

ABSTRACT

Annotated Translation of Euripides' *Ion*

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Euripides' play *Ion*, like his other works, has been translated numerous times into English. However, these translations are often completed in poetic verse, and while still readable, can deter or isolate modern audiences from engaging with the text. This translation aims to create a prose rendition of the play in idiomatic English that is easier to read while still retaining elements of the original Greek. Combined with a section of endnotes to help explain obscure mythological allusions as well as point out interesting features of the language, this project hopes to make the world of Greek tragedy a little more accessible to the modern audience.

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ANNOTATED TRANSLATION OF EURIPIDES' *ION*

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INTRODUCTION

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle confesses that “Euripides, faulty though he may be in the general management of his subject, yet is felt to be the most tragic of the poets” (1.14, 1453a28-30). History must have agreed with him, for out of the three great tragedians of Ancient Greece, Euripides possesses the largest amount of surviving plays. And yet, modern audiences tend to tragically overlook his works for those of Sophocles. While the stories of *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* are generally known among the masses, the plays of Euripides remain relatively obscure to many.

The great potential for entertainment and edification that each story contains remains unknown to most people simply because they don’t feel as though they have the right knowledge or intellectual tastes to tackle his work. That could not be further from the truth. Dramatic performances were events attended by entire communities in Ancient Greece, and used stunning sets, costumes, music, dancing, and storytelling to enrapture their audience. All these spectacular elements still survive in the text, but accessing them can take a bit of work. This is where translators have their work cut out for them.

The original text of Euripides’ plays is already hard to decipher at times for the trained Hellenist. All of the surviving text comes from two surviving manuscripts located in the Laurentian and Vatican Libraries, and the loss of Ancient Mediterranean musical and metrical knowledge has made multiple passages in each difficult to render, especially the choral odes. To even begin translating, it takes comparing multiple editions, building off the conjectures of one editor here, switching line order there, and identifying

irreparably corrupt (even missing) verses. Thankfully, the work of commentators and textual critics that has amassed over the years makes this a much easier job than it would be without their contributions.

Once an edition of the text is settled on, one question still remains: How will the translator choose to approach the work. Like every tragic hero, every translator must choose how they will solve their dilemma. On the one hand, they could try to remain as literal as possible, allowing the target language to echo the distinct expressions and speech patterns of the original. However, this can come at the cost of isolating and confusing the target audience. On the other hand, the translator could focus on producing an idiomatic interpretation of the text, helping readers understand the thoughts behind the original text. But with such translations, one can never help but wonder if they truly experienced the work as it was intended. Neither option is the clear-cut “best choice.” Ultimately, it depends on the translator’s goals and the targeted audience.

For this project, I have opted with the latter approach, and tried to reproduce one of Euripides’ plays in smooth, idiomatic English prose. When I set out, it was my intention to translate a tragedy in a way most people could access. While there have been lovely translations of Euripides in rhymed iambs and free verse, the opinion most Modern Americans have towards classical poetry is that it is difficult and boring. Prose tends to be more inviting. I still attempted to preserve the sound of Euripides’ writing where I could. For example, I left many stock expressions the same (e.g. “see the light” = “be alive”) and tried to mimic Greek interjections to the best of my ability (English truly has no parallel for the quintessential *oimoi* or *pheu pheu* scattered throughout Euripides’

plays). Hopefully the mix of idiomatic English and Ancient Greek expression will result in a play that is easy to read while still intellectually stimulating.

For such a project, I could think of no better play to translate than Euripides' *Ion*. One of his more beautiful plays in my opinion, the story is plenty capable of capturing modern imaginations. Ion himself is essentially a Disney protagonist, a lost prince of Athens who sings as he sweeps and talks to birds. Creusa on the other hand provides the strong and daring female heroine Hollywood has grown to love. Add that to the mix of beautifully detailed descriptions of the set, more dramatic twists than a modern telenovela, and one of the few happy endings in Greek tragedy, and you have a show audiences will love. With a few notes to help explain niche mythological references and interesting peculiarities in the original text, this translation of *Ion* hopes to build off the countless renditions before it in way that will make Greek tragedy more accessible to a wider audience.

ION

Euripides

SETTING AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Apollo raped Creusa, daughter of Erechtheus, in Athens and made her pregnant, but she exposed the resulting child under the acropolis. The same place was witness to the wrong done to her and where she gave birth. However, Hermes took up the newborn and brought it to Delphi, where the Prophetess found him and reared him. Meanwhile, Xuthus married Creusa. Because he fought as an ally with the Athenians, he received the kingdom and the marriage of the aforementioned lady as a gift. Creusa has not had another child with this man, but Delphi made the one who was raised by the Prophetess the custodian of the temple, and he served his father without knowing it.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Hermes

Ion

Chorus of Creusa's Attendants

Creusa

Xuthus

An Old Man

A Servant of Creusa

The Pythian Prophetess Herself

Athena

The scenery of the play is set in Delphi.

[In front of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. Before the temple are an altar, an idol of Phoebus Apollo, and basin of cleansing water. The temple is flanked with groves of sacred laurel trees. Enter HERMES]

HERMES

Atlas, who bears heaven, ancient home of the gods, on his brazen back, fathered Maia from one of the goddesses. She in turn gave birth to me, Hermes, to Zeus the Greatest of the gods to be the servant of the powers-that-be. And I have come here to the land of Delphi where, sitting in the center of the world, Phoebus sings hymns to mortals about the things that are and the things that are going to be, always prophesying.

There is a city in Greece not without fame, named after Pallas of the golden spear. (10)* There, Phoebus raped the child of Erechtheus, Creusa, among those rocks to the north beneath Pallas Athena's acropolis which the lords of Attica call the "Makrai." But she kept it hidden from her father's knowledge (because the god desired it so) and she carried out the full term of her pregnancy. And when the time came, after she gave birth to the child within the palace, Creusa brought out the newborn to the same cave where she lay with the god, and she exposed him in his hollow cradle to die.

(20) But she preserved the custom of her ancestors and earth-born Erichthonius. For when he was born, the daughter of Zeus set a pair of snakes beside him to be his vigilant bodyguards, and then she gave him to Aglauros and her sisters to keep safe. From this story, the descendants of Erichthonius have a certain tradition to raise their little ones alongside serpents made of hammered gold.

* Numbers in parentheses roughly correspond with the lines of the original Greek text.

What fine clothing the maiden had, she wrapped around her baby boy, and then she left him out to die. So, my brother Phoebus asked me this: “O brother, go to the earthborn people (30) of glorious Athens (you know the goddess’ city), take up the newborn from the hollow rock along with his cradle and what swaddling clothes he has, and then bring him to my Oracle in Delphi, and place him at the very entrance of my house. And the rest will be for me to worry about (for the child is my own).”

And I, doing this favor for my brother Loxias¹, took up the woven cradle, carried him here, and then placed the child upon the foundation of this temple, (40) opening his cradle’s cover so he would be seen. The Prophetess stumbled upon him the same time the chariot of horse-driving Helios did, as she was entering the Oracular seat of the god. When she ran into him, she was astounded, wondering if some wretched girl of Delphi had the audacity to give birth to a secret child and cast it onto the house of a god, and she was ready to turn it out from the sacred grounds and hearth. But she cast out ferocity with pity (a god was the child’s ally so he would not be thrown out from the temple), and she took him in and raised him. (50) But she did not know Phoebus was his father, and she didn’t know what mother gave birth to him. The child still does not know his parents.

When he was little, he made his play around the altars and their offerings; but when he became a man in stature,² the Delphians made him the god’s treasurer and faithful steward of all his possessions, and even now he leads a holy life among the temple grounds.

But Creusa, who gave birth to the young man, has since gotten married to Xuthus. This is how it happened. War surged between the Athenians and the Chalcodonians, (60) who inhabit the land of Euboea. Afterwards, because he helped the Athenians fight and

drive out the enemy with his spear, Xuthus received the honor of Creusa's hand in marriage, although he was not a native Athenian, but was a descendant of Aeolus, a son of Zeus and an Achaean. Though he has sown his fields for a long time, he remains childless, and so does Creusa. And so they have come to the Oracle of Apollo desiring children. But Loxias has driven their fortune to this point. It has not escaped his notice, as it seems. (70) He will give his own child to Xuthus when he comes unto the Oracle, and he will say that Xuthus is his father, so that when he comes to the house of his mother, he might be recognized by Creusa. Loxias' love-affair will stay hidden and the child will acquire his due inheritance. And he will be called "Ion," the founder of an Asian land, all throughout Greece.

But I will go into these laurel groves so that I might learn what happens with the child. For I see this son of Loxias coming out to decorate the shining gates (80) with garlands of laurel. But I am the first of the gods to call him Ion, a name which he will receive later.

[Exit HERMES to the laurel groves on the side of the temple. Enter ION with attendants with a bow and arrows, basins for fetching water, a broom made of laurel branches, and garlands for the temple entrance. ION breaks into verse as he begins instructing his attendants in their morning duties]

ION

Already Helios and his brilliant chariot shed their light upon the earth, and the stars run from this ethereal fire into holy night. The untrodden peaks of Parnassus shine as they receive the wheel of day for mortals, (90) and the smoke of myrrh rises to the roof

of Phoebus' temple. A Delphian woman sits on the sacred tripod, singing to Greece whatever Apollo sings.

But you, Delphian attendants of Phoebus, go to the silvery Castalian spring, and once you have been washed clean with its pure water, return to the temple. Make sure good omens and blessings (100) come from your mouths to those who wish to consult the oracle.

[The attendants begin to exit as ION continues]

Meanwhile I'll clean the entrance of Phoebus' temple with a young branch of laurel and arrange it with holy garlands and sprinkle the ground with water, as I've always done since I was a child. And I'll chase away the flocks of birds that desecrate the holy offerings with my arrows. Since I came into this world motherless and fatherless, (120) I will care for the temples of Apollo that raised me.

[ION begins to sing in a different rhythm as he starts sweeping the temple]

Come, newly blossomed tool of the loveliest laurel, and sweep the hearth of Phoebus' temple. Come from your evergreen garden, where holy dew wets the leaves of the myrtle trees and sends forth an ever-flowing stream. (120) I sweep the floor of a god all day long, day after day, as soon as the sun rises on his wings.

O Paean, our healer! Blessed! May you be blessed, child of Leto!

The work I do as a servant for you before the temple (130) to honor your oracular seat is noble, Phoebus. My work is glorious. My hand is a slave for the gods, not mortals but immortals. I don't tire of laboring over this auspicious job. Phoebus is like father to me, and I bless him who nourished me, and I call Phoebus, (140) the one who dwells in this temple and helps me, my father.

O Paeon, our healer! Blessed! May you be blessed, child of Leto!

But I'll stop sweeping with my laurel broom, and will pour out water from the Castalian spring from this golden pitcher, (150) as my bed is chaste and undefiled. I wish that I could never stop serving Apollo like this, but if I do, I wish it would be for a good destiny.

