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RECONSIDERING EURIPIDES' *BELLEROPHON**

No consensus has been reached about the reconstruction of Euripides' fragmentary tragedy *Bellerophon*, but two suggestions have not received the serious attention they deserve. The first is that Stheneboea is a character in the play,[1] and the second that Euripides does not depict Bellerophon as an atheist or an impious hero.[2] In this paper, I shall reconsider both of these suggestions. In fact, the addition of Stheneboea to the *dramatis personae* allows us to correct the second problem, as I shall propose that Stheneboea, not Bellerophon, speaks the infamous atheistic fragment.

The myth is treated by various sources, the most important of which are Homer (*Iliad* 6.155–202), Pindar (*Olympian* 13.84–92 and *Isthmian* 7.43–8), Euripides (*Bellerophon* and *Stheneboea*), Apollodorus (*Bibliotheca* 2.3), and Hyginus (*Fabulae* 57). There are many differences in the various treatments but the basic structure of the myth can be summarized briefly.[3] Bellerophon visits Proetus, king of Lycia, seeking purification for a murder.[4] Proetus' wife, Stheneboea, falls in love with Bellerophon and tries to seduce him, but he rebuffs her advances. Stheneboea lies to her husband, claiming that Bellerophon tried to seduce her, and so Proetus sends his guest-friend to Stheneboea's father Iobates to be killed. Iobates forces Bellerophon to confront many deadly foes, including the Chimaera, but the hero defeats them all. Impressed by these accomplishments, Iobates awards the hero half of his kingdom and allows Bellerophon to marry his daughter Philonoë. This is the story up to this point as told by Apollodorus and Hyginus, but Euripides' *Stheneboea* diverges from this version of the myth. Instead of marrying Philonoë, Bellerophon returns to Proetus' kingdom to get revenge, woos Stheneboea, convinces her to fly off on Pegasus, and then throws her into the sea. Later in life, Bellerophon becomes hateful to the gods, and he wanders around the Alean plain (*Iliad* 6.200–2). He tries to fly to Mount Olympus, but is critically injured when he falls from Pegasus (*Isthmian* 7.43–8).[5] Most scholars believe that Euripides' *Bellerophon* depicts this last part of the hero's life.

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[1] See G. Sellner, 'De Euripidis *Stheneboea*: questiones selectae' (Diss., Princeton University, 1910), 65–79. S.D. Olson, *Aristophanes: Peace* (Oxford, 1998), xxxii–xxxiv, accepts this possibility in his discussion of the *Bellerophon*. The text and the numbering of the Euripidean fragments follow *TrGF*. Translations are my own.

[2] Suggested in passing by R. Scodel, review of C. Collard, M.J. Cropp, and K.H. Lee, *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays 1, Phoenix* 51 (1997), 226–7, at 226.

[3] See also T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore, MD, 1993), 1.313–16.

[4] According to Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.3, Bellerophon had murdered his brother Deliades, but in the hypothesis to the *Stheneboea* the victim is not identified.

[5] Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.18 says that Bellerophon becomes frightened when he looks down from Pegasus and falls.

Wilamowitz's suggestion that Euripides' *Bellerophon* is a sequel to his *Stheneboea* has become the *communis opinio* among students of the play.[6] The surviving hypothesis of the *Stheneboea* informs us that Bellerophon kills her, and so, according to Wilamowitz, she cannot appear in the *Bellerophon*. He offers two primary reasons for believing that the *Bellerophon* was produced after the *Stheneboea* and continued its action. First, Euripides has taken many liberties with the myth, especially in changing the queen's name from Antea, as in Homer, to Stheneboea,[7] and in inventing the deception, abduction, and murder. Secondly, Bellerophon's melancholy at the beginning of the tragedy has probably resulted from the gods punishing him for killing Stheneboea. Generally, Willamowitz argues, the bold innovation (*inveniendi audaciam*) found primarily in the *Stheneboea* would be more typical of a young Euripides, and the *Stheneboea* betrays the very felicitous art (*felicissimam artem*) of a young poet, while the *Bellerophon* is more bitter (*acerbitatem propius accedit*), like his *Cretans* and *Medea*.

Neither of these arguments, however, conclusively shows that Euripides produced the *Stheneboea* before the *Bellerophon*, let alone that the latter is a sequel. The first argument, concerning the innovations, indicates only that the poet introduced typically Euripidean innovations to the myth. The second argument is founded upon an inconclusive suggestion about the content of the *Bellerophon*, but the fragments themselves do not indicate the cause of the hero's misfortune.[8] Although it is possible that the gods are punishing Bellerophon for murdering Stheneboea, to suggest that this reveals the bitterness of an older Euripides – itself an untenable assumption – and that this proves the priority of the *Stheneboea* is suspect.

Even using other evidence, we cannot, in fact, date either play with much precision. Comic parody gives a *terminus ante quem* for both plays: 425 B.C.E. for the *Bellerophon*, based on parody in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*; 422 B.C.E. for the *Stheneboea*, based on *Wasps*.[9] An analysis of metrical resolutions supports these dates but offers no more accuracy.[10] Thus, based on the available evidence that does not rely on an interpretation of the fragments, it is just as likely that the *Bellerophon* was produced before the *Stheneboea*. Even if we were to admit, however, that the *Bellerophon* was produced later, this admission in no way requires that it be a sequel to the *Stheneboea*.[11]

[6] U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 'De Euripidis *Stheneboea*', *CPh* 3 (1908), 225–32, at 229–30. Some scholars had previously argued that the *Bellerophon* depicted a revenge plot for the death of Stheneboea, although some suggested that her death was depicted differently in the *Bellerophon*. On this idea in earlier scholarship, see bibliographical references in L. Di Gregorio, 'Il *Bellerophonte* di Euripide: I. dati per una reconstruzione', *CCC* 4 (1983a), 159–213; id., 'Il *Bellerophonte* di Euripide: II. tentativo di reconstruzione', *CCC* 4 (1983b), 365–82; and Buslepp, 'Stheneboia', in W. Roscher (ed.), *Ausführliches Lexicon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1909–15), 1506–21.

[7] Wilamowitz (n. 6), at 230, claims that Euripides was the first to substitute the name Stheneboea for Antea, but it is also found in the Hes. *Cat.* (F 129.18, 20 M.–W.).

