

THE COMPLETE GREEK TRAGEDIES

*Edited by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore*

EURIPIDES · III

HECUBA

*Translated by William Arrowsmith*

ANDROMACHE

*Translated by John Frederick Nims*

THE TROJAN WOMEN

*Translated by Richmond Lattimore*

ION

*Translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts*

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO & LONDON

## INTRODUCTION TO ION

THE *Ion* can be fairly certainly assigned, on stylistic and metrical grounds, to the decade 420-410 B.C. There is no conclusive evidence for a more exact date within this period.

Creusa was the daughter of Erechtheus, the autochthonous king of Athens. While still a girl, she was seduced by Apollo and gave birth to a son whom she exposed from fear of her parents. She naturally supposed that the child had died. But, unknown to her, Apollo sent Hermes to take the child to Delphi and leave him beside the temple. There he was found by the prophetess, who brought him up. He eventually became a steward in the temple. Knowing nothing of the circumstances of his birth, he lives a sheltered life and is happy in the service of the god. In the meantime his mother has married Xuthus. He, though a foreigner, won his bride as a reward for his services to Athens in war. Though long married, they are childless. They have therefore decided to come to Delphi to consult the god about their chances of having children.

Such is the situation at the opening of the play. It arose from an old wrong, the seduction of Creusa by Apollo. It lends itself to development in a number of different ways. The wrong can be righted and Athens glorified by accepting Ion's divine birth as a mark of favor to the Ionian tribes. Or the romantic can be rejected in favor of a more realistic approach. Euripides was sometimes romantic, more often realistic, in his treatment of myths. Here he chose to handle the theme realistically and was preoccupied with the human problem it presented. He weaves the strands of the Ion legend together to form the framework outlined above. He then tears from the story its mythological and supernatural pretensions—at least until Athene appears as *dea ex machina*. Here, at first sight, it seems that the playwright welcomes her with gratitude to supply a ready-made solution for his tangled plot.

The essence of the realist method in this play lies in the double-edged treatment of mythology. Euripides accepts Apollo as the di-

vine lover of Creusa and then invests him with human attributes. In consequence, Apollo emerges in very poor light as a barbarian god whose ethics are shattered by the probings of a civilized and skeptical mind. This exposure is achieved not only by Creusa's intense denunciation of the god in a moment of high climax in the unfolding of the intricate plot. It is more subtly managed through the impact of the whole action upon the boy, Ion. Perhaps the chief merit of this well-designed play is the careful study of Ion's development, the revelation of the changes brought about by the abrupt contact of youthful, cloistered virtue with worldliness. At times we may suspect that the boy grows up too quickly—not so quickly, however, that he becomes a cynic: though he learns with rapidity, he also learns ingenuously. As he becomes more and more disturbed, and therefore more and more disturbing, to his initial charm are added self-confidence and strength of will.

As the plot is presented, Ion is foisted as a son upon Xuthus by the oracle. This leads to the attempt of the mother to kill her son. When this is foiled there follows the further attempt of the son to kill his mother. The rest of the play falls into two parts—the cleverly contrived recognition scene between mother and son and the appearance of Athene as *dea ex machina*.

To accept the resolution of the play at its face value is impossible if we are to believe that there is any serious purpose behind it. Until the end we have no doubts that Euripides is, in fact, dealing with an important theme in earnest. At the end we are likely to feel that our emotions have been cheated; for the explanations of the goddess seem paltry and inconsistent with the dramatic quality and the seriousness of all that has gone before. The contrast is so marked that the play cannot be easily accepted as a tragicomic fairy tale with a well-knit, tense plot and a happy ending, designed to extol the Apolline origin of the Athenian race. The poignant dramatic structure, we feel, must not be reduced to the level of a preface to a pamphlet, even if delivered by an Olympian.

In other words, there is a critical problem to be solved here. Now the "rationalizing" view of the play, associated particularly with A. W. Verrall, had the merit of recognizing that this problem exists.

Verrall agreed with the argument that the *Ion* is an attack upon Delphi and must be interpreted in this way; that the oracle delivered to Xuthus, like the recognition scene between Creusa and Ion, is a Delphian fraud, the attribution of Ion to Apollo and Creusa being due to a change of tactics following upon Creusa's confession and denunciation of Apollo.

But this "rationalizing" solution ignores a most important point. Creusa, even when Ion takes her aside in confidence and suggests the possibility, will not admit that her lover was a mortal man. The whole design of the play depends on the assumption that Apollo seduced Creusa. Are the design and the assumption sustained throughout? Let us examine the last two scenes with this query in mind.