[ION quickly leaves off from his current task and grabs his bow and arrow, using it to chase away the flocks of birds now descending on the temple]

Ey! Ey!

The birds are already leaving Parnassus and descending. I'm warning you! Don't even try to approach the eaves of this golden temple. I'll shoot you again with my arrows, winged herald of Zeus,* (160) though you conquer other birds with your sharp beak.

And now a swan is flying towards the altar. Won't you move your red foot elsewhere? Apollo's singing lyre won't protect you at all from my bow. Move your wings aside! Go to the pool of Delos! If you don't obey, your song will be "Ai! Ai!"

(170) Ey! Ey!

Who is this new bird? Are you making beds of straw for your young ones beneath the eaves of my temple? My bow will scare you off. Aren't you going to obey? Go away to the river Alpheus and have your chicks there, or to a valley in the Isthmus, so the offerings and the temple of Phoebus won't be desecrated. I'd be ashamed to kill you, (180) since you are the gods' messengers to mortals, but I am devoted to my service to Phoebus, and I won't stop serving the one who raised me.

* the eagle

[Enter the CHORUS of handmaidens, singing in turns as they fawn over the art and architecture of the temple complex]

CHORUS LEADER

It seems not only holy Athens has beautifully decorated temples and worships Apollo Agyieus.³ The light also brilliantly shines here on the twin facades on the temple of Loxias, son of Leto.

CHORUS MEMBER

(190) Look at this. The son of Zeus* is slaying the Lernaean Hydra with a golden sickle. Look at it, my dear.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

I see it. And there is someone else next to him holding a blazing torch. Could it be the warrior whose stories were told at my loom, Iolaus, (200) who helped the son of Zeus undergo his labors? ⁴

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

And look at this man sitting astride a winged horse. He is slaying the mighty fire breathing monster with three bodies.⁵

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

I'm looking around at it all. See the battle of the Giants on the stone walls.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

I'm looking at it, friends.

* Hercules

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

(210) Are you looking at the goddess shaking her shield emblazoned with the Gorgon at Enceladus...? ⁶

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

I see Pallas, my goddess.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

And what's this? The blazing thunderbolt in the hands of Zeus who smites from afar?

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

I see it. He's burning wretched Mimas to ash with his fire.⁷

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

And roaring Bacchus is slaying another one of Gaia's sons with his ivy staff, not a tool for war.

CHORUS LEADER

You there, beside the temple. (220) Are we allowed to set our pale feet beyond the threshold of this holy ground?

ION

That isn't allowed, strangers.

CHORUS LEADER

May we learn something from you then?

ION

What would you like to know?

CHORUS LEADER

Does the temple of Phoebus really house the center of the earth?

ION

Covered with garlands and surrounded by gorgons.

CHORUS LEADER

So the rumor goes.

ION

If you offer a cake of meal, honey, and oil in front of the temple and you wish to learn some oracle from Phoebus, then approach the altar. But unless you have sacrificed any sheep, do not approach the inner chamber of the temple.

CHORUS LEADER

I understand. (230) We won't break the god's customs. My eyes are delighted enough with what's on the outside.

ION

That is allowed. Take it all in.

CHORUS LEADER

My masters have given us leave to see the god's sacred grounds.

ION

What house are you slaves to?

CHORUS LEADER

The house that raised my rulers is shared with Pallas. Here comes the one you're talking about.

[Enter CREUSA]

ION

You have a certain nobleness to your appearance, a sure sign of your character, whoever you are, ma'am. But once they've seen their dress, most people would know (240) if a person were well-born.

[CREUSA begins crying at the sight of the temple]

Ey! You astound me, covering your eyes and wetting your noble cheeks with tears⁸ once you saw Loxias' holy Oracle. Why are you anxious to come here, ma'am? Everyone else rejoices when they see the god's sanctuary. Why do your eyes run with tears?

CREUSA

Stranger, it is not rude of you to wonder about my tears, but when I saw the temple of Apollo, (250) an old memory came to mind. Home must hold my mind though I am here, I suppose.

Oh, how wretched are women! Oh the shameless acts of the gods! What then? Where will we take our case if we are destroyed by the injustice of our overlords?

ION

What're you so worked up about?

CREUSA

Nothing. I am putting away my bow and arrows and keeping quiet about this matter. Don't think about them anymore yourself.

ION

But who are you? What land did you come from? What sort of fatherland have you sprung up from? What should I call you?

CREUSA

(260) Creusa is my name. Erechtheus was my father. My fatherland the city of the Athenians.

ION

A lady from a glorious city and sprung from nobility! I am in awe of you!

CREUSA

I am not well off where such great things are concerned, stranger, but not beyond that.

ION

By the gods, as people say the story goes . . .

CREUSA

What are you wanting to learn?

ION

Did your father's ancestor really spring from the earth?

CREUSA

Yes, Erichthonius did, but my lineage does not help me.

ION

And Athena really took him up from the earth?

CREUSA

(270) Yes, into her virgin arms. She did not give birth to him.

ION

And did she give him, just as it's commonly depicted . . .

CREUSA

To the daughters of Cecrops to keep safe? Yes. But they were not allowed to look at him

ION

I heard that the maidens opened the cradle the goddess gave them.

CREUSA

And for that they died, bloodying the acropolis.⁹

ION

Well then, what about this? Is the story true or false...?

CREUSA

What are you asking about? I have plenty of leisure to talk.

ION

Your father Erechtheus, did he really sacrifice your sisters?

CREUSA

Yes. He was so cruel as to sacrifice virgins for his country.

ION

But how were you the only one spared out of all your sisters?

CREUSA

(280) I was just a newborn babe in my mother's arms.

ION

Did the earth really open up and swallow your father?

CREUSA

Earthquakes from the blows of Poseidon's trident killed him.

ION

And is there a place in Athens called the Makrai?

CREUSA

And what is *this* you inquire? Ay! You have reminded me of something.

ION

The Pythian god and his flashes of lightning honor that spot.

CREUSA

He honors it? He *honors* it?! * Oh that I had never seen it!

ION

Why do you hate something so dear to the god?

CREUSA

Nothing. I am privy to something shameful that happened among those caves.

[There is a moment of silence before ION changes the subject]

ION

Which Athenian married you, ma'am?

CREUSA

(290) He is not from the city, but hails from another land.

ION

Who? He must obviously be a noble.

CREUSA

Xuthus, a descendant of Aeolus and Zeus.

* *He honors it? He honors it?!:* The original text is corrupt.

ION

And how did he, a foreigner, manage to win your hand?

CREUSA

Athens has a nearby city, Euboea . . .

ION

Separated by the sea, they say.

CREUSA

He helped the sons of Cecrops defeat it in battle.

ION

As an ally? And then he married you?

CREUSA

The wedding gifts of war and honor of his spear.

ION

Have you come to the Oracle with your husband or alone?

CREUSA

(300) With him. But he has stayed behind at the shrine of Trophonius.¹⁰

ION

As a tourist or seeking an oracle?

CREUSA

He wants to learn one thing from Trophonius and Phoebus.

ION

Did he come because of the fruit of the earth or children?

CREUSA

We are childless, though we've been married for a long time.

ION

And you haven't had any children that whole time, but remain childless?

CREUSA

Phoebus knows that I am childless.

ION

O you poor thing! Though you're doing fine with other matters, you aren't really well.

CREUSA

But who are you? Whoever gave birth to you I call happy.

ION

I am called a servant to the god, ma'am, and live my life as such.

CREUSA

(310) Were you offered up by the city or sold by someone?

ION

I only know one thing: that I am called Loxias'.

CREUSA

Then I pity you as well, stranger.

ION

I don't know my mother or father.

CREUSA

Do you live among the temples or in a house?

ION

My whole house is the god's. Wherever I sleep I call home.

CREUSA

Did you come to the temple as a child or a young man?

ION

The people who seem to know say I was a newborn.

CREUSA

And did any Delphian woman raise you on her milk?

ION

I've never known a mother's breast, but the woman who raised me...

CREUSA

(320) Who, you poor young man? Though I suffer pain myself, I have found more.

ION

The Priestess of Phoebus, I consider her mother.

CREUSA

What food did you live on until you reached manhood?

ION

The altars and the pilgrims who come here fed me.

CREUSA

(326) You must have a livelihood, for I see that you are well adorned.

ION

(327) I'm decked with the belongings of the god I serve.

CREUSA

(328) And did you never jump at the chance find your parents?

ION

(329) No, ma'am. I have no sure sign to start from.

CREUSA

(324) Whoever bore you must be miserable.

ION

(325) It's likely I resulted from an injustice done to a woman.

CREUSA

(330) Oh! Another woman has suffered the same things as your mother.

ION

Who? If she could share my pain, I'd be glad.

CREUSA

It is on her account that I have come ahead of my husband.

ION

What are you going to ask? I want to know so that I can help.

CREUSA

I need a secret oracle from Phoebus.

ION

Tell me. I'll take care of it.

CREUSA

Listen to her story [*she hesitates to continue*]...but I'm ashamed for her.

ION

Then you'll accomplish nothing. Shame's an idle goddess.

CREUSA

One of my friends says she lay with Phoebus.

ION

A woman with Phoebus?! Don't say such things, stranger!

CREUSA

(340) And she gave birth to the god's child without her father knowing.

ION

It can't be! She has to be ashamed at the wrongdoing of a mortal man.

CREUSA

She does not say so, and she has suffered! Poor woman!

ION

What did she have to do? That is if she actually laid with the god.

CREUSA

She exposed the child that she bore.

ION

And what came of the child? Does he still see the light?

CREUSA

No one knows. I seek to know these things in an oracle.

ION

But if he's no longer alive, how did he die?

CREUSA

She supposes wild beasts killed the wretched thing.

ION

She might've said this, but does she have any proof?

CREUSA

(350) When she came to the place where she exposed him, she couldn't find him anymore.

ION

Was there any blood on the ground?

CREUSA

She does not say so, although she searched everywhere.

ION

When was the child exposed?

CREUSA

If he really were alive, he would be the same age as you.

ION

(357) But what, if Phoebus took him and is raising him without her knowledge?

CREUSA

(358) Then he is rejoicing by himself in something that should be shared and is not doing what is right.

ION

(355) The god wronged him. His mother's pitiful.

CREUSA

(356) At any rate, she had no other child after him.

ION

(359) Oi me! This misfortune harmonizes with mine.

CREUSA

(360) And I imagine that you, stranger, long for your suffering mother.

ION

Don't drag me out to the home I'd forgotten.

CREUSA

I will be quiet. End the matter I was asking you about.

ION

Do you know the biggest problem with what you've said?

CREUSA

What is not a problem for that miserable woman?

ION

How could the god prophesy about he wishes to keep hidden?

CREUSA

If he really sits on a prophetic tripod that all of Greece comes to, he will.

ION

He's ashamed of what he's done. Don't go and accuse him.

CREUSA

But the one who had to experience the misfortune is suffering!