[8] In Antiquity, different possibilities were offered, including despair at the death of his children (Schol. T. on *Il.* 6.202a) and melancholy ([Arist.] *Pr.* 953a). Asclepiades (*FGrH* 12 F 13) says that Bellerophon's wandering began after the fall from his flight to the heavens. Asclepiades, like Pind. *Isthm.* 7.43–4, attributes the flight to arrogance.

[9] Eur. *Sthen.* is perhaps alluded to in Eup. *Prospaltioi*, which would push the date back, perhaps to 429 B.C.E. See I. Storey, *Eupolis: Poet of Old Comedy* (Oxford, 2003), 230–3.

[10] M. Cropp and G. Fick, *Resolutions and Chronology in Euripides: The Fragmentary Tragedies* (London, 1985), 77 and 90–1.

[11] The tragedians often produced plays out of mythological order (e.g. Sophocles' 'Theban Trilogy'), and plays based on the same myth did not have to agree mythologically. Euripides' corpus

Nevertheless, most scholars accept Wilamowitz's hypothesis and reconstruct the *Bellerophon* as if it directly followed the plot of the *Stheneboea*. Webster's important and generally conservative study of the fragments follows Wilamowitz.[12] Di Gregorio reconstructs the play as a revenge plot against Bellerophon by Stheneboea's surviving relatives, which is foiled by Bellerophon's son Glaucus.[13] Collard discusses the difficulties with this influential interpretation, the most serious being that Di Gregorio relies on a textually corrupt epigram that claims to describe a second-century B.C.E. temple-relief at Cyzicus.[14] Collard advises caution in reconstructing the plot, but still seems to favour the interpretation that the *Bellerophon* completes the *Stheneboea*.[15]

Let us, then, take a new look at the evidence for reconstructing the *Bellerophon*. Most importantly, in analysing the available evidence (some of which has not been taken advantage of) we shall assume that Euripides' *Stheneboea* is not a prequel to the *Bellerophon*. Not only is there no reason to believe that the *Bellerophon* completes the action of the *Stheneboea*, but this suggestion also creates many problems – perhaps, as we shall see, more problems than it solves. Each type of secondary evidence presents its own problems of interpretation, and some are perhaps more reliably applied to reconstruction than others. I shall argue, however, that, once combined, the evidence will show that previous attempts at reconstruction do not adequately resolve the problems presented by the fragments and testimonia.

SHERLOCKISMUS OF THE *BELLEROPHON*

In an essay that lays out a principle for reconstructing fragmentary tragedies, Sommerstein suggests using a method called, after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective, *sherlockismus*: 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth', no matter how improbable.[16] This is an effective approach to studying Euripidean fragments given the poet's prowess in innovative mythopoeia. His tragedies do not

provides several examples. His two *Melanippe* plays probably describe differently the circumstances of the birth of her twins (see C. Collard, M.J. Cropp, and K.H. Lee, *Euripides: Selected Fragmentary Plays 1* [Warminster, 1995], 240–7). More germane are his *Iphigenia* plays and their ancient reception. *IA* is mythologically anterior but produced after *IT*. Euripides died with *IA* unfinished, and the final messenger speech (1532–612) was added much later 'by someone who had no ear for the quantities of vowels and no understanding of the rules of the tragic trimeter' (D. Kovacs, 'Toward a reconstruction of *Iphigenia Aulidensis*', *JHS* 123 [2003], 77–103, at 78). The speech was probably added to reconcile the two Iphigenia plays (see D. Kovacs, *Euripides 6* [Cambridge, MA, 2002], ad loc.). We should be cautious of this same temptation of reconciliation with the *Bellerophon*. R. Aélion, *Quelques grands mythes héroïques dans l'œuvre d'Euripide* (Paris, 1986), 185–96, tries to harmonize the major treatments of the Bellerophon myth and even places the events of Sophocles' *Iobates*, about which we know almost nothing, between Euripides' *Stheneboea* and his *Bellerophon*. Aélion emphasizes Euripides' unique treatment of the Bellerophon character but not the myth.

[12] T.B.L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), 109–11.

[13] Di Gregorio (n. 6 [1983b]).

[14] Collard et al. (n. 11), 99. See more recently M. Curnis, *Il Bellerofonte di Euripide* (Alessandria, 2003), who follows Di Gregorio in using the epigram to reconstruct the tragedy.

[15] Collard et al. (n. 11), 99–100, notes the possibility that Stheneboea appears in the *Bellerophon* but ultimately rejects it 'unless she has avoided death and returned to her father'.

[16] A.H. Sommerstein, '*Sherlockismus* and the study of fragmentary tragedies', in A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *The Tangled Ways of Zeus and Other Studies in and around Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 2010), 61–81, at 65. Sommerstein suggests using this method both for assigning unattributed fragments to a play and for determining the specific mythic variant used in a poorly attested play (67). For both, one gathers all the possibilities and eliminates them until, hopefully, just one remains.

always give us expected plots, but even for the fragmentary plays we can eliminate impossibilities and collect new, even improbable, alternatives. We can use this method to show that Euripides' *Bellerophon* does not continue the plot of the *Stheneboea* and that Bellerophon is not the speaker of the atheistic fragment (F 286).

In addition to the arguments presented above, a reading of F 310 does not support the interpretation that the *Bellerophon* follows the plot of the *Stheneboea*. The fragment is spoken by Bellerophon to himself – addressing his soul, as in F 307a – just before he dies:[17]

> ἦσθ' εἰς θεοὺς μὲν εὐσεβής, ὅτ' ἦσθ', ἀεί,
> ξένοις τ' ἐπήρκεις, οὐδ' ἔκαμνες εἰς φίλους

You were always pious towards the gods when you were alive, and you were helping guests and never tiring for your friends.

Our hero claims that he was helpful (ἐπήρκεις) to his *xenoi*, but this statement contradicts what we know about Bellerophon's character in the *Stheneboea*. There, after defeating the Chimaera, he returns seeking vengeance from his host, Proetus, and Stheneboea. To punish them both, Bellerophon seduces, deceives, and kills her.[18] If the *Bellerophon* continued the plot of the *Stheneboea*, presumably there would have been a great emphasis on the actions in the *Stheneboea*, including his deception at the end, especially if, as others have suggested, Bellerophon is being punished for killing her. Therefore, Bellerophon's self-praise for his dedication to his own *xenoi* suggests that the *Bellerophon* is not a sequel to the events of the *Stheneboea* (that is, it does not continue or complete the action), but rather, in terms of the plot, is an independent treatment of the myth.[19]

Our detective work also allows us to eliminate Bellerophon as the potential speaker of the infamous atheistic fragment. In F 286 (lines 1–3), someone claims that there are no gods, 'arguably the strongest denial of the existence of the gods in Greek drama':[20]

[17] Ael. *NA* 5.34 quotes and identifies the context of these two lines.