As Ion and the crowd advance threateningly toward Creusa, after she has been discovered in refuge at the altar, the Pythian priestess enters from the temple, carrying a cradle bound with fillets of wool resembling those on the altar. She had kept the cradle in which she had found Ion, together with his swaddling clothes and ornaments, and now gives them to him in case he should find a clue to his mother's identity in Athens or elsewhere. Ion examines the cradle with great interest, marveling at the freshness of its fastenings. On the "rationalist" view this would have been part of the fraud perpetrated by the Delphians, since Euripides could not have intended such magical hocus-pocus to be taken seriously: that would have been inconsistent with his "rationalism." But Euripides is consistently irrational in such respects in other plays; though inconsistency is one of his strongest characteristics as a playwright.

When Ion unties the fillets, Creusa recognizes the cradle, is overwhelmed for the moment and then rushes from the altar to embrace him, prepared to risk death, and greets him as her child. He supposes she is playing a trick on him, orders the guards to seize her, and then decides on a better method. He will test her knowledge of the contents of the cradle. But Creusa answers all his questions. Ion is convinced she is his mother. In the joy of her discovery all thought of Xuthus is obliterated. Her son has brought her her personal triumph. As she had tried to murder him as a menace, so now she welcomes

him as the savior of her house. The stigma of childlessness is removed together with the memory of Xuthus as the partner of her unhappiness. He has no mention in her triumphant outburst.

Ion puts an end to this rapture by asking for his father to be there to share their happiness. Creusa is again obliged to describe the seduction by Apollo. Ion is guarded in his reception of the story, though his sympathy with his mother as she describes her suffering is spontaneously generous. He can credit the story—with reservations. This is clear when, after making some platitudinous remarks about the workings of providence, intended for the Chorus and others on the stage, he draws his mother aside and puts the question that is uppermost in his mind. Is Apollo being made into a convenient scapegoat?

This is a crucial passage where the "rationalist" explanation breaks down. Ion makes a natural assumption. It demands a truthful answer. There have been enough complications in the plot. Let us suppose that Creusa had agreed with his suggestion. She would presumably have made some confession of an intrigue in her youth. Ion would then have asked the reason for the oracle's deception in giving him to Xuthus as his son. The fraud which the "rationalizers" are anxious to prove would have been most obvious and the play would become more of an open attack upon Delphi than a criticism of Olympian morals. Creusa and Ion might then have agreed, for the sake of convenience, to leave Xuthus in blissful ignorance of the facts, the happy ending would be dramatically justified, the purpose of propaganda achieved, and Athene could have predicted Ion's future without having to make lame excuses for Apollo. The main objection to all this is that, since no one was aware of the birth and exposure of the child except the mother, there was no reason to put any blame upon Apollo. Yet Euripides purposely adopts that version of the story.

Instead, what happens? Creusa vehemently denies any suggestion of deceit. The play proceeds and still gains its effects from the assumption that Apollo was the father. The characters still continue to judge him by human standards. For Ion immediately asks why Apollo should give his own son to Xuthus, with the plain falsehood that he was the father. Creusa, now quite happy in the possession of

her son, is content to let moral problems go by the board. Apollo, she says, practiced the deceit out of kindness to Ion. But Ion is not satisfied. He has already received some shocks to his beliefs. His only wish now is to decide finally whether Apollo is a sham:

But, mother, does Apollo tell the truth,  
Or is the oracle false? With some good reason  
That question troubles me.

Creusa offers the same explanation again, but Ion's question "cannot be so lightly answered." He is about to enter the temple to ask the oracle if Apollo is his father when Athene appears. She begins by saying that Apollo did not care to come, since some criticism of his previous conduct might be expected. This answer to Creusa's earlier challenge is intentionally farcical. Apollo now becomes contemptible. Ion is saved the trouble of consulting the oracle. Athene assures him that Apollo is really his father. The legend is preserved to the end. But Ion's question is ignored. The answer is too obvious.

Athene's final remarks are all the more ironic because redundant. They are an appeal to faith, and Euripides has done his best to destroy the basis of faith. Even now Apollo can go merrily on from one deceit to another. Xuthus is not to know the truth, and Apollo makes Creusa and Ion partners in his falsehood. Only Athene, Hermes, and Creusa seem satisfied that Apollo "has managed all things well." Certainly no reader of the play can be. But Creusa, at least, may be pardoned for grasping her long-awaited reward without too much questioning.

Athene serves a double function. As in other plays of Euripides with a *deus ex machina*, she commemorates the foundation of a herocult and prophesies future Athenian history. At the same time, by uttering her divine commonplaces, she adds nothing to our knowledge but fits in with the dramatic purpose of the play. Before her appearance Apollo had still some chance to justify himself. After it, he retains no shred of dignity.