ION

No one will be your go-between in this situation because if the god were convicted of being base in his own house, (370) Phoebus would justly do some harm to whoever prophesies to you. Leave it as it is, ma'am. Matters that antagonize the god must not be put to him for questioning. For I'd be foolish if I tried to get the gods to reveal what they aren't willing to, either by offering sheep or reading bird signs. When we pursue what the gods aren't willing to give, we get it in vain, ma'am. (380) We benefit from what they freely give.

CHORUS LEADER

Many mortals have many misfortunes, but they differ in form. Any mortal would scarcely find a single fortunate person in life.

CREUSA

Phoebus, both there and here you are not just to my absent friend, though her words are not. You did not save your son, though you ought to have saved him. And now you won't even speak to the inquiring mother even though you are a prophet. If he no longer lives, she could honor him with a funeral, but if he still lives, he could return to his mother someday. (390) I suppose I must let it pass,* if I am hindered by the god from learning what I want.

But, stranger, I see my noble husband, Xuthus, nearby. He has left the cave of Trophonius. Keep what we have talked about secret in his presence, lest I be put to shame for what I have done in secret from him and our conversation be misconstrued. For the

* *I suppose I must let it pass*: The original text is corrupt

difficulties of women are distasteful to men, and because they mix up the good with the bad, (400) we are still hated by them. Such is our misfortune.

[Enter XUTHUS]

XUTHUS

Let the god be glad after he receives my greeting first, and then my wife. I haven't scared you by tarrying so long, have I?

CREUSA

Not at all. I had started to worry, but tell me, what oracles do you bring from Trophonius? How might we have children?

XUTHUS

He didn't think it right to take oracles before the god does, but he did say one thing. You and I will not come home from the Oracle childless.

CREUSA

(410) Revered Lady, Mother of Phoebus,* if we have come here auspiciously, may the former engagements which we had with your son change for the better.

XUTHUS

These things will happen. But who here speaks on the god's behalf?

ION

I see to what happened outside the temple. What happens inside is the concern of others, the best of the Delphians, chosen by lot, who sit near the tripod.

XUTHUS

Well and good. I have everything I wanted.

* Leto

I will go inside because, as I hear, (420) the general offering for the Oracle for pilgrims has been made in front of the temple. I want to hear the god's prophecies on this auspicious day. But you, my wife, take some laurel branches and pray around the altars to the gods that I will carry away oracles promising children from the temple of Apollo.

CREUSA

It will happen! It will!

[XUTHUS enters the temple]

And if Loxias now wishes conversely to make amends for his former wrongdoings, he still would not be altogether dear to us, but as much as he foretells (for he is a god) I will receive.

[Exit CREUSA.]

ION

(430) Why is this foreign lady always speaking against the god in riddles, reviling him? Is it out of love for the woman whom she's consulting the Oracle for, or is she keeping quiet about things that need to stay that way?

But what does the daughter of Erechtheus have to do with me? She doesn't concern me at all. Instead I'll pour pure water from golden ewers into the vessel for sprinkling with holy water.

However, I must admonish Phoebus. What is the matter with him? Does he rape virgins and then forsake them? Does he secretly father children and then neglect them as they die? Surely you don't, Apollo. Since you are powerful, (440) pursue virtue. The gods punish any wicked mortal. How can it be fair that you all, after writing laws for mortals, you yourselves incur the infamy of lawlessness? For if (though it isn't possible,

and I'm speaking only for the sake of argument) you give reparations to mortals for rape, you and Poseidon and Zeus, who is master of heaven, empty your temples to pay the penalty for your injustice. For you do wrong in being eager for pleasures rather than considering the consequences. (450) It isn't right in any way to call mortals bad if we imitate things that are fine for the gods. Blame instead the ones who have taught us these things!

[Exit ION]

CHORUS

Athena, who was born without the help of Eileithyia, who was delivered from the forehead of Zeus with the help of Titan Prometheus, I beg you and blessed Nike to come to the home of the Pythia, flying from the golden halls of Olympus (460) to the streets where Phoebus's hearth, the center of the earth, fulfills prophecies beside the tripod that mortals dance around, you and Leto's daughter,* two virgin goddesses, holy siblings of Phoebus.

Ladies, pray that the ancient race of Erechtheus (470) will receive clear oracles about the long awaited blessing of children.

For mortals get exceeding joy from children. Their youthful strength brightens a father's halls, and in time, they produce their own offspring, receiving their father's inheritance (480) to pass down to the next generation. They are a defense against evil. They are cherished in times of good fortune. They are strength and salvation, defending the fatherland with their spears. I would rather have children to care for than wealth or

* Artemis

stately palaces. The childless life is dreadful, and I rebuke anyone who thinks it good.

(490) May I be blessed with children and enough wealth to get by.

Oh the sacred seats of Pan! Oh the rock near the Makrai, full of caves, where the daughters of Aglauros dance over the green lawns in front of Pallas' temple, (500) while you play songs on the panpipes in your sunless caves, Pan, where a maiden gave birth to Phoebus' child and exposed the poor thing for the birds to devour, a bloody feast for wild beasts, an outrage resulting from that bitter rape. I haven't heard such a story where the children of the gods had good fortune while I was at the loom or in any conversation.¹¹

[Enter ION]

ION

(510) Handmaidens, while you were keeping look out for your mistress around this fragrant temple, do you know if Xuthus has already left the Oracle and her tripod, or is he still in the temple asking about his childlessness?

CHORUS LEADER

He's in the temple, stranger. He hasn't left yet, but he must be on his way out. I hear the sound of the doors, and now I can see my master coming out.

[Enter XUTHUS]

XUTHUS

Oh child! Greetings! That sounds like a good introduction to me.

ION

I am glad, but be sensible, and we'll be alright.

XUTHUS

Let me kiss your hand and embrace you.

ION

(520) Are you alright? Or is some god causing mischief and making you sound crazy, stranger?

XUTHUS

Why would I not be alright? I have found the dearest thing and I don't want him slipping away!

[XUTHUS embraces ION]

ION

Stop touching me! Don't break the garlands of the god!

XUTHUS

I will keep holding on to you. I am not dragging you away like a stolen prize, but I have found something dear to me.

ION

Would you like to release me before you get an arrow in your lungs?

XUTHUS

Why do you shrink from recognizing your own dearest one?

ION

I don't like teaching crude and maddened strangers.

XUTHUS

Kill me and burn me, then, but you will be the murder of your own father if you do.

ION

You're my father? Is this some sort of joke?

XUTHUS

No! As I continue my story, you will understand.

ION

(530) And what are you going to tell me? ¹²

XUTHUS

That I am your father, and you are my son.

ION

Who says so?

XUTHUS

Loxias, who raised you even though you are mine.

ION

You're just saying that.

XUTHUS

I learned it just now from the Oracle of the god.

ION

When you heard her riddle, you interpreted it wrong.

XUTHUS

Then I must not be hearing well.

ION

What is Phoebus' story?

XUTHUS

That the person who met me...

ION

What meeting?

XUTHUS

...as I was leaving the temple of the god...

ION

Which would result with what exactly?

XUTHUS

...would be my son.

ION

Born from you or given from someone else?

XUTHUS

Given, and yet he came from me.

ION

And you ran into me first?

XUTHUS

No one else, son.

ION

How did this happen?

XUTHUS

We are both amazed at the same thing.

ION

(540) What mother did you have me with?

XUTHUS

I could not tell you.

ION

Didn't Phoebus say?

XUTHUS

I was so delighted at this that I did not think to ask about that.

ION

Perhaps I was born from Mother Earth herself.

XUTHUS

The ground does not give birth to children.

ION

How could I have come from you then?

XUTHUS

I don't know, but I will bring it up to the god.

ION

Come, let's try a different approach.

XUTHUS

Good thinking.

ION

Have you ever had an affair?

XUTHUS

In the folly my youth.

ION

Before you married Erechtheus' daughter?

XUTHUS

Well I certainly did not after that.

ION

So you begat me back then?

XUTHUS

It matches with the time.

ION

Then how did I end up here?

XUTHUS

I am at a loss.

ION

Did I come a long way?

XUTHUS

I am stumped at this too.

ION

(550) Have you ever come to the Pythia's rocky summit before?

XUTHUS

For the Bacchic festivals, yes.

ION

Did you stay with one of the public hosts?

XUTHUS

Yes, with him, and the maidens of Delphi...

ION

Did he introduce you or...? How do you say it?

XUTHUS

Maenads of Bacchus!

ION

Were you sober or drunk?

XUTHUS

I was partaking in the pleasures of Bacchus.

ION

Then that explains that. Where I was conceived...

XUTHUS

...Fate has discovered, my child.

ION

But how did I end up at the temple?

XUTHUS

Likely, you were exposed by the girl.

ION

I have escaped the lot of a born slave, then.

XUTHUS

Now take me as your father, child.

ION

I suppose it isn't right to doubt the god.

XUTHUS

That is very sensible.

ION

And what more could I want...

XUTHUS

Now you see it as you should.

ION

... than to be the son of a descendant of Zeus?

XUTHUS

Which is your lot.

ION

(560) Have I really held my father?

XUTHUS

If you have been persuaded to trust the god.

ION

Welcome, Father...

XUTHUS

How welcome that is to hear!

ION

...this very day rejoices!

XUTHUS

It has made me very happy!

ION

Dear mother, when will I see you, too? I wish to see you now more than ever, whoever you are.

CHORUS LEADER

We share the good fortune of the royal family, but all the same, I wish that my mistress and the house of Erechtheus were just as fortunate when it comes to children.¹³

XUTHUS

My boy, the god has happily brought about your discovery (570) and united me with you, and you have found your nearest and dearest once more, though you never saw him before. I also desire what you do: that you, my boy, find your mother, and I discover what sort of woman gave birth to you. But if we give these things time, we might, perhaps, discover them.

But leave behind the god's sacred precinct and your wandering lifestyle and come to Athens, where the blessing of your father's kingly power awaits you, mighty and rich. And you will not feel the pain (580) of being called low born or poor, but you will be called noble and exceedingly rich.

Why are you silent? Why are you staring at the ground?¹⁴ You went off into deep thought. By turning from joy you cast fear upon your father.

ION

Things don't look the same when they are far off as they do when they're right at hand. I'm thankful that I happened to discover you, father. But listen to how I understand the situation.

They say that the famous people of Athens sprung up from the ground itself (590) and don't descend from a foreign people. So I will face two challenges, since my father is a foreigner and I'm a bastard child. I'd have no standing so long as I had this disgrace...I'd be called a nobody because I am a nobody.* If I ever want to become someone of status and rush to be at the helm of the city, I'll be hated by the powerless, because I'll offend them with my advantages. But among the circle of honest, wise, and influential citizens, who keep to themselves and don't engage in politics, (600) I'll become a laughing stock, a fool since I don't keep quiet in a city full of envy. And when I enter the city assembly,† I will be held back by their votes. For these sort of things tend to go that way, father. Those who rule cities and possess honors are very hostile to rivals.