[18] *Xenia* must have been an important theme in the *Stheneboea* (see esp. F 661, 667), and by the end of the play all of the major characters – Proetus, Stheneboea, Iobates, and Bellerophon himself – have harmed their *xenoi*.

[19] We can contrast these two tragedies with the *Oresteia*. In Aeschylus' trilogy, the plot of one play continues the action of the proceeding one, even though some time has elapsed between the end of one and the beginning of the next, and the events of the previous tragedy are not contradicted. When Bellerophon says that he always respected his *xenoi*, it would be as if Orestes, after killing Clytemnestra in the *Choephoroe*, claimed in the *Eumenides* that he had always respected his mother. But, while the *Bellerophon* does not continue the plot of the *Stheneboea*, the two do treat some of the same themes, and Euripides seems to rehabilitate his hero's character in his homonymous play: in F 310, Bellerophon almost knows that he must refute the negative reputation he has from other depictions. On this phenomenon in other Euripidean tragedies, see M. Wright, *Euripides' Escape-Tragedies: A Study of Helen, Andromeda, and Iphigenia among the Taurians* (Oxford, 2005), 133–57; id., '*Orestes:* a Euripidean sequel', *CQ* 56 (2006), 33–47. Wright calls it metamythography: 'a type of discourse which arises when mythical characters are made to talk about themselves and their own myths, or where myths are otherwise presented, in a deliberately self-conscious manner' ([2006], 38). Sellner (n. 1), 66–9, thinks that the *Bellerophon* is an attempt to save Stheneboea's character from her scandalous depiction in the *Stheneboea*, just as he attempted to save Phaedra's character in *Hippolytus* after her shocking portrayal in *Hipp.* I. See also W.S. Barrett, *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 2001[2]), 10–45 and esp. 30–1, on the different Hippolytus plays.

[20] G.W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play: Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics* (Oxford, 2001), 93.

φῆσίν τις εἶναι δῆτ' ἐν οὐρανῶι θεούς;
οὐκ εἰσίν, οὐκ εἴσ', εἴ τις ἀνθρώπων θέλει
μὴ τῶι παλαιῶι μῶρος ὢν χρῆσθαι λόγωι.

Does anyone say there are gods in heaven? There are not, there are not, unless one wishes to follow ancient wisdom like a fool.

Although the speech is unassigned, most scholars assume that Bellerophon is the speaker. He is, after all, the most obvious candidate, especially given the frustration expressed in F 285, probably from the prologue:[21]

ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν δὴ πανταχοῦ θρυλούμενον
κράτιστον εἶναί φημι 'μὴ φῦναι' βροτῶι.
τρισσῶν δὲ μοιρῶν ἐγκρινῶ νικᾶν μίαν,
πλούτου τε, χὥτωι σπέρμα γενναῖον προσῆι,
πενίας τ'· ἀριθμὸν γὰρ τοσόνδε προυθέμην.
ὁ μὲν ζάπλουτος, εἰς γένος δ' οὐκ εὐτυχής,
ἀλγεῖ μέν, ἀλγεῖ, παγκάλως δ' ἀλγύνεται
ὄλβου διοίγων θάλαμον ἥδιστον χερί.
ἔξω δὲ βαίνων τοῦδε, τὸν πάρος χρόνον
πλουτῶν, ὑπ' ἄτης ζεῦγλαν ἀσχάλλει πεσών.
ὅστις δὲ γαῦρον σπέρμα γενναῖόν τ' ἔχων
βίου σπανίζει, τῶι γένει μὲν εὐτυχεῖ,
πενίαι δ' ἐλάσσων ἐστίν, ἐν δ' ἀλγύνεται
φρονῶν, ὑπ' αἰδοῦς δ' ἔργ' ἀπωθεῖται χερῶν.
ὁ δ' οὐδὲν οὐδείς, διὰ τέλους δὲ δυστυχῶν,
τοσῶιδε νικᾶι· τοῦ γὰρ εὖ τητώμενος
οὐκ οἶδεν, αἰεὶ δυστυχῶν κακῶς τ' ἔχων.
οὕτως ἄριστον μὴ πεπειρᾶσθαι καλῶν.
ἐκεῖνο γὰρ μεμνήμεθ'· οἷος ἦ ποτε
κἀγὼ μετ' ἀνδρῶν ἡνίκ' ηὐτύχουν βίωι.

I agree with the sentiment commonly repeated that it is best for man not to be born. I shall judge one lot of three the best: wealth, noble birth, and poverty; for I reckon it thus. The first, wealthy but not fortunate in his lineage, suffers; he suffers. He grieves wonderfully as he opens by hand his sweetest mansion of wealth. But going outside, although previously rich, he falls under the yoke of folly and suffers. And he who is proud of his noble birth but lacks a livelihood, although fortunate in his lineage, is inferior because of poverty. He grieves in his mind, and rejects manual labour out of shame. The last man, always a nobody, miserable till the end, is superior to them, because he does not know he lacks well-being, being ever misfortunate and base. Thus it is best not to experience good things. For I remember what I myself once was among men, when I was fortunate in life.

If we assign the atheistic fragment to Bellerophon, however, insurmountable problems arise with other lines known to be spoken by him. The denial of the gods in F 286 contradicts the sentiment of F 310, which we encountered just above, since there Bellerophon praises his piety (ἦσθ' εἰς θεοὺς μὲν εὐσεβής, ὅτ' ἦσθ', ἀεί). Collard tries to account for the discrepancy, suggesting that ὅτ' ἦσθ' (he translates 'while you lived') alludes to Bellerophon's earlier prosperity (cf. F 285.20),[22] but it is unlikely

[21] Pindar's treatment of the myth at *Isthm.* 7.43–8 may imply that the hero had impious motivations for flying to the heavens, although he simply says that Bellerophon's actions were unjust (πὰρ δίκαν, 47), not impious.

[22] Collard et al. (n. 11), ad loc. See also C. Riedweg, 'The "atheistic" fragment from Euripides' *Bellerophontes* (286N^2)', *ICS* 15 (1990), 39–53, at 53, whom Collard follows here, and Di Gregorio (n. 6 [1983a]), 183–5.