## ION

# ION

SCENE: *Before the temple of Apollo at Delphi, just before sunrise.*

*(Enter Hermes.)*

## CHARACTERS

*Hermes*

*Ion*

*Chorus (Creusa's attendants)*

*Creusa*

*Xuthus*

*Old Man*

*A Servant*

*Pythian priestess*

*Athene*

*Hermes*

Atlas, who wears on back of bronze the ancient  
Abode of gods in heaven, had a daughter  
Whose name was Maia, born of a goddess:  
She lay with Zeus and bore me, Hermes, servant  
Of the immortals. I have come here to Delphi  
Where Phoebus sits at earth's mid-center, gives  
His prophecies to men, and passes judgment  
On what is happening now and what will come.

5

For in the famous city of the Greeks  
Called after Pallas of the Golden Spear,  
Phoebus compelled Erechtheus' daughter Creusa  
To take him as her lover—in that place  
Below Athene's hill whose northern scarp  
The Attic lords have named the Long Rocks.  
Her father, by the god's own wish, did not  
Suspect her, and she carried her child in secret.  
And when the time had come, her son was born,  
Inside the palace. Then she took the child  
To the same cave where she had lain with Phoebus,  
And in a wicker cradle there exposed  
Him to his death. She kept an ancient custom  
Begun in Athens when Athene placed  
By Erichthonius, son of Earth, two snakes  
As guardians, when the daughters of Aglaurus  
Were given charge of him.

10

15

20

And so Creusa tied

25

To him whatever girlish ornaments  
She had, before she left him to his death.  
My brother Phoebus then made this request:

“You know Athene’s city well,” he said,  
 “Now will you journey to the earth-born people  
 Of glorious Athens? There, inside a cave  
 A newborn child is hidden. Take the child,  
 His cradle, and his swaddling clothes and bring  
 Them to my oracle at Delphi, where  
 They must be left before the temple entrance.  
 I will arrange the rest. The child is mine.”

I did as Loxias my brother wished,  
 Took up the wicker cradle, brought it here,  
 Setting it on the temple steps before  
 I opened it, so that someone might see  
 The child. Now when the sun began to ride  
 In heaven, the prophetess was entering  
 The holy shrine. Her eyes were drawn toward  
 The helpless child. Astonished that a girl  
 Of Delphi should dare to cast her secret child  
 Before Apollo’s temple, she would have taken it  
 Outside the sacred precinct, but her pity  
 Expelled the cruel impulse—and the god  
 Designed to keep his son within his house.  
 And so she took the child and reared him,  
 Not knowing who his mother was, or that  
 Apollo was his father; while the child  
 Has never known his parents. His childhood home  
 Has been about the altars where he played  
 And wandered. But when he was fully grown,  
 The Delphians appointed him their steward,  
 The trusted guardian of Apollo’s gold.  
 And he has lived a holy life until  
 This day, within the shrine.

Creusa, whose son  
 He is, has married Xuthus. This is how  
 The marriage occurred. A war was surging high  
 Between Chalcidians of Euboea and Athens,  
 Whose ally, Xuthus, helped to end the strife.

Though he was not a native, but Achaean,  
 Son of Aeolus, son of Zeus, the prize  
 He won was marriage to Creusa. But  
 In all these years no children have been born.  
 Desire for children is now bringing them  
 To Apollo’s shrine. Apollo seems indifferent,  
 But he controls their fate and guides them here.  
 When Xuthus comes before the shrine, the god  
 Will give him his own son, declaring Xuthus  
 The father. Thus the boy shall be received  
 Into his mother’s house, made known to her.  
 And while Apollo’s intrigue is kept secret,  
 His son may have what is his due. Moreover,  
 Apollo will bestow on him the name  
 Of Ion, make that name renowned through Greece  
 As founder of ancient cities.

Now, because

I wish to see this young boy’s destiny  
 Complete, I shall conceal myself within  
 These laurel groves. This is Apollo’s son,  
 Who comes here now, with branches of bay, to make  
 The portals bright before the temple. And I  
 Will be the first of all the gods to call  
 Him by his future name of—Ion.

*(The central doors of the temple open, and Ion comes out with  
 a group of Delphian servants. He is wearing a brightly colored  
 tunic and cloak, and on his head is a wreath of bay leaves.  
 He carries a bow and arrow, symbol of his service to  
 Apollo, which is to have a more practical purpose later  
 in the scene. The two peaks of Parnassus which  
 overlook the temple have caught the first rays of  
 the dawn, and Ion points to them as he  
 begins to speak.)*

Ion

Look, now the sun’s burning chariot comes  
 Casting his light on the earth.

Banned by his flame, the stars flee  
To the awful darkness of space.  
The untrodden peaks of Parnassus,  
Kindling to flame, receive for mankind  
The disk of the day.

The smoke of unwatered myrrh drifts  
To the top of the temple.  
The Delphian priestess sits on the  
Sacred tripod chanting to the Greeks  
Echoes of Apollo's voice.

