterocosmica* 201)

In *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* Lubomír Doležel presents a diagram that depicts 'transduction' as an open, unlimited chain of transmission between Text 1, Text 2, and Text n (204). Doležel draws on Vodička's notion of concretization as he explores intertextuality in terms of possible world semantics. In an interactive literary communication, he argues, Reader 1 constructs a fictional world [W(F)1] that corresponds to the one constructed by Author 1: Text 1. Another Reader 2 constructs a fictional world W(F)2 that corresponds to the one

created by Author 2—Text 2—but it contains allusions to W(F)1, by which it is shaped in part.

I would like to test the usefulness of transduction in the context of oral poetics, in cases where there is no concrete Text 1 to serve as the intertext, but there is evidence of a story pattern (a type, a Gestalt) lurking beneath the surface of a second and third narrative. The pattern on which I will focus, Parricide-Incest (“P-I”), would have been familiar to Homeric audiences from a number of stories from the traditional repertoire of Greek mythology and saga. I will demonstrate how an interpreter attuned to the P-I story pattern might respond with richer associations and stronger emotions to two passages from Homer’s *Iliad*, Phoenix’s autobiographic narrative in Book 9, 446-484 and Glaukon’s narrative of his ancestor Bellerophon in Book 6, 152-211.

In archaic Greek literature the P-I pattern finds expression in a number of tales of intergenerational strife within divine and human families. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus tells his Phaeacian hosts of all the heroines he met in his trip to the Underworld:

‘I saw the beautiful Epicasta, Oedipus’ mother,  
 who in the ignorance of her mind had done a monstrous  
 thing when she married her own son. He killed his father  
 and married her, but the gods soon made it all known to mortals  
 But he, for all his sorrows, in beloved Thebes continued  
 to be lord over the Kadmeians, all through the bitter designing  
 of the gods; while she went down to Hades of the gates, the strong  
 [one,  
 knotting a noose and hanging sheer from the high ceiling,  
 in the constraint of her sorrow, but left to him who survived her  
 all the sorrows that are brought to pass by a mother’s furies.’  
 (*Odyssey*. 11. 271-280)

Explicit in Odysseus’ tale within his Adventures are the motifs of parricide and incest. So is the suicide by hanging of Epicasta (= Jocasta) and her ignorance, when she committed the monstrous deed, of her son/husband’s identity. What the gods’ eventually reveal to mortals anticipates by nearly 300 years Sophocles’ treatment in *Oedipus the King*, ca. 426-420. In the early Homeric version, Oedipus is not exiled but continues to rule the Kadmeians (= Thebans) despite his sorrows brought about by his mother’s furies (avengers of family crimes). Odysseus, as narrator, seems to present Epicasta’s focalization: her ignorance, her suicide, her furies—all reflect his reprisal of her first-person account of events when he encountered her in the Underworld. As narrator, he captures her focalization.

A fuller and still early P-I narrative appears in the Succession Myth

of Hesiod's *Theogony* of ca. 700 BCE, albeit with many expansions and adaptations to suit the purposes of this cosmogonic poem. The narrative is told in segments by the Muse-inspired Hesiodic narrator. Whatever the relative chronology between the *Iliad* and the *Theogony*, we can assume that both Hesiod and Homer were drawing their fabulae for their respective tales from a larger oral tradition, and we know that Hesiod's narrative is indebted to its ancient Near Eastern antecedents (see West). Hesiod's text, though not an ideal comparandum, strengthens my argument that the two *Iliadic* passages under consideration can be understood as transductions of the well-attested P-I pattern.