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that Bellerophon here refers to some distant time in his life, which must have been before the drama begins, in which he was prosperous. The hero is on his deathbed, and so it is likelier that he refers to his whole life, as if to say, 'Despite your constant misfortune in life, you were always pious'. Moreover, the point of the atheistic fragment is that piety (εὐσέβεια) does not result in good fortune (εὐτυχία, cf. ηὐτύχουν, F 285.20). There, the speaker's point is that the gods cannot exist because they allow impious men to be more prosperous than the pious:

φῆμ' ἐγὼ τυραννίδα
κτείνειν τε πλείστους κτημάτων τ' ἀποστερεῖν
ὅρκους τε παραβαίνοντας ἐκπορθεῖν πόλεις·
καὶ ταῦτα δρῶντες μᾶλλόν εἰσ' εὐδαίμονες
τῶν εὐσεβούντων ἡσυχῇι καθ' ἡμέραν.
πόλεις τε μικρὰς οἶδα τιμώσας θεούς,
αἳ μειζόνων κλύουσι δυσσεβεστέρων
λόγχης ἀριθμῶι πλείονος κρατούμεναι.
οἶμαι δ' ἂν ὑμᾶς, εἴ τις ἀργὸς ὢν θεοῖς
εὔχοιτο καὶ μὴ χειρὶ συλλέγοι βίον
* * *[23]
τὰ θεῖα πυργοῦσ' αἱ κακαί τε συμφοραί

I say that tyranny kills many people, deprives possessions, circumvents oaths, and plunders cities. And even though they do these things, they are more fortunate than those living piously day to day in peace. I know small cities honouring the gods that obey larger and more impious ones since they are outnumbered in spearmen. I know that you, if someone who is lazy should pray to the gods and not gather his sustenance with his hands … fortify religion, and misfortunes …

The speaker of these lines criticizes the gods for not favouring the pious. If we accept the hypothesis that Bellerophon was pious (only) while he prospered, his own experiences would contradict the argument presented in the atheistic fragment. Thus ὅτ' ἦσθ' of F 310 cannot refer to Bellerophon's earlier prosperity (*pace* Di Gregorio, Riedweg, Collard); however, even if it simply means 'while you were living', it still contradicts the sentiment of the atheistic fragment.[24] The same character cannot praise his piety on his deathbed after he has previously rejected the gods' existence. Perhaps, then, Bellerophon is not the one who denies the existence of the gods. Scodel suggests this same solution and claims that perhaps 'Euripides' originality lay in motivating the flight so that it was not hybristically intended (a very Euripidean move)'.[25]

F 307a and 308 present yet more problems if Bellerophon is the speaker of F 286. These lines are delivered by Bellerophon just before he flies towards the heavens on Pegasus:

[23] On the lacuna, see Riedweg (n. 22), 40–6.

[24] Curnis (n. 14), ad loc., suggests that there is no contradiction between F 286 and F 310 and argues that they present Bellerophon's alternative view of piety. Curnis' proposal would not resolve Bellerophon's problematic claim that he always helped his *xenoi*, which we addressed above. This article's anonymous reviewer suggested that Bellerophon could be deceiving himself and referred to Hippolytus' somewhat deceptive claim about his own piety (*Hipp*. 1364). Without more evidence, however, it is impossible to confirm or deny this hypothesis.

[25] Scodel (n. 2), 226. Another possible solution would be to locate F 286 after Bellerophon's fall, but the speaker expresses general disillusionment rather than, as would be the case, disgust at an unjust injury caused by the gods. Also, the parody in Ar. *Peace* lends support to placing the fragment before the fall (Riedweg [n. 22], 49–50).

σπεῦδ', ὦ ψυχή
* * *
πάρες, ὦ σκιερὰ φυλλάς, ὑπερβῶ
κρηναῖα νάπη· τὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς
αἰθέρ' ἰδέσθαι σπεύδω, τίν' ἔχει
στάσιν εὐοδίας.

Hasten, my soul!
* * *
Stand back, shady foliage, let me cross over the watery glens. I am eager to see the sky above my head, and what condition it has for a good journey.

To me, these do not seem to be the words of someone who believes that he will not find the gods – or even unjust gods – in heaven. Bellerophon expresses excitement, using σπεύδειν twice (F 307a, 308.3), and he even expects the journey to be a good one (εὐοδίας). He is about to make not simply a trek but a *good* (εὐ–) trek. These lines express none of the disillusionment with the gods found in the atheistic fragment. They also provide a clearer picture of the Bellerophon character: he seems optimistic despite his current misfortune.

Therefore, no matter how improbable the alternatives, it seems impossible that Bellerophon is the one who denies the existence of the gods and that the *Bellerophon* continues the action of the *Stheneboea*. Still, several issues remain unresolved (for example, who speaks the atheistic fragment and what motivates Bellerophon's flight to the heavens?), but not all problems can be solved using the extant evidence. Before we address them, however, we must first reconsider whether Stheneboea appears in the tragedy.

STHENEBOEA AMONG THE *DRAMATIS PERSONAE*

Far more evidence suggests that Stheneboea does appear in the *Bellerophon* than that she does not. The fragments themselves, our most reliable testimony, provide circumstantial evidence of this. Although the context is uncertain, the beginning of her name (Σθενεβο–) appears in a badly damaged hypothesis to the play (*P. Oxy.* 4017 F 4 = T iiib.6). This could mean anything, but another important clue survives. The letters Λυκία in another hypothesis (*P. Oxy.* 3651 = T iiia.20)[26] suggest that the play takes place in Lycia, and most, if not all, reconstructors infer from this that Iobates, king of Lycia and father of Stheneboea, was a character. If the *Bellerophon* does follow the *Stheneboea*, some reconciliation between Bellerophon and Iobates would be required, and although it is not impossible that Iobates would forgive Bellerophon for murdering his daughter, it seems to me unlikely.[27] According to my reconstruction, no reconciliation is required since the murder never took place.

F 666 has also proved difficult to explain:

[26] W. Luppe, 'Die "Bellerophontes"-Hypothesis *P. Oxy.* 3651', *ΕΙΚΑΣΜΟΣ* 1 (1990), 171–7, attempts to reconstruct parts of this hypothesis using only the hypothesis itself. Based on the remains, he suggests that the plot contains an attack against a sister-in-law, with Bellerophon as avenger.