You Delphians, attendants of Phoebus,  
Go down to Castalia's silvery eddies:  
When you have bathed in its holy dews,  
Return to the temple.  
Let your lips utter no words  
Of ill-omen, may your tongues  
Be gracious and gentle to those who  
Come to the oracle.

As for myself, mine is the task  
I have always done since my childhood.  
With these branches of bay and these sacred  
Garlands I will brighten Apollo's  
Portals, cleanse the floor with  
Sprinklings of water,  
Put to flight with my arrows the birds  
Who foul the offerings.  
Since I have neither mother nor father,  
I revere the temple of Phoebus  
Where I have lived.

Come, fresh-blooming branch  
Of lovely laurel,  
With which I sweep clean  
The precinct below the shrine,  
Sprung from the eternal garden  
Where the sacred spring sends  
A welling, never failing stream

From the myrtle grove  
To water the sacred leaves,  
Leaves I brush over his fane,  
Every day serving with my daily task  
When the sun's swift wing appears.

O Healer! O Healer!  
My blessing! My blessing!  
O Leto's son!

Fair, fair is the labor,  
O Phoebus, which  
I am doing for you,  
Honoring the prophetic place.  
I have a glorious task:  
To set my hands to serve  
Not a man but the immortals.

I will never weary  
Over my pious tasks.  
I praise him who feeds me, Phoebus  
My father—his love deserves the name,  
Phoebus, lord of the temple.

O Healer! O Healer!  
My blessing! My blessing!  
O Leto's son!

Now I have finished my sweeping  
With my broom of bay,  
I will pour from golden bowls  
Water risen from the earth,  
Drawn from the spring  
Of Castalia.

Myself holy and chaste, I can  
Cast the lustral water.  
Always thus may I serve Phoebus,  
Service without end—  
Or an end come with good issue.

Look! Look!

Here come the birds already,  
 Leaving their nests on Parnassus. 155  
 Keep away from the cornices  
 And the gold-decked abode.  
 I will strike you again with my arrows,  
 You herald of Zeus,  
 Though your beak is strong,  
 Surpassing the other birds. 160  
 Here sails another to the temple steps,  
 A swan.—Take to another place  
 Your red shining feet.  
 You may have your music,  
 But Apollo's lyre will not save you  
 At all from my bow,  
 Turn your wings,  
 Speed on to the lake of Delos.  
 If you do not obey,  
 You will raise, and in blood,  
 That clear-toned song.  
 Look! Look! 170  
 What is this other bird here on its way?  
 Is it going to build in the cornice  
 A nest of dry twigs for its young?  
 The twang of my bow will prevent it.  
 Go, I tell you and rear  
 Your young in the eddies of Alpheus  
 Or the Isthmian grove,  
 Without fouling the offerings  
 And Apollo's shrine.  
 Yet I scruple to kill you  
 Who announce to mankind  
 The will of the gods. 175  
 But I will bend to the labors  
 Of my devotion,  
 Never ceasing to honor him  
 Who gives me life. 180

*(Ion goes out. The Delphian servants enter in silence and perform a sacrifice on the altar in front of the temple. After the sacrifice the Chorus, young girl servants of Creusa, enter.*

*They pass up and down, excitedly admiring the temple buildings.)*

Chorus

Not only in holy Athens after all  
 Are there courts of the gods 185  
 With fair columns, and homage paid  
 To Apollo who protects the streets.  
 Here too on this temple  
 Of Leto's son shows  
 The bright-eyed beauty of twin façades.  
 Look, look at this: Zeus's son 190  
 Is killing the Lernaean Hydra  
 With a golden sickle,  
 Look there, my dear.  
 Yes—and near him another is raising  
 On high a flaming torch. 195  
 Can it be he whose story I hear  
 As I sit at my weaving,  
 Iolaus the shield-bearer,  
 Companion of Heracles,  
 Whom he helped to endure his labors? 200  
 And look at this one  
 On a horse with wings.  
 He is killing the mighty three-bodied  
 Fire-breathing monster.  
 My eyes dart everywhere. 205  
 See! The battle of the giants  
 On the marble walls.  
 Yes we are looking.  
 Can you see her, brandishing  
 Her Gorgon shield against Enceladus—? 210



I can see my goddess Pallas Athene.

Oh! The terrible thunderbolt  
With fire at each end which Zeus holds  
Ready to throw.

Yes I see. Raging Mimas  
Is burnt up in the flames.

And Bacchus, the boisterous god,  
With unwarlike wand of ivy is killing  
Another of Earth's giant sons.

(*Ion enters through the central doors of the temple.*)

*Chorus Leader*

You there by the temple,  
May we with naked feet  
Pass into this sanctuary?

*Ion*

You may not, strangers.

*Chorus Leader*

Perhaps you would tell me—?

*Ion*

Tell me, what do you want?

*Chorus Leader*

Is it true that Apollo's temple  
Really contains the world's center?