In the *Theogony* Gaia begets Ouranos equal to herself; then, after mingling together, mother with son, they produce three sets of offspring: the twelve Titans, the three Cyclopes, and the three Hundred-Handers. Ouranos hates the Cyclopes and the Hundred-Handers and hides them inside their mother's womb. Enraged and in pain, Gaia asks the Titans for aid, using *oratio recta* in her three-line appeal. In a matching three-line speech the youngest Titan, Kronos, volunteers. Mother and son join forces against Ouranos, as Kronos embraces Gaia's plan and, with the tooth-edged sickle she has fashioned, castrates the father whom he hates. Then he becomes king of the gods. He mates with his sister Rhea, and they produce the six Olympians. Much to Rhea's dismay, Kronos swallows each child as it emerges from her womb—except for the youngest. Gaia helps Rhea trick Kronos into swallowing a swaddled stone instead of baby Zeus. Meanwhile, rescued from obliteration, Zeus grows to manhood in Crete and then, in his prime of youth, he returns and wins the Titanomachy, a ten-year war against Kronos and his allies, with help initially from the Cyclopes and later from the Hundred-Handers, whom he has liberated from imprisonment in Tartarus (or in Gaia's womb). He gains their allegiance in a second *oratio recta* exchange. After his victory, which devastated the earth, Zeus effectively exiles Kronos and his allies to Tartarus and binds them there in jail, to be guarded by the Hundred-Handers. Mating with Tartarus, Earth produces a final 'youngest son', the dragon Typhon, who would have become king of the gods and men, had Zeus not taken note. Zeus defeats him in a deadly battle that again scorches the earth. Only then, at Earth's urging, do the gods elect Zeus king. At this point, he has not only displaced his father Kronos with finality but has eliminated a series of potential threats to his supremacy as well.

From this story I abstract a fabula that accommodates the three separate segments or moves of the story: Gaia – Ouranos – Kronos; Kronos – Rhea – Zeus; Zeus – a series of females culminating in Gaia – a series of challengers culminating in the dragon Typhon:

1. The father sires a series of sons.
  2. He hates and/or fears some of them.
    - i. because of their excessive manhood, size, or monstrosity (hybridity).
    - ii. because he has learned from an oracle that one of them will displace him.
  3. He tries to obliterate those dread sons
    - i. by repressing (= obliterating) them.
    - ii. by swallowing them as each is born.
    - iii. by swallowing the pregnant mother.
  4. With this act he dishonors/violates their mother.
  5. He also dishonors/violates their sons.
  6. The mother is enraged and in pain.
  7. She betrays her spouse
    - i. by enlisting the aid of their youngest son.
    - ii. by rescuing the threatened son and instructing him to retaliate later at the peak of youth (*hēbē*).
  8. The youngest son embraces her plan and punishes (= displaces) the father.
    - i. by castrating him.
    - ii. by defeating him in a battle or contest after he grows up in hiding, away from his natal home and returns at *hēbē*.
    - iii. He may receive aid from an ancestress (mother or grandmother).
  9. The victorious son becomes king, takes a bride, and sires sons.
  10. The defeated father curses or threatens his youngest son or all his sons.
  11. The victorious son exiles or murders his father (= parricide).
- Alternatively, instead of 9-11:
- 9b. The father defeats his son(s) and eliminates him/them as a threat (through murder or exile).
  - 10b. The father retains his kingdom and his wife as queen.

This version of the story anticipates by nearly 300 years Sophocles' treatment in *Oedipus the King*, ca. 426-420. Odysseus, as its narrator, captures and presents Epicasta's focalization on these events: her ignorance, her suicide, her furies. All reflect the narrator's reprisal of her first-person account of events when he encountered her in the Underworld. Explicit are the motifs of parricide and incest, as well as the mother/wife's suicide by hanging and her ignorance, when she committed the monstrous deed, of her son/husband's identity. After her death, in this early account, Oedipus is not exiled but continues to rule the Kadmeians despite his sorrows brought about by his mother's furies.

At slot 9-11 in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the victorious son, after committing parricide and solving the riddle of the sphinx, wins his father's kingdom and his own mother as queen and bride. In Hesiod's divine Succession Myth Ouranos, who is fatherless from the start, possesses his mother Gaia already and without any contest. Kronos weds Rhea, his sister, while Zeus mates with a series of females, culminating in his marriage to his sister Hera. Only Zeus of the three male figures in the Succession Myth both defeats his father and fends off a series of

challengers who might have displaced him.

The PI pattern, I suggest, underlies a number of familiar 'almost incest' myths, among them the Father's Concubine, the King's Wife (usually labeled Potiphar's Wife), and even the Bride-Contest, where the father-in-law and son-in-law play out the conflictual paternal and filial roles. Knowledge of the PI pattern (as outlined above) shapes an interpreter's reception of two passages from the *Iliad*, to which I now turn.