[27] Collard imagines a reconciliation (Collard et al. [n. 11], 99), but other explanations are possible. Di Gregorio (n. 6 [1983b]) offers one: if the setting is before Bellerophon's hovel in Lycia, rather than Iobates' palace, and if Iobates takes part in the revenge plot against him, no reconciliation would be necessary.

ὦ παγκακίστη καὶ γυνή, τί γὰρ λέγων
μεῖζόν σε τοῦδ' ὄνειδος ἐξείποι τις ἄν;

You are completely evil and a woman, of what greater disgrace might someone accuse you than this?

These lines, which are attributed by Stobaeus to *Bellerophon*, are addressed to a woman. Collard says that this fragment suits the plot of *Stheneboea* better and that perhaps it was misattributed to the *Bellerophon*.[28] Although the slander would no doubt fit the context of the *Stheneboea*, there is no indication that it would not suit the *Bellerophon* as well. Di Gregorio, on the other hand, trusts the original attribution but imagines it as an apostrophe to the dead Stheneboea.[29] The simplest explanation – although admittedly the simplest explanation is not always correct – is that the original attribution is accurate and that these lines are addressed to Stheneboea.

Her appearance in the *Bellerophon* is perhaps confirmed by a fragment of a vase-painting, the so-called Würzburg Skenographie (Martin von Wagner Museum H 4696 and 4701). The most visible figures depicted are a woman in a doorway and a downcast man wearing a traveller's hat and what seem to be rags. Although the scene is damaged, one can make out the outline of a man holding a ritual bowl and another woman peering out of a door on the opposite side of what appears to be a stage. The scene 'call[s] out "theater!"'.[30] Trendall argues that the Pegasus depicted on the pediment of the portico suggests that the scene is from Euripides' *Stheneboea*.[31] Taplin calls this an 'amusing idea' but rejects it.[32] Csapo and Slater likewise reject the attribution because it does not explain all the vase's details: 'The older man is performing a ceremony of purification for the young man. In myth and tragedy this is required after someone has spilt the blood of a relative and left his home in exile.'[33] Csapo and Slater suggest Euripides' *Peleus*, but the Pegasus on the pediment would remain a mystery. The play that accounts for most of the vase's details is the *Bellerophon*.[34] One of the eavesdropping women could be Stheneboea and the other either her nurse or her sister,[35] and the dejected man could be Bellerophon, who in Apollodorus' version (*Bibliotheca* 2.3) has slain his brother, seeking purification from Iobates, who holds a ritual cleansing bowl (*phiale*).

It would be circular to argue that this vase depicts the *Bellerophon* because, among other reasons, Stheneboea is in it and then to use this vase as evidence that Stheneboea appears in the *Bellerophon*. But I believe that another, overlooked, detail of the vase suggests that the scene is inspired by this drama. The sad-looking man appears to be

[28] Collard et al. (n. 11), ad loc. Collard places the fragment with those from *Stheneboea*, and this arrangement is kept in the Loeb (C. Collard and M.J. Cropp, *Euripides 7–8* [Cambridge, MA, 2008]).

[29] Di Gregorio (n. 6 [1983b]), 371.

[30] O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles, CA, 2007), 228.

[31] A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), 3.3, 43.

[32] Taplin (n. 30), 228. He cautiously suggests instead that the scene depicts Jason's confrontation with his uncle Pelias in Iolcus. For a reconstruction of the scene, see E. Simon, *The Ancient Theatre* (London, 1982[2]), 23–4, who also believes that it depicts Jason and Pelias.

[33] E. Csapo and W.J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995), 62.

[34] The other two figures on the pediment remain unaccounted for, but they are likely to depict the action from another episode.

[35] No evidence suggests that Eur. *Beller.* follows the variant in which Iobates allows Bellerophon to marry his other daughter (Hom. *Il.* 6.191–3; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.3; Hyg. *Fab.* 57), but nothing explicitly rules out that possibility.

wearing rags.[36] In Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis asks Euripides for the costume of one of his rag-clad heroes. Before Dicaeopolis requests Telephus' costume, Euripides suggests that he wear Bellerophon's rags (*Acharnians* 426–7), and a scholiast on the passage (Σ *Acharnians* 426) tells us that Euripides depicted Bellerophon as lame after his fall from Pegasus, which occurs in the *Bellerophon*. Admittedly, none of this evidence is a smoking gun, but an attribution of the vase-painting to Euripides' *Bellerophon*, even ignoring the women, would best account for the details of the scene.

Other external evidence suggests that Stheneboea appears in the *Bellerophon* and, furthermore, that Euripides tells a different version of her death, which he may have invented himself. In the *agon* of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Aeschylus and Euripides discuss the corrupting effect that Euripides' Stheneboea has on the Athenian audience. Specifically, Aeschylus criticizes his underworld rival for portraying immoral women onstage. Euripides rebuts:

> Ευ· καὶ τί βλάπτουσ', ὦ σχέτλι' ἀνδρῶν, τὴν πόλιν ἀμαὶ Σθενέβοιαι;
> Αι· ὅτι γενναίας καὶ γενναίων ἀνδρῶν ἀλόχους ἀνέπεισας
> κώνεια πιεῖν αἰσχυνθείσας διὰ τοὺς σοὺς Βελλεροφόντας.
>
> Eu: And what harm, you scoundrel, did my Stheneboeas cause the city?
> Ae: You compelled noble women and the wives of noble men to drink hemlock out of shame for your Bellerophons. (*Frogs* 1049–51)

Sommerstein provides two possible explanations for what Aeschylus means. Either Athenian women are so ashamed by Stheneboea that they commit suicide or they use Stheneboea's suicide as an exemplum for their own.[37] In other words, she is either simply the cause of or the explicit model for women's suicide. In support of the former reading, Tzetzes in his commentary of the *Frogs* recounts her death as told in Euripides' *Stheneboea* (ad 1051),[38] and Sommerstein prefers the interpretation that Stheneboea's actions impelled women to commit suicide: 'Since the structure of the sentence strongly suggests that the "harm … to the community" consists in the suicides themselves, not in an epidemic of adultery, the first interpretation is to be preferred.'[39] On the same passage, Sommerstein notes, 'this [allusion] would be pointless unless there had been at least one well-known recent case of an upper-class wife … committing suicide by this means'.[40]

[36] The young man's clothing appears similar to the clothing of old men as portrayed on vases. For old men's clothing, we can compare other depictions of the myth which show Bellerophon delivering the letter from Proetus to Iobates. In these scenes, Bellerophon is shown in heroic nude, and Iobates is bearded, bare-chested with a garment wrapped around his waist (see an Apulian stamnos in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 1900.349). Another clue that the figure's clothing on the Würzburg Skenographie is meant to depict rags is the walking stick with which he supports himself; clearly he is not an old man, and so the walking stick is another indication of the figure's unique position. A striking parallel is a scene on an vase at Ruvo (Mus. Jatta, J 1499), which shows Bellerophon delivering the letter to Iobates. Here, Bellerophon is once again in heroic nude, and Iobates wears a drapery and carries a walking stick. (Cf. also the similar iconography on an amphora in the Naples National Archaeological Museum, 82263 [H 2418].)