*Ion*

Yes, wreathed in garlands, flanked by Gorgons.

*Chorus Leader*

That is the story we have heard.

*Ion*

If you have offered sacrificial food  
In front of the temple, and you have a question  
For Apollo to answer, come to the altar steps.

But do not pass into the inner shrine  
Unless you have slaughtered a sheep.

*Chorus Leader*

I understand.  
We are not for transgressing Apollo's law.  
The outside charms us enough.

*Ion*

Look where you please at what is lawful.

*Chorus Leader*

Our masters have allowed us  
To look over this sanctuary of Apollo.

*Ion*

In whose house do you serve?

*Chorus Leader*

The dwelling place of Pallas  
Is the house of our masters.  
But the person you ask about is here.

(*Enter Creusa.*)

*Ion*

Whoever you may be, you are a noble,  
Your looks reveal your character: by looks  
Nobility is often to be judged.  
But?—You surprise me—why, your eyes are closed,  
That noble face is wet with tears—and now!  
When you have seen Apollo's holy temple.  
What reason can there be for your distraction?  
Where others are glad to see the sanctuary,  
Your eyes are filled with tears.

*Creusa*

That you should be surprised about my tears  
Is not ill-bred. But when I saw this temple,  
I measured an old memory again,  
My mind elsewhere, though I stand here.

(*aside*) Unhappy women! Where shall we appeal  
For justice when the injustice of power  
Is our destruction?

*Ion*  
What is the cause of this strange melancholy?

*Creusa*  
Nothing. Now I have loosed my shaft I shall  
Be silent, and you will not think of it.

*Ion*  
But tell me who you are, your family,  
Your country. And what is your name?

*Creusa*  
Creusa is my name, Erechtheus' daughter,  
And Athens is my native land.

*Ion*  
A famous city and a noble race!  
How fortunate you are!

*Creusa*  
Yes, fortunate in that—but nothing else.

*Ion*  
There is a story told—can that be true?

*Creusa*  
But tell me what you want to know.

*Ion*  
Your father's ancestor sprang from the earth?

*Creusa*  
Yes, Erichthonius—the glory is no help.

*Ion*  
Athens really took him from the earth?

*Creusa*  
Into her virgin arms, though not her son.

*Ion*  
And then she gave him as we see in paintings—

*Creusa*  
To Cecrops' daughters, who were to keep him hidden.

*Ion*  
I have been told they opened the cradle.

*Creusa*  
And died for it. The rocks were stained with blood.

*Ion*  
Oh. (*pauses*)  
The other story? Is that true or not?

*Creusa*  
Which one is that?—I have time to answer.

*Ion*  
Well, did your father sacrifice your sisters?

*Creusa*  
He had the courage. They were killed for Athens.

*Ion*  
How was it you were saved, the only one?

*Creusa*  
I was a baby in my mother's arms.

*Ion*  
And was your father buried in a chasm?

*Creusa*  
The sea-god's trident blows destroyed him.

*Ion*  
There is a place there which is called Long Rocks?

*Creusa*  
Oh, why ask that?—You are reminding me.—

*Ion*  
The lightning-fire of Phoebus honors it.

*Creusa*

Vain honor. I wish I had never seen it.

*Ion*

Why do you hate a place he dearly loves?

*Creusa*

No matter.—But I know its secret shame.—

*Ion*

And what Athenian became your husband?

*Creusa*

My husband is no citizen of Athens.

290

*Ion*

Who then? He must have been of noble birth.

*Creusa*

Xuthus, the son of Aeolus and Zeus.

*Ion*

A stranger. How then could he marry you?

*Creusa*

A neighboring land of Athens is Euboea—

*Ion*

Which has a sea for boundary they say.

295

*Creusa*

—Which Athens conquered with the help of Xuthus.

*Ion*

The ally came, and you were his reward?

*Creusa*

Dowry of war, the prize won with his spear.

*Ion*

And have you come alone or with your husband?

*Creusa*

With him. But he stayed at Trophonius' shrine.

300

*Ion*

To see it or consult the oracle?

*Creusa*

To ask the same as he will ask of Phoebus.

*Ion*

Is it about your country's crops—or children?

*Creusa*

Though married long ago, we have no children.

*Ion*

No children? You have never had a child?

305

*Creusa*

Apollo knows my childlessness.

*Ion*

Ah! That misfortune cancels all your blessings.

*Creusa*

And who are you? Your mother must be happy!

*Ion*

I am what I am called, Apollo's slave.

*Creusa*

A city's votive gift or sold by someone?

310

*Ion*

I only know that I am called Apollo's.

*Creusa*

So now it is my turn to pity you!

*Ion*

Because my parents are unknown to me.

*Creusa*

You live inside the temple? Or at home?

*Ion*

Apollo's home is mine, wherever I sleep.