### Father's Concubine Tale

The defining feature of this plot-type is a son's act of sleeping with his father's concubine. This occurs in Phoenix's autodiegetic tale at *Iliad* 9.446-484, which is the earliest 'Father's Concubine' narrative in extant Greek literature.<sup>1</sup> Here, within the famous embassy scene, Phoenix is the second of three speakers sent by Agamemnon to bring Achilles back to battle, and he uses two stories and a parable to persuade his youthful ward (whom he raised almost as his own child) not to be stubborn and unyielding. At this moment, the Achaians are in desperate need of their best warrior, and Phoenix adapts his narrative accordingly. Nevertheless, the logic of the story as a recasting of the traditional P-I tale comes through.

Therefore apart from you, dear child, I would not be willing  
 To be left behind, were not the god in person to promise  
 He would scale away my old age and make me a young man blossoming  
 As I was that time when I first left Hellas, the land of fair women,  
 Running from the hatred of Orchemenos' son Amyntor,  
 My father, who hated me for the sake of a fair-haired mistress (*pellakis*).  
 For he made love to her himself, and kept dishonoring his own wife,  
 My mother; who was forever taking my knees and entreating me  
 To lie with this mistress instead so that she would hate the old man.  
 I was persuaded and did it; and my father when he heard of it straightway  
 Called down his curses, and invoked against me the dreaded furies  
 That I might never have any son born of my seed to dandle  
 On my knees; and the divinities, Zeus of the underworld  
 And Persephone, the honored goddess, accomplished his curses.  
 Then I took it into my mind to cut him down with the sharp bronze,  
 But some one of the immortals checked my anger, reminding me  
 Of rumor among the people and of men's maledictions repeated,  
 That I might not be called a parricide among the Achaians.  
 (*Iliad*. 9. 444-53)

From this text I abstract the following fabula:

1. Father kept loving a concubine and kept dishonoring his wife by sleeping

- with the concubine (implication, not with the wife).
2. She retaliated by frequently beseeching their son to sleep with the concubine, so that she would hate the old man (*gerôn*).
  3. The son, in his prime (*hebôdsa*), repeatedly refused.
  4. Finally, the son obeyed his mother and slept one time with the *pallakis* (two punctual aorists).
  5. The father found out.
  6. He cursed his son to sterility and impotence or blinded him.
  7. The son wanted to kill his father but restrained himself, or some god checked his anger, so he might not be called a parricide.
  8. Kinsmen kept beseeching him (not to be angry?).
  9. They put him under house arrest and kept watch.
  10. He escaped and went into (voluntary) exile far away, running from the hatred of his father.
  11. He became childless, probably impotent; the gods answered the father's prayer.
  12. No outcome is specified for either the unnamed *pallakis* or the unnamed mother or for the father.

Here the second move begins, as the son finds a new home in Phthia on the estate of Peleus, known for his generosity to strangers, who gave him his love, even as a father loves his own son, and made him rich. There Phoenix raised Achilles and made him, as it were, his own child.

The fact that Phoenix is recounting his life-experience to the very one whose father welcomed him as a young fugitive and gave him a second home guarantees the reliability of his first person narrative. The addressee, Achilles, already knows its essential features. The story is further authenticated by Phoenix's childlessness at Troy (i.e., in the fictional world of the text), which confirms what he says as a character-narrator, that the gods fulfilled his father's curse. Phoenix slants the tale to mitigate his own blame while at the same time, in the hope of persuading Achilles to relent and rejoin the Greek forces, he offers his impetuous young self as a negative exemplum for Achilles to avoid.

Phoenix's autodiegetic story, like all PI narratives, is a powerful tale of a transgression that occurs at the critical moment in the life of the son. He begins by telling Achilles he would not abandon him, "even were the god in person to promise he would scale away my old age and make me a young man blossoming / as I was that time when I first left Hellas...". Thus he emphasizes his age-grade difference from Amyntor, who will be designated by his mother as a *gerôn*, an old man, while he was in the prime of youth (*hebôdsa*) when these events transpired. Compare how Zeus too in the Succession Myth was at the peak of his youth when he returned to vanquish his father and claim the throne, and so was Oedipus in Sophocles' version of the Theban saga, *Oedipus Tyrannos*. In fact, all such P-I stories contain such intergenerational conflict, as we shall see below.