[37] A.H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Warminster, 1996), ad loc.

[38] See also his commentary on Lycophron (ad 17), where Tzetzes combines the various mythical traditions surrounding Bellerophon and Stheneboea. He does not, however, mention Stheneboea's death. Interestingly, Tzetzes is perhaps unique in saying that Bellerophon was blinded after his fall from Pegasus.

[39] Sommerstein (n. 37), ad loc.

[40] Ibid.

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Nevertheless, Aristophanes' joke would have more resonance if Euripides' heroine herself had committed suicide in the same way, and the pointed references to both hemlock and Stheneboea in Aristophanes' *Frogs* leave open the possibility that Euripides tells an alternative version of her death, one in which she commits suicide by drinking hemlock.[41] If this is the case, Stheneboea would have to appear in both the *Stheneboea*, where Bellerophon kills her, and the *Bellerophon*. Tzetzes comments on this passage and tells us that there are, in fact, two plays in which she appears:

καὶ ταύτης δύο δράματα Εὐριπίδου, τὸ μεν Βελλεροφόντης καλούμεν, τὸ δὲ Σθενέβοια· γράφουσι δὲ τὸν Σθενεβοίας ἔρωτα πρὸς Βελλεροφόντην.

There are two plays with Stheneboea by Euripides: one called *Bellerophon*, the other *Stheneboea*. They describe Stheneboea's love for Bellerophon. (ad *Frogs* 1043)

Although the first sentence could perhaps mean that Stheneboea is only mentioned in the *Bellerophon*, the claim that both plays describe her love for him tells against this interpretation.

The Roman mythographer Hyginus preserves an alternative version of this myth in which Stheneboea commits suicide. Hyginus' version perhaps supports my reading of the passage from *Frogs*, although he does not specify how she kills herself. He says:

Bellerophon cum ad Proetum regem exsul in hospitium uenisset, adamatus est ab uxore eius Stheneboea; qui cum concumbere cum ea noluisset, illa uiro suo mentita est se ab eo compellatam. at Proetus re audita conscripsit tabellas de ea re et mittit eum ad Iobatam regem, patrem Stheneboeae. quibus lectis talem uirum interficere noluit, sed ad Chimaeram eum interficiendum misit, quae tripartito corpore flammam spirare dicebatur. [idem: prima leo, postrema draco, media ipsa chimaera.] hanc super Pegasum sedens interfecit, et decidisse dicitur in campos Aleios, unde etiam coxas eiecisse dicitur. at rex uirtutes eius laudans alteram filiam dedit ei in matrimonium. Stheneboea re audita ipsa se interfecit.

After Bellerophon had come to the court of King Proetus as an exile and guest, Stheneboea, the king's wife, became enamoured with him. Since he was not willing to sleep with her, she deceived her husband by claiming she was assaulted by Bellerophon. Having heard this, Proetus wrote a letter about the affair and sent him to King Iobates, Stheneboea's father. Upon reading the letter, he did not wish to kill such a great man, but sent him to his death against the Chimaera, which is said to breathe fire and have a tripartite body[: the head of a lion, the tail-end of a dragon, and the middle itself is a Chimaera]. While riding Pegasus, Bellerophon killed it and then, it is said, fell into the Alean plain, where he broke his hip. But the king praised his valour and gave him his other daughter in marriage. Stheneboea, after she heard this, killed herself. (*Fabulae* 57)

This passage recounts a mythical variant of Stheneboea's death, but is this variant Euripidean? Huys has shown that Hyginus is not simply 'translating' Euripidean versions of myths from the so-called 'Tales from Euripides' into Latin,[42] and certainly Hyginus' account of the Bellerophon–Stheneboea myth does not draw exclusively on

[41] Drinking hemlock would be a unique way for a tragic heroine to commit suicide. Hanging was the most common way for women to kill themselves in tragedy and 'was more disgraceful and associated more than any other with irremediable dishonor' and 'is a woman's way of death' (N. Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* [Cambridge, MA, 1987^2], 9). Also noteworthy here is Menander's comedy entitled *Kōneiazomenai* (*Women Drinking Hemlock*). Unfortunately, none of the very few surviving fragments sheds light on this passage.

[42] In two articles, he argues that there is little evidence that Hyginus translates directly from the hypotheseis (M. Huys, 'Euripides and the "Tales from Euripides": sources of the *Fabulae* of Ps.-Hyginus?', *APF* 42 [1996], 168–78; id., 'Euripides and the "Tales from Euripides": sources of

either play. Hyginus' version of the myth, however, seems to fuse the *Stheneboea* and *Bellerophon* of Euripides. The Hyginean version follows what is known about the *Stheneboea* until the hero is injured. Hyginus, in fact, differs from Homer and Pindar but follows Euripides, as Bellerophon fights only the Chimaera.[43] No evidence suggests that Euripides' Bellerophon is injured in his battle with the Chimaera, which is described in *Stheneboea*. In the *Bellerophon*, however, the hero's fall from Pegasus is depicted, although it occurs not during his battle with the Chimaera but as he flies to the heavens. If Hyginus combines different aspects of the two Euripidean tragedies, as he seems to be doing, he could be choosing to represent Stheneboea's death as it is told in *Bellerophon* rather than *Stheneboea*.[44]

Thus, in the *Bellerophon*, Euripides seems to include Stheneboea as a character and to depict her death as a suicide, possibly by hemlock. Unfortunately, none of the extant fragments provides irrefutable evidence of a suicide, but the play's hypothesis does mention a corpse (νεκρόν, T iiia.7), which could possibly be hers. The word is preserved without any context, and no other completely satisfactory explanation for it is readily available. It appears early in the hypothesis, which is 22 lines long, and Bellerophon does not die until the end of the tragedy. Moreover, his name occurs twice more later in the hypothesis (10–11 and 19), making it more unlikely that the corpse is his. Another possible explanation is that the *nekron* refers to one of Bellerophon's children (cf. *Il*. 6.203–5), but there is no evidence to suggest that Euripides follows this version of the myth.[45] Nevertheless, 'corpse' refers to someone's body, which, all things considered, could be Stheneboea's.