And if I, a stranger, come into another man's house and to his childless wife, who used to share this misfortune with you, but has now been left all alone in her destitution (610) to bear her own bitter misfortune, why wouldn't she have good reason to hate me when I stand close beside you while she, childless, bitterly looks upon what you hold dear? Then you'll either have to give me up and look to your wife or honor me and ruin your house.

* *I'd be called a nobody because I am a nobody*: The original text is corrupt

† *And when I enter the city assembly*: Parts of the original text are corrupt

Trust me, women discover many ways to kill butcher their husbands or poison them. Besides, I pity your wife, father. She's getting older and has no children. She descends from nobility and doesn't deserve (620) to be childless.

Being a ruler is overrated. It looks pleasant on the outside, but there's sorrow at home. Can anyone be happy when he lives in fear and suspicion? I'd rather live the life of a fortunate commoner than be a king who takes pleasure in worthless friends and despises good people because he's afraid to die.

Would you say gold overcomes all that? (630) That it's great to be rich? No, I don't want to be blamed for guarding my wealth with a clenched fist, and I don't like trouble either. I'd rather have a moderate lifestyle so I won't feel any pain.

Listen to all the good things I've got going here, father. Leisure, for one thing, the dearest thing a person could have. Just the right amount of troubles too. Not a single wicked man has pushed me out of his way (and I can't stand having to step aside for good-for-nothings). I get to join people in their prayers to the gods and their daily conversations. I get to help joyful people, not mournful ones. (640) And just as I would send some on their way, other would arrive, so I was always a pleasant new face to them. It was a life people ought to wish for, even if they don't want it. My habits and nature made me righteous before the god.

As I think about these things, I think what I've got here is better than there, father. Let me live right here, for it's just as pleasant to be happy with great things as with small possession.

CHORUS LEADER

Well said, since your preference means that people I care about can be fortunate.

XUTHUS

(650) Stop talking like that, and learn how to handle success! I want to start sharing tables with you in the very place I found you, son, lying down at a public feast. I want to give the sacrifices I did not offer on the day you were born. For now I will lead you, a stranger and yet member of my own house, and delight you with a feast. Then I will bring you to the land of Athens (as a visitor, not as my own son). For I do not want my wife to be grieved over her childlessness while I myself am prospering. In time I will seize the right moment and persuade my wife (660) to allow you to hold the scepter of the land along with me.

I name you Ion, suitable for this chance occurrence, since you were the first to cross paths with me as I was going out from the god's sanctuary.¹⁵ Once you have gathered all of your friends at the sacrifice, address them with pleasure and tell them that you are going to leave the city of Delphi behind you.

Slaves, keep quiet about these things. Otherwise it's death for anyone who says a word to my wife.

ION

I might go, then. But my good fortune is still missing one thing. If I don't ever find out who the woman that gave birth to me was, father, (670) my life will be intolerable. If it's okay to pray, then may the woman who gave birth to me be from Athens, so I could speak freely thanks to my mother's lineage. For if some foreigner ever stumbles into a city of a single race, even if he's called a citizen in conversation, he learns to have a mouth slave and isn't free to speak his mind.¹⁶

[Exit XUTHUS leading ION]

CHORUS

I see tears and mourning, I see the beginning of loud cries and groaning once my queen¹⁷ knows that her husband has been blessed with children (680) while she remains childless. What prophetic strain have you sung, Oracular Child of Leto? Where did this child who was reared around your temple come from? What woman was his mother? This divine message does not make me happy. I fear it is a trick. I fear the misfortune that will come of it. (690) It is a strange story, and there's something treacherous and fateful about the child...the child who came from another woman. Who wouldn't agree?

[The handmaidens of the CHORUS begin to sing in turns]

CHORUS MEMBER

Friends, shouldn't we tell these things plainly to my mistress' ears? That her husband, in whom she shared all her hopes, poor thing...

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Now she is flowing with misfortunes, but he is faring well.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

(700) She slips away into gray old age, but her husband...

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

He doesn't honor his own.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Good-for-nothing! He came from abroad to her house and entered into great happiness, but he didn't make her fortune equal to his.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

May he be destroyed, destroyed for deceiving my mistress!

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

May he have no luck when he offers his brightly burning sacrifice to the gods on the fire. But he will know my feelings: (710) how dear my queen is to me.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

The child and his new father must be close to their feast.

[The CHORUS sings in unison again]

CHORUS

Oh rocky peak of Parnassus, watchtower and seat of heaven, where Bacchus holds up his flaming torches and leaps about lightly in the night with his Bacchantes, may the child never come to my city. (720) May he die and abandon his young life. For the mourning city would have an excuse to call it a foreign invasion...just as lord Erechtheus gathered and led his forces before.

[Enter CREUSA, leading an OLD MAN by the hand as he walks]

CREUSA

Oh you old tutor of my father back when he was alive, come to the Oracle, so that we might rejoice together should the Lord Loxias utter any prophecy about having children! (730) For it is pleasant to be with friends when faring well. But if anything bad should happen (God forbid!) it is sweet to see a kindly face. And I, your mistress, will tend to you as I would my own father, just as you did to my father before me.

OLD MAN

My daughter, worthy of your noble descent, you maintain your character and never disgrace your ancestors who sprang from earth itself. Lead me, lead me on to the

temple and bring me there. The Oracle is hard for me to reach. (740) Help my old limbs.

Be my healer.

CREUSA

Follow me now. Watch your step.

OLD MAN

Yes. My foot might be slow, but my mind is quick.

CREUSA

Lean on your walking stick. Your steps are shaky.

OLD MAN

They're blind too, for my sight is rather dim.

CREUSA

You are right, but do not give up out of weariness.

OLD MAN

I certainly won't quit on purpose; but I don't have control over what isn't there.

CREUSA [*to the CHORUS*]

Ladies, faithful servants of my loom and shuttle, what sort of fortune did my husband receive about children when he left? We have come because of it. (750) Give me a sign. If you tell me something good, you will be doing a favor for your dutiful masters.

CHORUS LEADER

Oh god!

OLD MAN

This prelude does not bode well.¹⁸

CHORUS MEMBER

Oh miserable one!

OLD MAN

What is wrong with the oracles for my masters?

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Aiai! What do we do?! Death lies all around these things!

CREUSA

What song is this? What are you afraid of?

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Should we tell or keep quiet? What will we do?

CREUSA

Speak up! For you have some sort of misfortune to tell me.

CHORUS LEADER

(760) I'll tell you, even if I am going to die twice for it. Mistress, you won't ever hold a child in your arms or at your breast.

CREUSA

Oi me! Let me die!¹⁹

OLD MAN

My daughter!

CREUSA

My misfortune makes me miserable. I have received, I have suffered pain I cannot live through, my friends! I am ended.

OLD MAN

Child!

CREUSA

Ai ai! Pain shoots throughout my chest!

OLD MAN

Don't mourn yet...

CREUSA

The wailing is already here.

OLD MAN

(770) Not until we learn...

CREUSA

What's left for me to learn about?

OLD MAN

Whether the master shares this misfortune or you alone suffer from it.

CHORUS LEADER

Loxias gave a child to *that* man, old one. He's doing well on his own, without her.

CREUSA

What you just said is the worst evil in this whole situation, a pain for me to mourn over.

OLD MAN

But is the child you mentioned not born yet, or was he was already alive in the prophecy?

CHORUS LEADER

(780) The child Loxias gave him was already born and full grown. I was there myself.

CREUSA

What are you saying? Unspeakable...unspeakable...you've told me unspeakable things.

OLD MAN

To me also. How was the oracle fulfilled? Tell me more clearly, who is the child?

CHORUS LEADER

The first person your husband ran into as he was leaving the god's temple was the child the god gave him.

CREUSA

Oh, oh, oh! So he did sing about my childless, childless life, then? (790) I will live alone in a house bereft of children.

OLD MAN

Who was prophesied? Who the husband of this poor woman cross paths with? How and where did he see him?

CHORUS LEADER

You know the young man who was sweeping the temple, my dear mistress? He is the child.

CREUSA

If only I could fly through the air far from the land of Greece. I have suffered so much pain, my friends.

OLD MAN

(800) What name did the father give him? Do you know? Or is it still unknown and in silence?

CHORUS LEADER

He called him Ion because he was the first person to cross paths with his father.

OLD MAN

What sort of woman was his mother?

CHORUS LEADER

I couldn't tell you. But just so you'll know everything that I do, old man, her husband is off giving a sacrificial feast for the child's friends and celebrating his birth-rites at the sacred tents without her knowing, throwing a feast with his new child.

OLD MAN

Mistress, we have been betrayed (yes, I am suffering with you) by the hand of your husband. (810) We're being insulted by his acts of treachery and have been cast out from the house of Erectheus. I'm not speaking out of hatred for your husband, though I prefer you to that man. The man who married you, who entered your city as a foreigner, who took your home and your inheritance, has made it clear that he must be enjoying the offspring he secretly had with another woman.

"Just how secret?" you might ask. I'll show you. As soon as he figured out that you were childless, he wasn't content to be like you and bear the same lot, but he secretly bedded down with a slave girl (820) and had the child. Then he gave it to someone from Delphi to raise outside of our country. The child was raised as though he'd been dedicated to the god's temple so this whole plot would go unnoticed. When your husband

found out that the boy had reached his youth, he persuaded you to come here because of your childlessness.

The god did not deceive you, but this man did long ago while he was raising his child, and he meticulously wove together this plot. If it was detected, he would cast the blame on the god, but he went unnoticed all this time,* he intended to invest the boy with the rule of your land. (830) And over the course of time he came up with this new name, “Ion,” because he pretended to come across him as he was going on his way.

CHORUS LEADER

Oi me! I will always hate villainous men, who plot out injustice and then adorn it with cunning arts. I’d rather have a kind and simple man for a friend than a wicked schemer.

OLD MAN

And you’ll suffer the worst evil of all. He is taking a motherless, insignificant, slave-born child and making him master of your house. The evil would have been singular if it were the child of a noble woman (840) that he was bringing home. He’d win you over by pleading that he did it because you were childless. And if you found that cruel, then he should have sought marriage with some Aeolian woman.²⁰

You must do something about this within a woman’s power. Take up a sword or come up with some treacherous plan or procure some poison. Kill your husband and his child before they kill you. For if you lower your resolve, you will die, because when two enemies come under one roof, one or the other has to suffer misfortune. (850) I am willing to help you accomplish this and kill the child. I will enter the house where he’s

* *but if he went unnoticed all this time*: the original text is corrupted

getting the feast ready. I am willing to die and repay to my masters for their kindness, or to live and continue looking upon the light. Just one thing brings shame to slaves: our title. As far as everything else is concerned, any good slave is no worse than a freeman.

CHORUS LEADER

I'm also willing to help, dear mistress, and have a share in this. I'm willing to die or live.

[CREUSA begins to sing, revealing her affair with Apollo.]