A mother is dishonored here as in all P-I tales. Amyntor kept dishonoring Phoenix's mother by his preference of the concubine and his implicit refusal to have sex with her. Compare how Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus dishonor Gaia, Rhea, and Metis, respectively, by either appropriating or assaulting their procreative function. In addition, collusion against the father by a mother-son pair is a motif throughout. Such collusion is isomorphic with mother/son incest: it reiterates, with a difference, the initial uncontested incest between Earth and Sky.

As the secondary narrator and focalizer, Phoenix stresses that he transgressed only once, but each of his parents did so repeatedly. Thus he exculpates himself to the degree possible, despite the paternal curse. In particular, the three frequentatives in close proximity for the parents' actions (*phileesken*, *atimeske* and *lissesketō*) are answered by two aorists for his own: *pithomên* (I obeyed) and *edraxa* (I did it).

A curse or a threat is present here as in all the P-I tales: Once Amyntor learns of his son's deed of supplanting him in bed, he responds *as if* Phoenix had in fact committed incest. His paternal curse of childlessness is the strongest punishment for such a sexual crime. Moreover, in later versions of the story—Euripides' *Phoenix*, fr. 86N2, Ar. *Acharnians* 421, Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.13.8, Tzetzes on Lyc. 421—Amyntor blinds Phoenix, a metaphor for castration (Devereux 36-49), in Apollodorus on the false accusation of the concubine. Compare Ouranos' reaction to Kronos's betrayal: he threatens the Titans with eventual vengeance (210: *tisin*), which Rhea ultimately facilitates through her rescue of Zeus, an act specifically designed to avenge her father and her offspring (cf. 472: *teisaito*). Laius, on the other hand, has no opportunity to curse Oedipus before the murder at the crossroads; but the motif of the paternal curse resurfaces in the next generation, when Oedipus (in Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonos*) curses his two sons, who eventually commit 'autoctony', killing each other at the same instant (cf. Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes*).

Phoenix's wish to kill his father invokes the actual parricide committed by Oedipus (*Odyssey* xi.273 and later in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* 800-813) as well as Zeus' banishment of the immortal Kronos to Tartarus, a kind of death. While the son displaces the father in all these tales, in Father's Concubine his victory is less conclusive. Phoenix triumphs in bed, but he never realizes his desire to commit parricide, and he, not his father, goes into exile, albeit voluntarily; moreover, he is childless and probably impotent as a result of the paternal curse. Amyntor's outcome too is mixed, at best. His 'triumph' over his son evokes the alternative ending of the P/I tale (expressed in Zeus' sequential victories over potential usurpers) and yet his curse reverts to him as well. Amyntor will have no grandson to dandle on *his* knees, no son, no heir. As the story continues, in a second move, Phoenix

experiences some restitution: after losing his native land and natal family, he gains a new home and Achilles as a surrogate child.

In the PI tale-type, the father's dread occurs twice: at birth, in anticipation of the later displacement, and again at *hébê*, when the son has come of age and returns to claim the throne and queen. Since Phoenix begins his narrative at his *hébê*, eliding his birth and childhood, we do not know if his father, like the divine fathers in the *Theogony*, anticipated his own displacement. In fact Amyntor's perspective—on his wife's betrayal, for example—is absent from Phoenix's account. We do not even know what specific information Amyntor had when he cursed his son for sleeping with his concubine.

A few other distinctive features of the Phoenix tale deserve mention. The role of Amyntor's wife is split off from that of the Amyntor's concubine and current sexual partner. From the focalization of Amyntor and perhaps of Phoenix, the unnamed concubine (whom Apollodorus calls Phthia) is indeed a surrogate for the unnamed wife. Moreover, like Gaia in the *Theogony*, the mother/wife exercises extraordinary agency: both females are trying to restore equilibrium, aided by their sons. Phoenix's mother exploits her son's sexuality to reclaim her husband. Phoenix does not volunteer, like Kronos, but complies reluctantly, after repeated entreaties. Both Phoenix and Kronos implement their mother's scheme and, in both narratives, their alliances undermine the sexuality of the father—either simply through displacement in bed or through castration and jailing in Tartarus. This outcome resembles Oedipus' double displacement of his father—as the king of Thebes and as the husband of Epicasta/Jocasta.