315

*Creusa*

And did you come here as a child?

*Ion*

A child, they say who seem to know.

*Creusa*  
 What Delphian woman suckled you?

*Ion*  
 No breast fed me. But she who reared me.—

*Creusa*  
 Yes, who, poor child?  
 (*aside*) A sorrow like my own. 320

*Ion*  
 The prophetess, I think of her as mother.

*Creusa*  
 But what supported you as you grew up?

*Ion*  
 The altars and the visitors who came.

*Creusa*  
 And your unhappy mother! Who was she then?

*Ion*  
 My birth perhaps marked her betrayal. 325

*Creusa*  
 You are not poor? Your robes are fine enough.

*Ion*  
 These robes belong to him, the god I serve.

*Creusa*  
 But have you never tried to find your parents?

*Ion*  
 How can I when I have no clues to guide?

*Creusa*  
 Ah yes. (*pause*)  
 Another suffered as your mother did. 330

*Ion*  
 Who was she then? If she would help me in my grief! 331

*Creusa*  
 On her behalf I came before my husband. 332

*Ion*  
 Why did you come? Tell me and I will help. 333

*Creusa*  
 I have a friend—who says—she lay with Phoebus. 338

*Ion*  
 Not Phoebus and a mortal woman. No!

*Creusa*  
 And had a child unknown to her own father. 340

*Ion*  
 She is ashamed to own some man's betrayal.

*Creusa*  
 But she says not. Her life has been most wretched.

*Ion*  
 Why, if her lover was a god?

*Creusa*  
 She put from out the house the child she had.

*Ion*  
 Where is the child? Is it alive? 345

*Creusa*  
 I have come here to ask, for no one knows.

*Ion*  
 If he is dead, how did he die?

*Creusa*  
 Killed by wild beasts, she thinks.

*Ion*  
 What reason could she have for thinking so?

*Creusa*  
 She could not find him when she went again. 350

*Ion*  
 But were there drops of blood upon the ground?

*Creusa*  
 She says not, though her search was careful.

Ion

And how long is it since the child was killed?

Creusa

He would have been your age by now.

Ion

Apollo is unjust. She has my pity.

355

Creusa

For she has never had another child.

*(Pause as Ion reflects. He is still unwilling  
to believe Apollo guilty.)*

Ion

Supposing Phoebus reared him in secret?

Creusa

To keep that pleasure for himself is wrong.

Ion *(sighs)*

Ah! This misfortune echoes my own grief.

Creusa

And some unhappy mother misses you.

360

Ion

Do not revive the grief I had forgotten.

Creusa

No.—Then you will see to my request?

Ion

But do you know where that request is faulty?

Creusa

What is not faulty for that wretched woman?

Ion

Will Phoebus tell the secret he wants to hide?

365

Creusa

If oracles are open to all Greeks.

Ion

Do not press him to reveal his shame.

Creusa

His shame means suffering to her!

Ion

No one will give this oracle to you.

Convicted of evil here inside his own temple,

370

Apollo would justly take vengeance on

His prophet. Think no more of it: avoid

A question which the god himself opposes.

This foolishness we should commit in trying

By any means to force reluctant answers,

375

Whether by slaying sheep before the altar

Or taking omens from the flight of birds.

The benefits we win by force against

Their will are never blessed. We only profit

By what the gods give with their blessing.

380

Chorus Leader

The woes assailing human life are many,

The forms of woe diverse. And happiness

Is rare and rarely comes to light on man.

Creusa

*(Raising her hands toward the temple.)*

Apollo! Then and now unjust to her,

The absent woman whose complaints are here.

385

You did not save the child you should have saved.

A prophet, you have no answer for its mother.

But now that hope must die, because the god

390

Prevents me learning what I wish to know.

But I can see my noble husband, Xuthus,

Arriving from Trophonius' cave. He is

Quite near; I beg you, stranger, tell him nothing

Of what we have been saying. Or I may

395

Be suspect, meddling in these secret matters,

And then this story will not have the end

We have designed. For trouble is very easy

When women deal with men. Since good and bad

Are not distinguished, all of us are hated.  
To this misfortune we are born. 400

*(Xuthus enters with servants and Delphians.)*

*Xuthus*

My greeting first is to the god, and then  
To you my wife. *(He sees she is upset.)*

But has my long delay  
Caused you alarm?

*Creusa*

No. Your arrival has prevented that.  
What oracle did Trophonius give about 405  
Our hopes of having children?

*Xuthus*

He was unwilling to anticipate  
Apollo's answer. But he has told me this,  
That neither you nor I shall go from here  
Without a child.

*Creusa*

O holy mother of Apollo, may 410  
Our journey here end well, our dealings with  
Your son have a happier issue than before!

*Xuthus*

So it will be! But who speaks here for Phoebus?