CREUSA

Oh my soul, how can I stay silent? (860) How can I reveal that clandestine affair? How can I leave behind the shame? What hinders me still? Who am I pitted against in a contest of virtue? Is my husband not a traitor? Have I not lost my house? Have I not lost my children? Aren't the expectations which I longed to arrange well but simply could not entirely lost? All because I kept quiet about that marriage, because I kept quiet about that mournful birth.

(870) But by the starry throne of Zeus, by the goddess who dwells upon our hills, and by the holy headland of Triton's pool, I will not keep that affair secret anymore. Once I cast it from my heart I will be at ease. My eyes drip with tears, and my soul feels pain. I'm victim of the plots of mortals and immortals, whom I will prove (880) are thankless traitors to their marriage beds.

Oh you who makes the seven-stringed kithara sing, who plays lovely hymns on the lifeless, rustic horn, oh, son of Leto, I will cry out your blame in the light of day. You came to me, your hair gleaming with gold, when I was culling golden crocuses and setting them into the folds of my mantle (890) to decorate it. You clung to the white

wrists of my hands and led me to the marriage bed of a cave while I cried out, “Oh mother!” as you gratified shameless Cyprian Aphrodite. And I, the wretched one, gave birth to your son. In fear of my mother, I cast him at that bed of yours (900) where I joined my miserable self with you in a miserable union. Oi me! And now my child has perished, a feast carried off by the birds...and he was your son too, hard-hearted one! But you simply pluck away on your kithara and sing paeans.

Oi! I call upon you, son of Leto, who delivers oracles before your golden seat, (910) your temple in the middle of the earth, and now I will proclaim something in your ears: Wicked bedmate! Though you received no favor from him, you settled a child in my house for my husband! But the one that was mine and yours, you ignorant fool, perished, carried off by birds of prey, and has left behind the baby clothes his mother gave him. Delos hates you and so do the shoots of laurel (920) that grow beside the lush palm tree where Leto gave birth to you, a holy one, among Zeus’ orchards.

CHORUS LEADER

Oi me! How great a store of evils has been laid bare! Anyone would shed a tear at them!

OLD MAN

My daughter, I can’t look at your face enough. I am stunned. Just as I’m draining my chest of one wave of evils, your words bring another one from the stern that sweeps me away. You’ve left behind your present troubles (930) and pursued the bad paths of other miseries.

What are you talking about? What are you accusing Loxias of? What sort of child are you saying you gave birth to? Where in the city did you say you placed his dear body for the wild animals? Go back and tell me again.

CREUSA

I am ashamed, old man, but nevertheless I will tell you.

OLD MAN

I know how to be genuine when I weep with friends.

CREUSA

Then listen. Do you know about the cave to the north of the Cecropian Rocks, which we call the Makrai?

OLD MAN

I know of it. Pan's shrine is there and his altars are nearby.

CREUSA

I was involved in a terrible struggle there.

OLD MAN

(940) What struggle? Oh! I'm tearing up at your words.

CREUSA

I unwillingly joined with Phoebus in a disastrous union.

OLD MAN

Oh my daughter, was that what I noticed back then?

CREUSA

I don't know. But if you should happen to say what really happened, then I could affirm it.

OLD MAN

That time when you grieved over a hidden sorrow...?

CREUSA

It was over the evils I'm revealing to you now.

OLD MAN

How did you hide Apollo's union with you?

CREUSA

I gave birth...bear with me and listen, old man.

OLD MAN

Where did this happen? Who took care of you? Or were you in labor by yourself?

CREUSA

By myself, in the very cave where I was raped.

OLD MAN

(950) Where is the child? You won't be childless anymore.

CREUSA

He's dead, old one. I left him to the wild animals.

OLD MAN

He's dead? Apollo, that coward! Didn't he defend him at all?

CREUSA

He didn't. The child is being raised in the House of Hades.

OLD MAN

Who exposed him? It couldn't have been you, right?

CREUSA

I did. I wrapped him up in my clothes in the dark of night.

OLD MAN

Doesn't anyone else know about the child's exposure?

CREUSA

Only my misfortunes and concealment of it.

OLD MAN

How did you muster the strength to leave your child in that cave?

CREUSA

How else? With much lamentation.

OLD MAN

(960) Ah! You were terribly rash, but the god is even more reckless than you.

CREUSA

If you had only seen the child stretching out his hands for me!

OLD MAN

Seeking to lay at your breast or in your arms?

CREUSA

There, where he didn't deserve to suffer being away from me.

OLD MAN

What notion made you expose your child?

CREUSA

I thought that the god would save his own son.

OLD MAN

Oi me! How storm-tossed is the happiness of your house!

CREUSA

What are you covering your head and crying for, old man? ²¹

OLD MAN

Because I see you and your father suffering misfortune.

CREUSA

Such is the lot of mortals. Nothing in this life lasts.

OLD MAN

(970) Let's not cling to grief any more, daughter.

CREUSA

What should I do? Misfortune is a difficult position to be in.

OLD MAN

First, take vengeance on the god who wronged you.

CREUSA

And how can I prevail at something beyond a mortal's capabilities?

OLD MAN

Burn up Loxias' Holy Oracle.

CREUSA

I would dread to do that! I have enough woe at the moment.

OLD MAN

Then venture to do what you can. Kill your husband.

CREUSA

I respect my marriage. He was faithful to it back then.

OLD MAN

Then the child who has appeared to supplant you.

CREUSA

How? If it were only possible, I'd do it.

OLD MAN

(980) Arm your attendants with swords.

CREUSA

I would go, but where would we do this?

OLD MAN

Among the sacred tents, where he is entertaining his friends with a feast.

CREUSA

A murder is not easy to cover up, and slaves are weak.

OLD MAN

Ah me! You're being a coward. Come on! Come up with a plan.

CREUSA

I have a crafty and effective one.

OLD MAN

I would be your helper in both respects.

CREUSA

Then listen. Do you know about the battle of the Earth-born Giants?

OLD MAN

I know of it, the one the Giants incited against the gods in Phlegra.

CREUSA

Mother Earth gave birth to the Gorgon there, a terrible monster.

OLD MAN

(990) The ally of her children but the gods' bane?

CREUSA

Yes. The goddess Pallas, daughter of Zeus, killed it.

OLD MAN

(994) Have I heard this story before? ²²

CREUSA

(995) Well, have you heard that Athena wears this monster's skin on her chest?

OLD MAN

(996) Yes, and they call Pallas' robe the Aegis?

CREUSA

(997) It got that name from the gods when Athena darted into the fray.²³

OLD MAN

(992) What sort of savage appearance does it have?

CREUSA

(993) It is a breast-piece furnished with the coils of a viper.

OLD MAN

(998) How will this harm your enemies?

CREUSA

Surely you know about Erichthonius, right? Why wouldn't you, old man?

OLD MAN

(1000) The first of your family's ancestors who sprouted from the earth?

CREUSA

Pallas gave this man when he was newly born...

OLD MAN

What? Why are you speaking with such delay?

CREUSA

...two drops of the Gorgon's blood.

OLD MAN

What sort of power do they have over mankind?

CREUSA

One is deadly. The other heals disease.

OLD MAN

What did she fasten them around the child with?

CREUSA

Golden chains, and he gave them to my father.

OLD MAN

And did they come into your possession when he died?

CREUSA

Yes, and I carry them on my wrist.

OLD MAN

(1010) How do these gifts from the goddess work?

CREUSA

This blood dripped from the Gorgon's primary vein...

OLD MAN

What use is it? What can it accomplish?

CREUSA

...heals diseases and sustains life.

OLD MAN

And the other one of these drops you talking about, what does it do?

CREUSA

It kills—poison from one of the Gorgon's serpents.

OLD MAN

Do you carry them around mixed into one or separately?

CREUSA

Separately; Good doesn't mix with evil.

OLD MAN

My dearest child, you have everything you need.

CREUSA

The child will die from this drop; and you'll be the killer.

OLD MAN

(1020) Where? How will I do it? Say the word, and I will.

CREUSA

In Athens, once he comes to my house.

OLD MAN

This isn't a good idea. If you can find fault with me, I can do the same with you.

CREUSA

How? Ah, are you thinking what I've just thought of?

OLD MAN

You would be considered the child's murderer, even if you don't kill him yourself.

CREUSA

Exactly. People say that step-mothers are malicious to their step-children.

OLD MAN

Then kill him right here, so you can deny the murder.

CREUSA

At least then I'll get the pleasure sooner.

OLD MAN

You'll take care of the child your husband hopes you won't notice without *him* noticing.

CREUSA

Then you know what you have to do. (1030) Take this ancient gold-work of Athena's. Go to the place where my husband is sacrificing in secret. Whenever they finish their meal and are going to pour libations to the gods, you'll have this in your robe. Drop it into the young man's drink. Set his cup to the side. Do not set it with everyone

else's. Just the one for the boy who is on his way to ruling over my house. And if it goes down his throat, he won't make it to renowned Athens. He'll stay here, a dead man.

OLD MAN

Then go now to the house of your host. (1040) I'll do what I've been appointed to. Come on, old feet! Be young in your work even if it's not possible for you to be so in years. March against the enemy with your masters! Help them kill him and remove him from their house! When things are going well, it's fitting to be pious, but whenever someone wishes to harm his enemies, then no law is an obstacle.

[Exit CREUSA and the OLD MAN in separate directions]

CHORUS

Einodia,²⁴ daughter of Demeter, goddess of the crossroads, who rules over assaults that happen during the night (1050) and day, lead the drink of the deadly mixing bowls to whom my queen is sending it—from the drops of the infernal Gorgon's severed head to the one who is trying to take hold of the house of Erechtheus. May no one from another house rule the city (1060) except someone from Erechtheus' line.

But if death and the zeal of my mistress go unfinished, and if the right time to be bold slips away, though hope now shines her, then a god will take a sharpened sword or tie a noose around my neck. Finishing her suffering with suffering, she will descend to another form of life. (1070) For my noble mistress will not stand to see a foreigner ruling her house while she still sees the light of day.

I'm ashamed to face the many hymned god Bacchus if he looks on and lets the child join the torch procession on the twentieth night beside the streams known for beautiful dances when even the starry heavens of Zeus join the dancing chorus, (1080)

and the Moon dances, and the fifty daughters of Nereus who dwell in the sea and the ever flowing eddies of the rivers dance in celebration of the golden crowned maiden and her holy mother. That is where this drifter sent by Phoebus expects that he will be king, falling onto the work of others.²⁵

(1090) Look, you poets who sing in raucous hymns according to your muse about what happens in our beds, who proclaim the unholy love affairs of profane Cypris. Look at how much we excel the lawless seed of men with our piety. Let your reproachful song and discordant muse surround the beds of men. For the descendant of Zeus* shows (1100) his lack of gratitude by not trying to have a child that would share my mistress' lineage. He placed an offering at another Aphrodite's feet, and happened to run into his bastard son.

[Enter a SERVANT, running]

SERVANT

Ladies, where can I find our mistress, the illustrious daughter of Erechtheus? Though I've been searching for her in every part of the city, I can't find her.

CHORUS LEADER

What is it, fellow slave? (1110) Why are you running? What news do you bring?