Phoenix assigns a motivation to his mother, “so that she [the concubine] will hate the old man”. This implies that, in setting up the competition between old father and virile son, she expected her son to win. The assigned motive is never authenticated: we only have Phoenix's words, focalized through his adolescent or adult lens, or both. In contrast, in the first move of the Succession Myth the narrator quotes Gaia's first-person speech to her Titan children: she wants to get even with Ouranos, since he was the first one to commit an evil. In Homer's account Epicasta has no specific motive: she acts in ignorance of her genealogical relation to the newcomer who wins her hand (Edmunds 13-31, see espec. 16-17).

### King's Wife Tale and Bride-Contest

The second Iliadic passage is a more peripheral or marginal member, in Eleanor Rosch's sense, of the category I'm calling Parricide-Incest. But the structure of its narrative and a number of its elements bear a family resemblance to the P-I tale type that, I am arguing, lurks beneath its



surface. This passage at *Iliad* 6.152-211 has two prominent episodes or moves: the King's Wife's Tale and the Bride-Contest. The narrator Glaukon, a Lykian ally of the Trojans, explains his genealogy to the Achaean Diomedes as they meet on the battlefield. His narration is thus part of a vaunt: I am the grandson of the hero Bellerophon, once of Argos, whose life, fraught with dangers not of his making, was mended when he settled in Lykia, and then (for unspecified reasons) became fraught again.<sup>11</sup> Whatever the vicissitudes of Bellerophon's fortunes, his grandson as internal narrator focuses on the endpoint most relevant to him, the fact that his father, one of the hero's offspring, survived to beget him and instruct him in heroic values; inspired by these, he has come forward to engage the formidable Diomedes. In other versions of this story, such as Euripides' *Sthenobolia*, which survives in fragments, revenge against the lying queen constitutes a later move, replacing the successful bride-contest in Lycia.

The first move of the Bellerophon story exemplifies the King's Wife Tale, usually labeled Potiphar's Wife after *Genesis*, ch. 39, while the second articulates the Bride-Contest, in which a father sets up various contests, often with hostile intent, and promises to give his daughter in marriage to the winner. In the first move, the king's wife tries to seduce a young man, fails, and invents a lying tale in which she maligns him to her husband, the king: he raped her, or tried to, as a piece of his clothing proves. If the alleged intruder/seducer/rapist is the queen's step-son, as in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, the incest motif in the lying tale becomes overt. The step-mother is then isomorphic with the concubine in the previous story type.

In answer to Diomedes' query, "Who among mortal men are you?" Glaukon responds first with the famous simile at 146-150 ("As is the generation of leaves, so is that of humanity.") and then he narrates the biography of his ancestor Bellerophon:

To Bellerophon the gods granted beauty and desirable manhood; but Proitos in anger devised evil things against him, and drove him out of his domain, since he was far greater, from the Argive country Zeus had broken to the sway of his scepter. Beautiful Anteia the wife of Proitos was stricken with passion to lie in love with him, and yet she could not beguile valiant Bellerophon, whose will was virtuous. So she went to Proitos the king and uttered her falsehood: "Would you be killed, o Proitos? Then murder Bellerophon who tried to lie with me in love, though I was unwilling." So she spoke, and anger took hold of the king at her story. He shrank from killing him, since his heart was awed by such action, but sent him away to Lykia, and handed him murderous symbols, which he inscribed in a folding tablet, enough to destroy life,

and told him to show it to his wife's father, that he might perish.  
 Bellerophon went to Lykia in the blameless convoy  
 of the gods; ...

Then after he had been given his son-in-law's wicked symbols  
 first he sent him away with orders to kill the Chimaira  
 none might approach; ...

He killed Chimaira, obeying the portents of the immortals.  
 Next after this he fought against the glorious Solymoi,

...

but third he slaughtered the Amazons, who fight men in battle.  
 Now as he came back the king spun another entangling  
 treachery; for choosing the bravest men in wide Lykia  
 he laid a trap, but these men never came home thereafter  
 since all of them were killed by blameless Bellerophon.

Then when the king knew him for the powerful stock of the god,  
 he detained him there, and offered him the hand of his daughter,  
 and gave him half of all the kingly privilege. Thereto  
 the men of Lykia cut out a piece of land, surpassing  
 all others, fine ploughland and orchard for him to administer.  
 His bride bore three children to valiant Bellerophon,  
 Isandros and Hippolochos and Laodameia.

...

But after Bellerophontes was hated by all the immortals,  
 he wandered alone about the plain of Aleios, eating  
 his heart out, skulking aside from the trodden track of humanity.