*Ion*

Sir, that is my role outside the temple—  
Inside are others, near the shrine, the nobles 415  
Of Delphi, chosen by lot.

*Xuthus*

Ah! Good. I now know all I need to know,  
And shall go in. They say the victim, which  
Is offered on behalf of strangers, has  
Already fallen before the altar. Omens 420  
Today are good, and I would like to have

My answer from the oracle. Will you,  
Creusa, with laurel branches in your hand,  
Go round the altars praying to the gods  
That I may bring an oracle with promise  
Of children from Apollo's house.

*(Xuthus enters the temple, Creusa watches him go and  
speaks with her hands raised toward the temple.)*

*Creusa*

So it will be! So it will be!  
And now 425

If Phoebus at least amends his former wrongs,  
Although his love can never be complete,  
Because he is a god, I will accept  
Whatever he bestows.

*(Exit.)*

*Ion*

Why does this stranger always speak in riddles,  
Reproach the god with covert blasphemy? 430  
Is it through love of her on whose behalf  
She comes before the oracle? Perhaps  
She hides a secret which she cannot tell.  
But what concern have I with Erechtheus' daughter?  
No, that is not my business.—I will pour  
The holy water out of golden pitchers 435  
Into the lustral bowls. I must confront  
Apollo with his wrongs. To force a girl  
Against her will and afterward betray!  
To leave a child to die which has been born  
In secret! No! Do not act thus. But since  
You have the power, seek the virtuous path. 440  
All evil men are punished by the gods.  
How then can it be just for you to stand  
Accused of breaking laws you have yourselves  
Laid down for men? But if—here I suppose  
What could not be—you gave account on earth  
For wrongs which you have done to women, you, 445

Apollo and Poseidon and Zeus who rules  
 In heaven, payment of your penalties  
 Would see your temples empty, since you are  
 Unjust to others in pursuing pleasure  
 Without forethought. And justice now demands  
 That we should not speak ill of men if they  
 But imitate what the gods approve, but those  
 Who teach men their examples.

450

(Exit.)

Chorus

STROPHE

O my Athene, born  
 Without birth pains,  
 Brought forth from the head of Zeus  
 By Prometheus, the Titan,  
 Blessed goddess of Victory,  
 Take flight from the golden halls  
 Of Olympus, come, I entreat you,  
 Here to the Pythian temple,  
 Where at earth's center Apollo's shrine  
 Proclaims unfailing prophecy,  
 At the tripod where they dance and sing.  
 Come with Artemis, Leto's daughter,  
 Virgin goddesses both,  
 Holy sisters of Phoebus.  
 Beseech him, O maidens,  
 That the ancient race of Erechtheus may  
 At last be sure by a clear response  
 Of the blessing of children.

455

460

465

470

ANTISTROPHE

Wherever gleams bright the flame  
 And strength of youth,  
 A promise to the house of growth,  
 There a man has a fund  
 Of joy overflowing;

475

From the fathers the children will gather  
 Hereditary wealth, and in turn  
 Pass it on to their own.  
 They are a defense in adversity,  
 In happiness a delight,  
 And in war their country's shield of safety.  
 For myself I would choose, rather than wealth  
 Or a palace of kings, to rear  
 And love my own children:  
 Shame to him who prefers  
 A childless life, hateful to me.  
 May I cling to the life of few possessions,  
 Enriched by children.

480

485

490

EPODE

O haunts of Pan,  
 The rock flanking  
 The caves of the Long Cliffs,  
 Where the daughters of Aglaurus  
 Dance, and their feet tread  
 The green levels before the shrines  
 Of Pallas, in time to the changing  
 Music of the pipes, when you play,  
 O Pan, in your sunless caves,  
 Where a girl in misery  
 Bore a child to Phoebus  
 And exposed it, a prey for birds,  
 Food for wild beasts to rend, shame  
 Of a cruel love.  
 Our legends, our tales at the loom,  
 Never tell of good fortune to children  
 Born of a god and a mortal.

495

500

505

(Enter Ion from the central doors of the temple.)

Ion

Serving women who are keeping watch here at the steps  
 Of the house of sacrifice, awaiting your master,

510

Tell me, has Xuthus already left the sacred tripod  
And the oracle, or does he still remain within,  
Seeking answer to his question?

*Chorus Leader*

He is still inside. He has not passed this threshold yet.  
But the noise the door has made shows someone is now there.  
Look, it is my master coming.

515

*(Xuthus appears from the temple. As soon as he sees Ion, he shows great excitement, runs to him and tries to embrace him. Ion, much surprised by this behavior, resists.)*

*Xuthus*

Son, my blessing.—It is right to greet you in this way.

*Ion*

Sir, my thanks. We are both well—if you are not mad.

*Xuthus*

Let me kiss your hand, embrace you.