SERVANT

We're being hunted. The native lords of the land are seeking her so that she might be stoned to death.

* Xuthus

CHORUS LEADER

Oi me! What are you saying? Surely you don't mean that we've been caught planning to murder the child?

SERVANT

Exactly that. You will not be the last to pay the punishment.

CHORUS LEADER

But how was our scheme revealed?

SERVANT

Injustice lost to justice. The god found out about it, and he didn't want to be defiled by it.

CHORUS LEADER

How? I beg you, tell us. (1120) For if we have to die all either way, we would willingly after we've learned this.

SERVANT

When Creusa's husband left the oracle of the god and took his new child to the feast, he prepared sacrifices for the god. Xuthus went where Bacchus' fire springs up so he could wet the rocks of Dionysus with slaughter from the thanksgiving offerings for his son. And he said, "You, child, stay here and set up a tent with the help of workmen. (1130) If I take a long time to sacrifice to our ancestral gods, then your friends who show up begin the feast."

He took the calves and left. But the young man reverently set up tent coverings on pillars. He guarded it from the heat of the sun, not letting it face toward midday or the rays of evening either. He measured out one hundred feet and squared it, (1140) so that

the measure of the interior was one thousand feet, so that he might invite every person in Delphi to the feast. And he took weavings from the treasury and used them as tent coverings, wonders for men to see.

First he threw the folds of a tapestry on the roof, an offering from the child of Zeus, which Heracles brought to the god as spoils from the Amazons. And these were the images woven into it: Uranus gathering the stars in heaven, Helios driving his horses to his final flame and dragging behind him the brilliant light of Hesperus; (1150) Nyx in her dark veil drove her chariot with its yoked pair, and stars accompanied the goddess; a Pleiad was going through the midst of heaven along with Orion carrying his sword; above, the Bear turned her golden tail on the pole; and the full circle of the Moon shot forth her rays above, dividing the month; and the Hyades, a clear sign for navigators, and light-bearing Eos were chasing stars away.

On the walls were other foreign tapestries: (1160) a well oared ship sailing against a Greek one; and creatures half-beast, half-man; and the hunt of deer on horseback; and the spoils of savage lions. But at the entrance was Cecrops beside his daughters,²⁶ his legs coiling with serpents' folds, an offering from the Athenians; and in the middle of the banquet area he set golden mixing bowls.

The herald drew himself up to his full height and announced that anyone from Delphi who wanted could come to the feast. And when the tent was filled, they put on garlands and took their as much rich food as they wanted. And when they sent back this pleasure, (1170) an old man came and stood in the middle of the tent and made the guests laugh so much while he made a preparatory offering, for he poured out water meant for

cleansing hands from pitchers, burned drops of myrrh as an incense offering, and presided over the golden cups, giving this honored task to himself.

And when it was time for music and drinking, the old man said, “Take away the small wine cups, and bring in the big ones so (1180) these guests might find pleasure sooner!” They began bustling to bring gold and silver libation bowls. The old man took a special one, and, as though he were doing a favor for the new master, gave the full bowl to him after dropping a potent poison they say his mistress gave him into the wine so that the young boy would abandon the light.

No one knew about this, but while the child was holding the libation in his hand along with everyone else, one of the slaves uttered something blasphemous. (1190) Since he had been raised in the temple among noble oracles, the boy took it as an omen, and he ordered them to fill another mixing bowl. He poured out the old libation to the god on the ground, and told everyone to follow suit.

A hush fell over us. We began refilling the sacred mixing bowls with pure wine from Byblos, and amidst the bustle a winged flock of doves descended into the tent (they live around Loxias’ temple unafraid of people). Wherever anyone poured out their wine, the doves put their beaks into it, wanting the drink, (1200) and they drank it up into their lovely-plumed throats.

The libation was harmless to the other doves, but the one who sat where the king’s new son poured his took a drink and immediately began frantically shaking her lovely feathered body and cried out with senseless screeching. The whole party was alarmed at the bird’s pain. While gasping for breath, she died, letting her red feet fall. The son the oracle had prophesied about held his arms bared of their robe over the table

(1210) and shouted out, “Who was trying to kill me?! Show me, old man! You were so eager from me to take the drink from your hand!” Immediately he sought him out and took him by the arm, so he could catch the old man in while he still had the poison. He was detected with it, and after being tortured he slowly confessed Creusa’s bold deed and her plans for the drink.

Immediately, the young man that Loxias’ oracle had prophesied gathered the guests and ran outside. He took a stand among the Pythian leaders and said, (1220) “O holy Earth, I was almost killed with poison from the hand of the daughter of Erechtheus, a foreign woman!” Then the lords of Delphi decided (and not by only one vote) that my mistress should die and be thrown from the rock, since she would have killed a holy man and committed murder among the temples. The whole city is searching for her as she hurries on her wretched path. She came wanting children from Phoebus, but she has destroyed her body, and with it, her children.

[Exit the SLAVE, running away]

CHORUS

There is no way, no way (1230) for us to avert death! Our plans have been brought to light from the libation to Dionysus, when the swift serpent was mingled with the drops of the grapes for murder! Our offering for the infernal gods has been exposed resulting in disaster for me and death by stoning for my mistress. What winged flight above or shadowy recesses below can I flee to, (1240) so I can escape a ruinous death by stoning? Can I flee on the swift hooves of a chariot or stern of a ship?

It's not possible to escape without being noticed when a god is unwilling to help us. What then is left for you to suffer in your soul, oh poor mistress? Will we who were willing to do an evil thing to our neighbors suffer justly?

[Enter CREUSA]

CREUSA

(1250) My servants, we're being pursued for deadly slaughter! I've been given up by a vote of the Pythians!

CHORUS LEADER

We know your misfortunes, poor thing, and how you are faring.

CREUSA

Where can I flee? I scarcely got out of the house to avoid my death. I made it here and escaped my enemies by stealth.

CHORUS LEADER

Where else but to the altar?

CREUSA

What would I gain from that?

CHORUS LEADER

It is against the law to kill a suppliant.

CREUSA

But I've met my end by the law.

CHORUS LEADER

Only if you're captured.

CREUSA

My bitter foes are here! Pressing on and armed with swords!

CHORUS LEADER

Sit at the altar now! If you die while you're there, (1260) then your blood will stain your killers with guilt. But you must endure your lot.

[CREUSA kneels and clings to the altar as ION enters]

ION

Bull-faced father Cephissus,²⁷ what sort of viper is this that you've made? What murderous dragoness that casts a deadly gaze of fire? She dared to do everything and is no less dangerous than the drops of Gorgon blood that she was going to use to kill me! Seize her, so the uplands of Parnassus which she will be thrown from can comb out her pretty hair!

I was lucky enough to meet a good guardian spirit (1270) before I went to Athens and fell at my stepmother's hand! For while I was still among my allies I was able gauge your intentions, and what a hostile bane you were. Had you closed me in your house you would have sent me to the House of Hades.

Apollo's altar will not save you and neither will his temple. The pity you want is better suited for me and my own mother. Though she isn't here in body, she is in name.

Look, everyone, at this wicked woman! Look at the sort of scheme she devised! (1280) She cowers at the altar of a god, as if she weren't going to pay the penalty for her deeds.

CREUSA

On my behalf and the god's, I forbid you to kill me where I stand!

ION

What do you and Phoebus have to do with each other?

CREUSA

I give him my body as a holy offering.

ION

And after that, were you going to kill the one who belongs to the god?

CREUSA

You aren't Loxias' anymore, but your father's.

ION

I was became my father's. I'm talking about the essence of the relationship.

CREUSA

You were his back then, but now I am. You are not anymore.

ION

(1290) You aren't pious by any means, but I lived righteously back then.

CREUSA

I would have killed an enemy to my house.

ION

I am not coming to your land bearing weapons.

CREUSA

You most certainly are. You would burn down the house of Erechtheus.

ION

With what flaming torches?

CREUSA

You were going to occupy my house and take it from me by force.

ION

I inherited it from my father, who gave it to me.

CREUSA

What share do Aeolians have in the lands of Pallas?

ION

He rescued it with arms, not just talk.

CREUSA

An ally who resides in the land is not the same as a native.

ION

(1300) Then you were trying to kill me because you were afraid of what I might do?

CREUSA

So I would not die if you happened to fulfill those intentions.

ION

You're just jealous because you're still childless while my father found me.

CREUSA

So you would snatch away a house from the childless, then?

ION

Isn't it my father's share for me?

CREUSA

As much as his shield and spear are. That is your possession.

ION

Leave the god's seat at the altar.

CREUSA

Rebuke your mother instead, wherever she is.

ION

Do you submit to the penalty for trying to kill me?

CREUSA

If you are willing to kill me within this sanctuary.

ION

(1310) What pleasure do you get from dying among the garlands of a god?

CREUSA

I will make someone feel the pain they made me feel.

ION

Ooh! It's strange. The god established these unfitting laws for mortals without knowledge or wisdom. It's not right for the wicked to sit down at the altar. They should be driven away from it instead. A worthless hand shouldn't touch the beauty of gods. The righteous and whoever has been wronged, they ought to be the ones to sit in temples. The good and the bad shouldn't come to the same place and get equal treatment.

[ION moves to kill CREUSA when the PYTHIAN PROPHETESS enters from the temple carrying a lidded cradle]

PROPHETESS

(1320) Stop, child! I have left my oracular tripod and stepped beyond the wall, I, the prophetess of Phoebus, who guards the ancient law of the tripod, who was chosen out of all the Delphians.

ION

Greetings, my dear mother, though you did not give birth to me.

PROPHETESS

Then let me be called such. That name is not distasteful to me.

ION

Have you heard how this woman schemed about killing me?

PROPHETESS

I have heard it. But you are sinning as well by being so savage.

ION

But shouldn't I kill people who would kill me?

PROPHETESS

Wives are always full of hatred for their step-children.

ION

(1330) But we step-children suffer evil from our step-mothers.

PROPHETESS

Do not do this. Leave the temple behind and go to your native land...

ION

What must I do?

PROPHETESS

Go to Athens clean, under good omens.

ION

A person who kills his enemies is completely pure.

PROPHETESS

Not you. Listen to what I have to say.

ION

Then speak. You mean well with whatever you say.

PROPHETESS

Do you see this vessel in my arms?

ION

I see an old cradle covered in garlands.

PROPHETESS

I took you up in this when you were just a newborn babe.

ION

(1340) What are you saying? This is news to me.

PROPHETESS

I kept it hidden. Now I bring it to light.²⁸

ION

Why did you hide this thing after you took me in it long ago?

PROPHETESS

The god wanted you to be a servant in his house.

ION

And now he doesn't want it anymore? How can I know this for sure?

PROPHETESS

Now that he has declared who your father is, he is sending you out from this land.

ION

But did you keep these things safe because you were commanded to? or...Why?

PROPHETESS

Loxias put it in my heart...

ION

To do what? Say it. Spit it out.

PROPHETESS

To keep this discovery safe until the present moment.