...

But Hippolochos begot me, and I claim that he is my father;  
 he sent me to Troy, and urged upon me repeated injunctions,  
 to be always among the bravest, and hold my head above others,  
 not shaming the generation of my fathers, who were  
 the greatest men in Ephyre and again in wide Lykia.  
 Such is my generation and the blood I claim to be born from.

(*Iliad*. 6. 156-210)

Interpreting Bellerophon's life-story, as Glaukon tells it to Diomedes at *Iliad* 6.152-211, against the background of the P-I tale-type enriches our understanding of this epic passage. Diomedes responds to the tale by initiating a gift-exchange in lieu of engaging in battle. This outcome resonates thematically not only with several other exchanges in Book 6 but also with the reconciliation between Priam and Achilles of *Iliad* 24 that ends the poem (Fineberg 1999: 14).

Bellerophon's biography is a triangulated tale articulated in two moves that unfold at two locations and with two sets of characters. Only Bellerophon participates in both. In the first encounter the two kings are doublets of one another, as are the two sisters, daughters of the Lykian king.

The age-grade difference between the king of Argos and the youth-

ful Bellerophon marks this tale as an intergenerational struggle over the elder's wife; the difference in their power is marked as well (6. 158-159). Other distinctive features include the wife's initiative; the young man's refusal; her rage; and her lying tale, to which the husband reacts as if it were true. Moreover, some of his reactions invoke the PI tale, in particular, the fact that he treats the young alleged rival as if he were a wayward son: he exiles him and sends him on a dangerous mission in the hope that he will die.

In the first move of this tale, which takes place in Argos, Bellerophon is *not* the suitor of Anteia but rather the object of her pursuit. She desires and pursues him, even though she is a *gunê* and not a *parthenos*, and when rejected, she alleges, in his absence, that he wanted to sleep with her against her will. At this plot juncture one might expect a duel or a murder or a judgment (as on the shield of Achilles in *Iliad* 18), and indeed "kill or be killed" is the option Anteia offers Proitos. (Cf. the Gyges story in Herodotus, Book 1, 8-15, where Candaules' unnamed wife makes a similar offer to Gyges, when he has seen her naked.) The Argive king rejects such an alternative and instead, as Glaukon recounts it, invents a subterfuge—the folded tablet with a message inscribed on it. The tablet functions like the curse in oedipal tales but is also isomorphic with the ambush (189: *lochos*) in move 2.

At the center of this narrative is strife between two men over a woman, the kind of 'trafficking in women' identified by Gail Rubin (1975) (see Felson/Slatkin). In this case, however, the woman sets the trafficking in motion through her lie. Proitos, taken in by his wife's deceit and believing her accusation against Bellerophon, *becomes* the 'sender' (Greimas' term)—i.e., the established king who sends the young hero on a perilous mission, usually intending his death. Underlying his aggressive act of exiling Bellerophon with a damning message on the tablet is the principle that 'he who sleeps with the queen becomes king'. At stake in the triangle in Argos are a bride and half the kingdom. In the Argive move, Proitos retains his wife and his kingship by exiling and perhaps dooming his alleged competitor.

In the second move, which takes place in Lykia, the father-in-law of Proitos initially tries to implement his son-in-law's intentions, in response to what is inscribed on the tablet. As Anteia's father, he is protecting his daughter's honor. The tablet's message activates him to devise a series of three perilous tasks, and when Bellerophon completes them all, he sets up an ambush—an overt attempt to kill him. When Bellerophon, having succeeded at all three bridal tasks, also defeats the ambush, the king relents and gives him his rewards. In this way Bellerophon attains in Lykia exactly what Anteia accused him of wanting in Argos and what he could not have, because of zero-sum. He

ends up marrying the sister of the woman who accused him of making overtures toward *her*. Anteia's father gives away his second daughter to and shares his kingdom with the very man with whom Proitos could share neither wife nor kingdom. And so what *was* a story of usurpation and cuckoldry in Argos (according to Anteia's punitive lie) not only precipitates the hero's exile; it brings about a second chance for him to win a bride-contest in Lykia. Here we have a Proppian folktale!<sup>iii</sup>

The Lykian king expected Bellerophon to die. In this he resembles many fathers in Bride Contest, who want each suitor to die so that they can have their daughters to themselves. Compare his tyrannical manner to that of Oinomaos, king of Elis, who was reluctant to marry off Hippodameia to the hero Pelops and caused the deaths of every previous suitor. In the two narrative moves of this story, the king functions both as the tool (or extension) of Proitos and as a father/king who protects two daughters and, in a sense, two kingdoms. Ultimately, however, despite the message on the table, Bellerophon triumphs.