THE IMPIOUS HEROINE AND POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION

The task of reconstructing the tragedy with a pious Bellerophon and a suicidal Stheneboea still remains. As we have seen, it is unlikely that Bellerophon is the speaker of the atheistic fragment (F 286), and so we must assign the fragment to someone else. Other possible speakers are Iobates, Stheneboea, and the other female figure on the vase. The tirade against tyranny later in the fragment (5–12), however, makes it unlikely that Iobates is the speaker, while assigning the lines to an unidentifiable female character, either Stheneboea's sister or nurse, would thrust her into the spotlight of a myth in

the *Fabulae* of Ps.-Hyginus? [part II]', *APF* 43 [1997], 11–30) and contends that there is no direct relationship between the 'Tales from Euripides' and the *Fabulae*. Furthermore, he says, 'we should forcefully reject the tendency still found in modern general studies on Greek literature or tragedy, and even in specialized studies on Euripides' fragmentary plays, to derive uncritically the contents of lost Euripidean tragedies from the "Fabulae" of Hyginus' ([1997], 30). I agree that caution should always be used when dealing with later mythographic sources, and my arguments and the reconstruction offered here do not rely on Hyginus' version of the myth alone. Although Huys disagrees that the death of Stheneboea is depicted as a suicide in the *Bellerophon*, we can build from his observation on Hyginus' treatment of the Bellerophon–Stheneboea myth that 'once again Hyginus seems to have created his own variant of the legend by fusing elements from different sources' (ibid., 16). What sources does Hyginus fuse? He could have found the suicide version in an older source, and I believe that the source was, in fact, Euripides' *Bellerophon*.

[43] Hom. *Il*. 6.179–86 and Pind. *Ol*. 13.87–90 say that Bellerophon faced the Chimaera, the Solymi, and the Amazons.

[44] In fact, Hyginus seems to recount the myth of Bellerophon as favourably to the hero as he can. The mythographer has Bellerophon sustain an injury in his battle with Pegasus, not on his foolhardy flight to Olympus, and he does not kill Stheneboea.

[45] Collard et al. (n. 11), ad loc., agrees that this is unlikely.

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which she plays little or no role in the tradition. Stheneboea, then, remains a possibility, and there is no obvious reason to eliminate her as a candidate. In fact, if Stheneboea does give this speech, it would be consistent with the character required by other known elements of the action. The speaker of the atheistic fragment expresses disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the condition of life, and this sentiment would suit Stheneboea, who will soon commit suicide by hemlock.[46] She may also be depressed because she does not end up with the man she loves, and may decide, like Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*, that death is preferable to her current situation. Finally, the last lines of the fragment become an apt critique of Bellerophon's life. He is the one wandering, looking to the gods for help in his pitiable condition instead of working to reverse his own misfortune.[47]

Using the fragments and available testimonia, we can attempt to reconstruct the plot of the tragedy, and I shall outline a potential reconstruction here. The usual caveats to reconstructing fragmentary dramas apply, and so I shall attempt to be as conservative as possible, citing the evidence I am using. Nevertheless, in order to make a coherent plot, we must sometimes attempt to decide what is most likely when no direct evidence is available.

The play is set in Lycia before the palace of King Iobates. Bellerophon has been exiled after committing a murder, probably accidentally killing his brother, in Argos[48] (F 305; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 57; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.3), and seeks purification from the king. King Iobates' daughter Stheneboea overhears their conversation (Würzburg Skenographie) and pities Bellerophon. She falls in love with him, following the canonical plot-line of the myth. Iobates, however, refuses to purify the hero. In a subsequent scene, Stheneboea asks her father to reconsider, but he refuses once again. He claims that Bellerophon is perhaps being punished by the gods and so he cannot intervene; the Chorus agrees with the king's assessment (F 286b). Stheneboea responds that the gods do not exist at all (F 286).[49] Frustrated by her father's

[46] It is debated whether one could be charged with impiety because of one's beliefs or only through perversion of ritual. E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, CA, 1951), 189, and D.M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (Ithaca, NY, 1986[2]), 200–2, both argue that, in the late fifth century, intellectuals, including Euripides, were prosecuted for their beliefs. D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1991), 210–17, argues that these trials were not a late fifth-century aberration and that 'unorthodox opinions about religious matters could fall well within the scope of *asebeia*' (211). He bases his argument primarily on the trial of Socrates. Unfortunately, we do not know what the standard penalty for impiety was, if one existed. It may be only an extremely great coincidence – but what a coincidence it is – that Socrates was forced to kill himself by drinking hemlock for his conviction of impiety.

[47] Stheneboea, then, would have the first of the three fortunes identified in F 285, since her wealth does not guarantee her personal happiness, and Iobates would probably also be this first type. Bellerophon would be the second type: the poor man of noble birth who also cannot find happiness. Perhaps the Chorus, possibly made up of Lycian farmers (cf. Riedweg [n. 22], 43), represents the third type: the one most fortunate because he has never known prosperity.

[48] In some versions, Bellerophon flees to Argos seeking purification from King Proetus, but perhaps this is another 'correction' to the *Stheneboea*: Bellerophon did commit a murder in Argos, but it was not Stheneboea's. Regardless, the dramatists had no problem changing a myth's setting to suit their needs (cf., e.g., Aesch. *Ag.*, where Argos replaces the traditional setting of Mycenae), and Eupolis (F 259.126 K–A) refers to Proetus, usually king of Tiryns, as king of Corinth.