ION

(1350) What benefit or trouble does it bring for me?

PROPHETESS

In it are hidden the clothes with which you were swaddled.

ION

Did you bring these things out so I would have clues to find my mother?

PROPHETESS

The divinity desires it. But he did not before this time.

ION

Oh, this is a day of blessed omens for me.

PROPHETESS

Now, take these things and find your mother.

ION

I will, even if I have to travel to every nation in Asia and Europe.

PROPHETESS

You will figure these things out on your own. I raised you for the sake of the god, child, and I return to you these things which, unbidden, he wanted me to take (1360) and keep safe for you. Whatever the reason he wanted it this way, it is not mine to say. No mortal knew that I had these things or where they were hidden. And now farewell. I bid you goodbye just as if I had given birth to you.

Begin your search in the places you should. First, see if a Delphian maiden gave birth you and then left you out at this temple. After that, see if she were some other Greek. You have everything Phoebus, who took a part in this act of providence, and I have to offer.

[Exit the PRIESTESS into the temple]

ION

Oh! Oh! I'm crying, (1370) now that I've thought back to that time when my mother, the victim of some hidden affair, secretly sold me instead of holding me to her breast. I lived a slave's life in the house of a god and never even had a name. Everything from the god is beneficial, but fate is burdensome. , I was robbed of all the time that I should have spent in my mother's arms, living in luxury and enjoying the good life. Robbed of my own mother's upbringing. My mother must be miserable too. Oh how she's suffered from completely losing the joy of her child.

(1380) I'll take this cradle and bring it to the god as an offering. That way, I won't learn anything I don't want to know. Because if it turns out some slave girl gave birth to me, finding my mother would be worse than leaving it a secret. Oh Phoebus, I offer this up to your temple.

Wait, what am I thinking? I'm fighting the god's will. He saved these tokens from my mother for me. I have to be bold and open them up. I shouldn't fight my destiny. Oh you holy garlands (1390) and bands that guard these dear things, what were you hiding back then?

Look at how the cover of this lovely cradle hasn't grown old thanks to some divine power! There is no mold on its wicker, even though a so much time has passed for these treasures.

CREUSA

What is this unexpected sign from heaven I see?

ION

Quiet! You've said plenty to me before...

CREUSA *[interrupting ION]*

I cannot stay silent. Do not rebuke me. For I see the cradle in which I once exposed...you, oh my child, when you were a newborn, (1400) in the cave of Cecrops beneath the overhanging Makrai! I'll leave this altar, even if it means I must die!

ION

Seize her! She's the god's driven her mad and she's sprung from the altar, abandoning the god's image! Bind her!

CREUSA

Kill me! Don't wait! I will cling to this cradle and to you and your hidden treasures.

ION

This is terribly strange...Your words are starting to get to me.

CREUSA

No it is not. You have been discovered by your own, dear one.

ION

Am I dear to you? Is that why you secretly tried to kill me?

CREUSA

I am saying that you are my child, for children are the dearest thing to their parents.

ION

(1410) Stop weaving your schemes! I'll prove you're making this up.

CREUSA

I hope you try to, at least, my child.

ION

Is this cradle empty, or is it hiding something in it?

CREUSA

Your things, the ones I exposed you with, are inside of it.

ION

Can you tell me what they are without looking?

CREUSA

If I do not tell you, then I am willing to die.

ION

Then tell me. You're oddly bold about this.

CREUSA

Look inside. There will be cloth that I wove when I was a child.

ION

What sort of cloth? Girls weave all sorts of things.

CREUSA

It was unfinished. A sort of practice piece from my loom.

ION

(1420) What did it look like? That way you can't trick me.

CREUSA

The Gorgon was in the middle of the cloth.

ION

Oh Zeus! What sort of destiny is hunting me down?

CREUSA

And it was bordered with serpents, like the aegis.

ION

Look! This is the cloth. I am learning what the god said I would.

CREUSA

Oh! It is the long lost childhood work of my loom!

ION

Was there anything else, or was this just a lucky guess?

CREUSA

There were serpents made entirely from gold. They are a tradition Athena gave to my people from its conception. She told us to raise our children in imitation of Erichthonius long ago.

ION

(1430) Tell me. What does she tell you to do with these golden snakes?

CREUSA

To give them as a necklace for a newborn babe, my child.

ION

They're in there. And I'm longing to know, what was the third thing?

CREUSA

A crown of olives that I placed around you back then. I took them from the tree Athena first planted on the peak of the city, and if it is in there, it should not have abandoned its greenery, but will be thriving because it comes from an untouched, holy tree.

ION

Oh my dearest mother! I am so happy to see you! And I press myself to your joyful face.

[ION and CREUSA begin to sing at their happy reunion]

CREUSA

Oh my child, a greater light to your mother than the sun (1440) (the god will agree) I hold you in my arms, a discovery that was beyond hope. I thought that you were living with Persephone in the land of the shades below the earth.

ION

Dear mother, in your arms I seem both dead and alive.

CREUSA

Heavens, what will I say? What will I cry out? Where did this unexpected blessing come from? Where did I receive this joy from?

ION

(1450) Anything would have come to my mind than the thought that I belonged to you, mother.

CREUSA

I still tremble with fear.

ION

As though you aren't holding me even though you are?

CREUSA

Because I had abandoned my hopes before. Oh, madam,²⁹ where, where did you take my baby from? Who brought him to Loxias' temple?

ION

It had to be someone divine. If only our fate would let us be happy the rest of our days, just as we suffered so much before now.

CREUSA

My child, you were not born without tears, and you were driven from your mother's hands with pain. (1460) But now, as I breathe on your cheeks, I feel the most blessed delight.

ION

You're speaking for the both of us.

CREUSA

I am childless no longer. I am no longer without progeny. My house has been established and holds the ruling authority in the land. Erechtheus is young again! No longer does the house of the earthborn people stare into night, but it looks up at the rays of the sun.

ION

Mother, since my father is in Delphi too, let him share in the happiness that I have given you both.

CREUSA

(1470) Oh my child, what are you saying? I must tell you something.

ION

What are you saying?

CREUSA

You were born from someone else, someone else.

ION

Oh me! Am I an unmarried woman's bastard child?

CREUSA

My wedding wasn't celebrated with torches and dances when I gave birth to you,
my child.

ION

Ai ai! I'm a bastard! Mother, who was my father?

CREUSA

Let the Gorgon slayer know...*

ION

What are you saying?

CREUSA

(1480)...she who dwell in the grove of the holy olive tree on my acropolis...

ION

You're telling me such strange things.

CREUSA

... that beside the nightingale's rock, with Phoebus...

ION

Why do you mention Phoebus?

CREUSA

...I slept in a secret union...

ION

Tell me more. You saying something good.

* Not Perseus, but Athena; as Creusa mentioned in her story about the Gorgon blood to the old man

CREUSA

...And in the tenth month, I gave birth to you, Phoebus' secret child.

ION

Oh you've said the best thing of all if you're telling me the truth.

CREUSA

Back when I was a maiden, (1490) I wrapped these clothes around you, the works of my loom, without my mother knowing. I did not give you milk, or my breast, a mother's nourishment, nor did I bathe you with my own hands, but I placed you back in that desolate cave to be slaughtered by the birds of prey as a feast for Hades.

ION

Oh mother, how did you have the courage to do something so terrible?!

CREUSA

My child, I was bound by my fear and cast away your life. (!500) I killed you unwillingly.

ION

And to think, my own impious hand was going to kill you!

CREUSA

Oh! My fortunes were terrible before, and these things are terrible too. I've been whirled between misfortunes and good fortunes, but the winds are changing. Let it be. The evils of the past are enough. Let some fair winds follow us after these evils, my child.

CHORUS LEADER

(1510) No one should ever think anything is hopeless in the face of these chance events.

ION

Oh Fortune, you have already changed the state of thousands of mortals, making them suffer and bringing them back around to pleasure. How could I come to the point where I would kill my mother and then suffer for it?

Ay, me!

Is it even possible to understand all these things in a single day? I'm glad to have found you, mother, and my lineage is nothing shameful to me. (1520) But I want to talk to you alone about some other things. Come here. I want to say some things in closely veiled privacy.³⁰

Look, mother. You wandered into that affliction common to young girls, a secret affair, didn't you? And then you blamed the god. And in an attempt to avoid the shame I would bring, you said Phoebus was my father. But I'm not a god's son, am I?

CREUSA

By victorious Athena, who fought with Zeus in her chariot against the earthborn Giants, (1530) your father was not any mortal, my child, but Lord Loxias, who raised you himself.

ION

But why did he give his own child to another father and say that I'm Xuthus' son?

CREUSA

He did not say that you were born from him. He is giving you to Xuthus, but you are the god's own son. For even among friends, one might give his own child to the other to be master of the house.

ION

Then the god is true or he prophesies falsely...It troubles my heart, mother, and for good reason.

CREUSA

Listen to what's come to my mind, my child.

(1540) Loxias is working things for your good, and has established you in a noble house. But so long as you are called the son of a god, you would never be eligible to inherit a house or a father's name. How could you when I hid my own marriage and then secretly tried to kill you? But in order to help you, he has handed you over to another father.

ION

However, I am not going to believe this carelessly, but I will ask Phoebus when I enter his temple whether I was born from a mortal father or Loxias.

[Enter ATHENA on the roof of the temple]

Ah! But what goddess has appeared, (1550) gleaming like the sun above the roof of this fragrant temple? Run, mother, so we don't look at divine things if it isn't the right time for us to see them.

ATHENA

Do not flee. For I am not your enemy, but she who shows you favor both in Athens and here. I am the one your land is named after, Pallas, and I have arrived after hastening from Apollo's side, who did not think it fit for you to see him, lest he should be blamed for his former actions, but he sends me to say these words to you.

(1560) Indeed, your father is Apollo, and he is giving you to these people. They did not father you, but he is doing this so that you might be considered part of a very noble house. When his secret deed was laid bare, he feared that you would die by your mother's schemes and she at your hands, so he drew you out of danger by his own arts. The lord was going to pass over these things in silence and tell you later in Athens that this woman is your mother and that you are the offspring of her and Phoebus. But listen so that I can bring these affairs to an end and fulfill the god's oracles, (1570) the very reason why I yoked my chariot.

Take this child and go back to the land of Cecrops, Creusa, and seat him on the royal throne. Since he comes from the line of Erechtheus, this one has the right to rule over my land, and he will be famous throughout Greece. He will have four children, all from one root, from whom lands and tribes will get their names, and they will dwell in my citadel.

Geleon will be the first; then following (1580) will be Hopletes and Argades and Aegicores, named after my aegis. The descendants of these will in time settle the island cities of the Cyclades and the coast and, in this way, strengthen my land. They will inhabit the plains of two continents divided by the straits, Asia and Europe. Called "Ionians," they will gain fame in honor of this one's name.