In one important respect, the propositioned male in the King's Wife tale-type differs from the more usual male adulterer—like Paris—and from unsatisfactory, spurned suitors. He is an *alleged* male intruder, the undeserving victim of a verbal trick. The pattern is well known from the story of Potiphar's wife, where Joseph is the alleged seducer, and in a number of Greek myths (see Jouan); these appear in Euripides' *Hippolytus* (both versions), *Peleus*, *Phoenix*, and *Stheneboia* and in Pindar's *Nemean* 5 (Hippolyte, and Peleus) and, in a modified form, in Herodotus' Gyges tale, as cited above. In such tales, the spurned queen tells her husband a lying tale, causing him to treat the alleged intruder as if he did indeed seduce his wife. In the lie, the two men vie with one another over the queen and (implicitly or explicitly) the kingdom.

Bellerophon's mastery of the 'impossible tasks' set by the Lykian king causes the tale-type to shift. 'Exile' becomes 'Resettlement in a New Land' once the king makes Bellerophon his new son-in-law and agrees to share half his kingdom. Ironically, Bellerophon becomes Proitos' equivalent: both are sons-in-law of the Lykian king. They are linked by kinship much as Agamemnon would have liked for Achilles to be when, at *Iliad* 9.142-284, he offered his daughter's hand in marriage and part of his kingdom in his effort to appease Achilles.

The Bellerophon folktale sets the tone for reconciliation between Diomedes and his natural adversary, the Lykian Glaukon. It also provides a model for the resolution of other conflicts in the poem, notably those between two men warring over a woman—Helen, Chryseis, Briseis—and over the possession of Hector's corpse. The tale resonates with the larger Iliadic theme of *mênis* (rage) that results from a *neikos* (quarrel) between two men, Agamemnon and Achilles, in a war over a woman, Helen, which was the result of the intrusion of Paris into the

domestic space of King Menelaos of Sparta. Glaukon's account of his ancestry affirms his identity and suitability for battle and humanizes the hero Diomedes, at least for the moment. Instead of fighting one another, at Diomedes' pronouncement they exchange armor, emulating the guest-exchanges of their forebears. The inequality of the gift-exchange of gold armor for bronze, to which the poet calls attention at line 234, highlights the importance of their ancestral connection over materiality and the heroic ideal of immortal fame (Fineberg 34-37).

## Conclusion

In these brief comments, I have argued that interpreting two passages from the *Iliad* with the PI Tale in mind enriches them. In the first case, resonances with PI underscore the profoundly incestuous and parricidal nature of Phoenix's compliance with his mother's request; in the second, they accentuate the nature of the actual and alleged transgressions against the Argive king. For a subordinate to sleep with the king's wife, even at her instigation—a transaction unactualized in this account—is nearly equivalent to incest, and to displace him in bed and/or in his kingdom is a form of regicide that resembles parricide (see Paul).

Phoenix's voluntary exile, his decision not to "cut down" Amyntor and be called a parricide, his act of sleeping only once with the concubine and never with his mother—all these differentiate him from a bona fide son who kills his father, commits incest with his mother, and takes over the kingdom, like Oedipus in *Od.* 11 and, less overtly, like Kronos in Hesiod's Succession Myth. Phoenix puts his past in the best light possible by emphasizing what distinguishes him from a parricidal and incestuous son. He presents his earlier acquiescence to his mother's pleas as a matter over which he had little control, even though it led to his near ruin. His compliance with his mother enacts her retaliation for the wrong committed by her husband; the only hint that Phoenix shares her view is his subsequent desire to murder the father who cursed him.