[49] F 286b is a fascinating passage in which the speaker says that doctors must treat patients on a case-by-case basis, since some diseases are self-chosen (αὐθαίρετοι) and others caused by gods. In the last extant line, the speaker says, εἰ θεοί τι δρῶσι φαῦλον, οὔκ εἰσιν θεοί ('if the gods do anything base, they are not gods'.) The last three words are echoed and repeated in the atheistic fragment. Thus, I believe F 286b comes before and prompts the denial of the gods:

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stubbornness, Stheneboea attacks his greed (F 297)[50] and his pride, and she confesses that she would rather die than see bad men honoured unjustly (F 293). These lines set up and foreshadow her suicide later in the play. In another scene, she meets with Bellerophon and tries to come up with a plan, perhaps suggesting that they kill Iobates (F 289), but both the hero (F 287, 288) and the Chorus (F 291) reject this idea. The Chorus reminds them both about the capriciousness of fate, claiming that great men fall while the weak also see reversals of fortune (F 303, 304). Bellerophon suggests an alternative plan: to fly to the heavens and asks the gods themselves for forgiveness.[51] He notes that men often see reversals of fortune from bad to good (F 301) and that one should be courageous when facing misfortune (F 302). He then mounts Pegasus and flies to the heavens. He is denied admittance, is bucked off his steed, and falls to the earth, seriously injuring himself.[52] Either a messenger recounts the fall (F 309, 309a) before Bellerophon is brought onstage, or the wounded hero describes it himself. After hearing this news, Stheneboea runs inside and kills herself by drinking hemlock (*Frogs* 1050–1). Bellerophon praises his resolve before adversity (F 310), and then he is carried inside (F 311). Either before or after Bellerophon leaves the stage, a god, perhaps Athena or Poseidon, appears and describes the fate of Pegasus (F 312).

If this is close to the plot of Euripides' *Bellerophon*, we find characters not unknown to tragedy but carried to extremes and explored in more detail than their counterparts. We can compare Stheneboea to Jocasta in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Jocasta is incredulous about the validity of oracles: 'No mortal affair depends on the prophetic arts', she tells Oedipus (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, 709). She turns out to be incorrect, as does Stheneboea, and both commit suicide for their transgressions. We cannot tell whether Stheneboea's outright denial of the gods' existence is treated throughout the entire tragedy, but several of the fragments (F285, 286, 286b, 293, 300, 301, 303, 304) indicate that the seeming injustice of life is a prominent theme. The fate of Bellerophon is similar to that of Neoptolemus, who is killed seeking forgiveness

Chorus?	If the gods do anything base, they are not gods.
Stheneboea?	Who says there are gods in heaven? There are not, there are not (οὐκ εἰσὶν, οὐκ εἰσ').

See also Riedweg (n. 22), 41 n. 10.

[50] An extant fragment from Rhinton's phlyax play *Iobates* perhaps suggests that the king had a reputation for greed: χρήιζω γὰρ ὀλίον μισθὸν αὐτὸς λαμβάνειν ('I need to make a little money myself', F 4 K.–A.). Sophocles wrote a *Iobates*, but since we know very little about it, about the context of this fragment, or about phlyax plays themselves, it is impossible to draw any conclusions. Rhinton's line does, however, show some similarity to F 297.2 (ὅστις δὲ πλεῖστον μισθὸν εἰς χεῖρας λαβών): μισθὸν occupies the same position in the trimeter and λαμβάνειν/λαβών is the last word of each. If Rhinton's Iobates speaks this line, and if the inspiration for his characterization came from Euripides, it would lend support to my reading of Iobates as a negative character. Several of Rhinton's known plays share titles with Euripidean tragedies.

[51] On Bellerophon's motivation, we should be cautious about inferring too much from Trygaeus' motives in *Peace*. The verbal allusions to Euripides' tragedy all relate only to the flight and to Pegasus (*Peace* 76, 154–5, 722; cf. F 306, 307, 312, respectively). Yet even Trygaeus believes that the gods do exist and dwell on Olympus. On the parody, see P. Rau, *Paratragodia: Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes* (Munich, 1967), 89–97, and Dobrov (n. 20), 89–104.

[52] Bellerophon, like Stheneboea in her homonymous play, may fall into the sea and is then recovered alive, unlike Stheneboea, by ship. There are two (foreshadowing?) uses of the sea as a metaphor for life (F 301, 304) and a strange reference to a ship in the hypothesis (iiia.21). Furthermore, F 309a, which probably describes the fall, mentions heaven's 'watery greetings' and in *Peace* Trygaeus' daughter worries that he might crash into the sea (140).

from Apollo (*Andromache*, 1085–1165).[53] Both seek forgiveness from the gods, but both are punished. Throughout the play Bellerophon seems optimistic in the face of adversity, and he expects that his lot will turn out better with patience (F 287) and courage (F 302). The Bellerophon I imagine is the exact opposite to that imagined by other scholars. Whereas they find a foolish, bitter, and hostile (anti-)hero, I see a hero who displays perseverance and piety. As Olson says, 'the most basic thesis of *Bellerophon* appears to have been that its hero was a thoroughly decent character'.[54] When Bellerophon flies to the heavens, he believes that the gods will reward him for his devout piety, but the gods see his ascent as a hubristic transgression of the natural boundary between the mortal and the divine.[55]

When dealing with fragmentary dramas, sceptics will always win the day. I hope to have shown, however, contrary to the *communis opinio*, not only that there is no *a priori* reason to regard the *Bellerophon* as a sequel to the *Stheneboea*, but also that much evidence suggests that it was not. Likewise, there is no evidence that Euripides depicted Bellerophon as impious or an atheist, and the fragments themselves discount this interpretation. Only the specious temptation of reconciliation compels us to reconstruct the *Bellerophon* so that it coheres with the poet's own *Stheneboea* and with other mythical accounts. Given Euripides' penchant for innovative mythopoeia, however, we should be cautious of viewing the poet as beholden to any previous version of a myth, even his own.

Boston University DUSTIN W. DIXON
dwdixon@bu.edu

[53] Webster (n. 12), 110, compares Bellerophon's situation to Ion's, who is not allowed to consult Apollo (*Ion* 1546–59).

[54] Olson (n. 1), xxxiii.

[55] My reading supports the argument of M. Lefkowitz, '"Impiety" and "atheism" in Euripides' dramas', *CQ* 39 (1989), 70–82, that 'any character in Euripides who expresses "philosophical" notions about the gods does so out of desperation, and that ultimately, the gods in that play will prove – not always to the characters' satisfaction – that the gods still retain their traditional powers' (ibid., 72). Lefkowitz does not discuss the *Bellerophon*, but see Riedweg (n. 22), who also reaches the same conclusion as Lefkowitz but follows the traditional approach in assigning the atheistic fragment to Bellerophon. Given the fate of the hero at the end of the play, however, it would be impossible for the *Bellerophon* not to support Lefkowitz's thesis.