And you and Xuthus *will* have a child together, (1590) Dorus, from whom a Dorian city will be sung about throughout the Peloponnese. And after him you will have Achaëus, who will rule over the shores near Rhion, and a people there will be distinguished as called by his name.³¹

Apollo has arranged everything well. First he begat you untouched by harm, so your family would not know. Then you gave birth to this child and placed him in the cave. He ordered Hermes to take the babe up in his arms and carry him here. (1600) He raised him and did not allow him to breathe his last.

Now don't tell anyone that this child is yours, so Xuthus may hold on to his pleasant fancies and you may go holding on to your own blessings, Lady.

Farewell. I proclaim a fortunate happiness and respite from your troubles.

ION

O Pallas, daughter of Greatest Zeus, we will not doubt your words. I've been persuaded that I'm the child of father Loxias and this woman...and there was no doubt about it before.

CREUSA

Now hear my words too. I praise Phoebus whom I did not praise before. (1610) He no longer neglects the child he has returned to me. The gates of this temple are friendly to me and so are the god's oracles, though they were enemies of mine before. Now I gladly hang onto the door handles and address the gates.

ATHENA

I praise you for changing your heart and blessing the god. The god is somehow always slow to work, but in the end, he is not weak.

CREUSA

Oh my child, let us go home.

ATHENA

Go, and I will be near you.

CREUSA

Our worthy escort.

ATHENA

And one who cares about your city.

CREUSA

Come, sit on the ancient throne.

ION

My worthy possession.

[Exit ION, CREUSA, and ATHENA]

CHORUS

Farewell, Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto. Any house (1620) driven by similar misfortunes must honor the gods and be brave, because in the end the good get what they deserve, but the bad, as is their nature, never fare well.

[Exit CHORUS]

ENDNOTES

1. (p. 5) *doing this favor for my brother Loxias*: Apollo is referred to with two epithets throughout Greek tragedy: Phoebus (Φοῖβος) and Loxias (Λοξίας). While rendering them both as “Apollo” in the English might help avoid confusion, their use in tragedy has a special purpose. Phoebus, meaning “bright” or “clear” is often used by characters when they receive fulfillment to their oracles or when they expect favorable outcomes from the god’s prophecies. On the other hand, Loxias, meaning “oblique,” is used when the god speaks cryptically or when characters feel like they have been deceived by his oracles. In a play where Apollo’s oracles play such a central role, leaving these names as they appear in the Greek allows the reader or audience member to experience and appreciate this convention of tragic literature.

2. (p. 5) *When he was little...but when he became a man in stature*: Ion’s age is up for speculation. While he might have “become a man in stature” (ἀπηνδρώθη δέμας, l. 53 in the Greek) he is mainly referred to as a “child” (*pais/παῖς*) or “young man” (*neanias/νεανίας*) throughout the play. For staging purposes it might be ideal to envision him as a lad past puberty, anywhere in his middle teens to early twenties, at that age where he might be a man in body but is still overconfident and naïve from his sheltered upbringing and lack of worldly experience.

3. (p. 9) *Apollo Agyieus*: The epithet “Agyieus” is peculiar, but refers to Apollo as a protector of the streets, public spaces, and entrances.

4. (p. 9) *Iolaus, who helped the son of Zeus undergo his labors*: According to Greco-Roman mythology, Iolaus helped Hercules kill the Hydra, who grew back two heads for every one cut off, but cauterizing the wound with a torch so no new heads could sprout from the wounds.

5. (p. 9) *this man sitting astride a winged horse...fire breathing monster with three bodies*: Pictured in this section of the frieze are Bellerophon, Pegasus, and the Chimaera, whom Bellerophon slew for Iobates, king of Lycia.

6. (p. 10) *Enceladus*: When the Giants tried to overthrow the Olympian gods, each had their counterpart in the Pantheon. Enceladus was Athena's traditional opponent in the battle.

7. (p.10) *wretched Mimas*: Mimas was yet another one of the Giants who tried to overthrow the gods. Though Euripides has Zeus slaying him in this play, he was often pitted against Hephaestus.

8. (p. 12) *covering your eyes and wetting your noble cheeks with tears*: The language of this passage provides an interesting description to suggest how crying would have been portrayed in the original style using elaborate masks. The Greek literally translates to "you hemmed in your eyes" (*omma synkalēsasa son/ὄμμα συγκλήσασα σὸν*) and might suggest that the actor for Creusa would have covered his mask with part of his veil or robe to convey mourning without facial expressions at his disposal.

9. (pp. 13-14) *Did your father's ancestor...bloodying the acropolis*: In a bit of obscure mythology, Athena gave the infant Erichthonius, whom she took from the earth, to the daughters of Cecrops, the first king of Athens, to raise. As Hermes mentions in the prologue, she placed two snakes in his cradle to keep him safe. When the maidens broke

the goddess' commandment to leave the cradle covered, they were driven mad at the sight and hurled themselves from the acropolis to their deaths.

10. (p. 16) *the shrine of Trophonius*: Trophonius was closely linked to the cult of Apollo, and in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, he was said to have laid the foundations for the temple at Delphi (l. 296). Sometimes identified as a son of Apollo, he was immortalized as a chthonic oracle after his death.

11. (pp. 26-27) *Athena, who was born without the help of Eileithyia...in any conversation*: This choral ode foreshadows the tragedy that will soon occur. Like her servants, Creusa has arrived with great hopes for having children, but when she receives no such oracle from Apollo, her hatred towards the god will drive her to do horrible things. The memory of Apollo's rape will become the central guiding point for her actions.

12. (pp. 29-35) *And what are you going to tell me?...It has made me very happy*: This is a long section of *hemistichomythia* (speaking in half lines) between Ion and Xuthus that runs for thirty-two lines in the Greek. The quick interchange between the characters heightens the emotion as their relationship is revealed. Eventually, the way Ion and Xuthus' words combine to form one full line of poetry symbolizes their close relationship as father and son.

13. (p. 35) *I wish that my mistress...just as fortunate when it comes to children*: Here is where modern audiences ought to pay attention. According to the story Apollo gave to Xuthus, Ion would be Creusa's stepson, which is not the same as being her full son. Without Creusa's bloodline, Ion threatens to dethrone the line of the Erichthonius

which had been ruling Athens for three generations. To Creusa, he will not be an heir, but a threat to her family.

14. (p. 35) *Why are you silent? Why are you staring at the ground?:* Xuthus' questions here show how much silence and active body language were used to convey various mental states in a production where actors' faces would be covered by masks, preventing the use of facial expressions.

15. (p. 38) *I name you Ion...as I was going out from the god's sanctuary:* This is a pun in the original Greek completely lost in the English. The name Ion is a participial form (ἰών, present active participle from *eimi/ἔϊμι*) and means "going".

16. (p. 38) *For if some foreigner ever stumbles into a city...isn't free to speak his mind:* This statement would have resonated with Euripides' Athens, where the full enjoyment of citizenship was limited to upper class men of Athenian descent. Foreigners and their children were not disrespected, but did not enjoy the full rights of a true Athenian.

17. (p. 39) *my queen:* The word here used to describe Creusa is actually not the word for queen, but is in fact "tyrant" (τύραννος), which is usually used to describe men who took or received positions of power (e.g. Oedipus in Sophocles' *Οιδίπους τύραννος*). This places Creusa beside multiple tragic rulers who did their best to secure their reign and family line from outside forces.

18. (p. 41) *This prelude does not bode well:* The language here suggests that the chorus might have sung their lines as an introduction to the lament their dialogue leads into.

19. (pp. 42-45) *Oi me! Let me die!...I couldn't tell you*: This conversation forms a lament scene called a *kommos* (κομμός), which means “beating” or “striking,” a common expression of grief in ancient literature. The meter of Creusa’s lines becomes frenzied and irregular, expression her intense anguish by preventing her from speaking in eloquent meters.

20. (p. 46) *he should have sought marriage with some Aeolian woman*: This is a rather obscure line, but from its juxtaposition with the phrase “if it were the child of a noble woman that he was bringing home,” it seems that this is a sarcastic comment that Xuthus should have gone as taken a wife from a less civilized area of Greece.

21. (p. 52) *What are you covering your head and crying for, old man?*: Another example of using body language to convey emotion rather than facial expression

22. (p. 54) *Have I heard this story before?*: The old man is asking the same question everyone in the audience would have been. Euripides is taking poetic license here and creating his own story. Nowhere else is the Gorgon mentioned in reference to the Gigantomachy. Neither do any mythographers mention the powers of the blood to heal or kill. Nevertheless, it provides a convenient plot device

23. (p. 54) *they call Pallas' robe the Aegis? / It got that name from the gods when Athena darted into the fray*: Another Euripidean invention in this story. The most common etymology for Athena’s “aegis” derives from the goatskin (*aix/αἶξ*; “goat”) it was made with. But here, Euripides claims the name comes from how Athena “darted” (*ēixen/ἤξεν*; “she darted”) into battle. Since Creusa stated in her story that Athena made the Aegis from the Gorgon’s skin, the goatskin etymology no longer works.

24. (p. 58) *Einodia*: Einodia, or “She who stands in the roads,” is an expression of three different goddesses. She is Artemis, Persephone/Kore, and Hecate all in one. Here, the chorus is invoking her as Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, as they hope to send Ion to her clutches.

25. (pp. 58-59) *I’m ashamed to face the many hymned god...the work of others*: This is a description of the Eleusinian Mysteries, a cult unique to Athens and so well guarded that its participants could not reveal any of its secret rites upon pain of death. If Ion were allowed to participate, then he would be so incorporated into Athenian life that there would be no hope of removing him from the picture.

26. (p. 61) *at the entrance was Cecrops beside his daughters*: The tapestry that holds the most obvious symbolism in this list is the one of Cecrops, the first king of Athens, and his daughters. Hanging at the entrance, it would have symbolized Ion’s entry into the Athens as its future king.

27. (p. 65) *Bull-faced father Cephissus*: Cephissus is a river in Attica, and like most river gods in Greco-Roman myth, has the horns of a bull. Ion is invoking him to refer to Attica itself.

28. (p. 70) *I kept it hidden. Now I bring it to light*: This line is related to the identity of Apollo as both Loxias and Phoebus. He keeps things hidden and obscure until the right time comes to bring them to light. Currently, he is achieving this through the Pythias, revealing the clues of Ion’s birth just before he can kill his mother.

29. (p. 77) *madam*: Creusa is presumably referring to the Priestess here, but it must be an apostrophe. Since only three actors would have played all of the main characters in Euripides’ day, and two would already be out on stage playing Ion and

Creusa, the actor playing the Priestess must have gone back into the temple *skene* where he could change into his costume for Athena at the end of the play.

30. (p. 80) *I want to say some things in closely veiled privacy*: This is another potential cue for the actors. To help provide a greater sense of urgent privacy, Ion and Creusa would not only have walked away from the chorus, but she would have drawn her veil around themselves to block out the chorus.

31. (pp. 82-83) *He will have four children...called by his name*: This etiology of the multiple tribes of the Greeks (The Ionians, Dorians, and Achaeans) makes Athens and Attica the center of Greek life and culture.

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