As Phoenix reprises this tale for Achilles, he presents his not yielding to the supplications of his kinsmen as a negative pathway, since it cost him dearly; Achilles, he implies, should avoid that mistake by returning to battle after he gives up his rage at the elder Agamemnon. Phoenix never denies the legitimacy of Achilles' anger at a surrogate father who would appropriate his bride-prize. The whole premise of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, the greatest warrior, is over the king's right to any woman he chooses. Nevertheless, Phoenix does offer up his autobiography as one cornerstone of his plea to the youthful Achilles not to retaliate against Agamemnon by wreaking

havoc on the whole Achaean army. In using his almost-incest tale as a basis for this appeal, he accentuates his positive relation to the generous Peleus and to Achilles. He even expands the kinship passage in order to highlight the resemblances between his former self and Achilles now. Thus Phoenix has two motivations for shaping his narrative as he does: to mitigate his offenses of the past and to gain access to the heart of Achilles, so that he can persuade him to defend the Achaians in the Trojan War.

Glaukon's line of argument is less transparent. His story of Bellerophon responds to Diomedes' question at *Iliad* 6.123, "Who of mortals are you?" He offers his grandfather's tale as a way of explaining his identity. Unexpectedly, Bellerophon turns out to have been a guest-friend of Oineus, Diomedes' grandfather, and this brings about a rapprochement between the two enemy warriors, a Lykian and a king from Argos. Their rapprochement has further implications for the plot. In a sense, the gift-exchange they enact recapitulates the mending of the breach several generations earlier between Proitos, King of Argos, and Bellerophon, a breach mended within the story when the King of Lykia gave his daughter and half his kingdom to the hero and allowed him to resettle in Lykia. It also anticipates the rapprochement to come, between Achilles and Priam, in *Iliad* 24 and the truce, albeit fragile and temporary, between the Trojans and the Achaeans. That there will ultimately be a winner and a loser is perhaps anticipated by the inequality in the gift exchange: Glaukon trades gold for bronze to Diomedes.

Both passages that I have used as my examples are stories told by a character to another character. The character-narrator is like an *oidos*, but one who draws on his own eye-witness or family-documented oral tradition—an intra-diegetic narrator in Genette's schema. The way each character-narrator shapes his story is of course geared to his pragmatic purposes, in Phoenix's case, his need to reinforce his bond with Achilles and Peleus as a basis for persuading him to yield, and in Glaukon's, the need to explain his own identity to an adversary, with unexpected and unintended results. Nevertheless, the *logic* of each story emerges when a critic analyzes its motifs within the body of traditional narratives of the ancient Greek tradition. In that context, transformations and emphases come forth, enhanced by knowledge of the tale-type, parricide-incest, lurking beneath the surface

Frequently, in hero-tales, the relation of a suitor to his prospective royal father-in-law (*ekyros* or *pentheros*) is fraught with conflict. At stake are the king's daughter and the kingdom. The youthful hero, the mature king, and the young maiden form a triangle that reflects the same tensions we find in oedipal family tales, where the father and son contend over the body/allegiance of the mother and over who will be lord of the household and kingdom. In *ekyros* hero-tales, the elder male



may try to eliminate the youth by forcing him to face one or more impossible tasks, either in his own kingdom or in a distant land. This motif is structurally equivalent to the double confrontation pattern, in all oedipal tales: the later conflict at *hebe* revisits the attempted infanticide at birth, itself often motivated by an oracle predicting the later confrontation. This is the case for the tale of Laius/Oedipus/Jocasta and Hesiod's Succession Myth. When the youth in the *ekyros* tales completes his assigned tasks, often aided by a helper, the narrative may take one of several turns. The triumphant young hero may retaliate by slaying the belligerent (or recalcitrant) king, usurping his power and taking over his kingship; he may sack his city and abduct the king's daughter as a *geras*, along with the king's treasures; or he may leave the city intact, simply escaping with the princess and some of her father's wealth. Alternatively, after witnessing the completion of the impossible tasks the king may offer the youth his daughter in marriage, along with half the kingdom, a folktale ending.

The PI tale is a narrative of extremes. It operates on the principle that there can be no sharing of resources—kingdoms, females, prerogatives. There will be a winner and a loser, zero-sum. Even when a conflict occurs among the deathless gods, a great deal is at stake, as becomes especially clear in Sophocles' appropriation of the Oedipus-Epicasta story for his tragedy. The nature of the relationships in the triadic constellation of characters varies with each type of tale; yet this paper suggests that the tale-types share so many elements as to justify our notion of Father's Concubine, King's Wife, and Bride-Prize as all belonging with varying degrees of centrality, to the category of Parricide-Incest Tales.

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