*Ion*

Are you sane? Or can the god have made you mad somehow?

520

*Xuthus*

Mad, when I have found my own and want to welcome him?

*Ion*

Stop.—Or if you touch it, you may break Apollo's crown.

*Xuthus*

I will touch you. And I am no robber. You are mine.

*Ion*

Must I shoot this arrow first, or will you loose me now?

*Xuthus*

Why must you avoid me just when you have found your nearest?

525

*Ion*

Mad and boorish strangers are no pleasure to instruct.

*Xuthus*

Kill me, and then bury me. For you will kill your father.

*Ion*

You my father! This is fool's talk.—How can that be? No!

*Xuthus*

Yes.—The story which I have to tell will make it clear.

*Ion*

What have you to say?

*Xuthus*

I am your father. You are my son.

530

*Ion*

Who has told you this?

*Xuthus*

Apollo, he who reared my son.

*Ion*

You are your own witness.

*Xuthus*

But I know my oracle too.

*Ion*

You mistook a riddle.

*Xuthus*

Then my hearing must have failed.

*Ion*

And what is Apollo's prophecy?

*Xuthus*

That him I met—

*Ion*

Oh! A meeting? Where?

*Xuthus*

As I came from the temple here.

535

*Ion*

Yes, and what would happen to him?

*Xuthus*

He would be my son.

*Ion*

Your own son or just a gift?



*Xuthus*  
A gift and my own son.

*Ion*  
I was then the first you met?

*Xuthus*  
Yes, no one else, my son.

*Ion*  
But how strange this is!

*Xuthus*  
I am just as amazed as you.

*Ion*  
Well?—Who is my mother?

*Xuthus*  
That I cannot say. 540

*Ion*  
And Apollo?

*Xuthus*  
Happy with this news, I did not ask.

*Ion*  
Earth then was my mother!

*Xuthus*  
Children do not spring up there.

*Ion*  
How could I be yours?

*Xuthus*  
Apollo, not I, has the answer.

*Ion (after a pause)*  
Let us try another tack.

*Xuthus*  
Yes, that will help us more.

*Ion*  
Have you had a secret lover?

*Xuthus*  
Yes, a youthful folly. 545

*Ion*  
And before you were married?

*Xuthus*  
Yes, but never afterward.

*Ion*  
So that could be my origin?

*Xuthus*  
Time at least agrees.

*Ion*  
Then what am I doing here?

*Xuthus*  
I cannot tell you that.

*Ion*  
Here, so far away?

*Xuthus*  
That is my puzzle too.

*Ion*  
Have you been before to Delphi?

*Xuthus*  
To the wine-god's torch feast. 550

*Ion*  
You stayed with a temple steward?

*Xuthus*  
He—there were girls of Delphi. 551

*Ion*  
He introduced you to their rites?

*Xuthus*  
Yes, they were Bacchanals. 552

*Ion*  
You had drunk well?

*Xuthus*  
I was reveling in the wine-god's feast. 553

*Ion*  
Then that was the time.

*Xuthus*  
The girl perhaps exposed her child. 555

*Ion* (after a pause)  
I am not a slave then.

*Xuthus*  
And you can accept a father. 556

*Ion*  
Could I wish for better?

*Xuthus*  
That you might have seen before. 558

*Ion*  
Than descent from Zeus's son?

*Xuthus*  
This is indeed your birthright. 559

*Ion*  
Shall I touch my father then?

*Xuthus*  
Yes, have faith in the god. 560

*Ion*  
Father—

*Xuthus*  
How dear is the sound of the name you have spoken!

*Ion*  
We should both bless this day.

*Xuthus*  
It has brought me happiness.  
(*They embrace.*)

*Ion*  
My dear mother! Shall I ever see your face as well?  
Now, whoever you may be, I long to see you even  
More. But she is dead perhaps, and I can have no hope. 565

*Chorus Leader*  
We also share this house's happiness.  
Yet I could wish my mistress too might have  
The joy of children, and Erechtheus' race.

*Xuthus*  
My son, Apollo rightly prophesied  
That I should find you, and united us. 570  
You found a father whom you never knew.  
Your natural desire I share myself  
That you will find your mother, I, in her  
The woman who gave me a son. And if  
We leave all that to time, perhaps we shall 575  
Succeed. But end your waif's life in the temple.  
Let me persuade you, come with me to Athens,  
For there your father's prosperous power awaits  
You, and great wealth. Though now you suffer  
In one respect, you shall not have the name  
Of bastard and of beggar, but highborn 580  
And well endowed with wealth. But why so silent?  
Why do you hold your eyes downcast? Now you have changed  
Your father's joy to fear.

*Ion*  
Things have a different face as they appear 585  
Before the eyes or far away. I bless  
My fortune now that I have found a father.  
But, father, listen to what is in my mind:  
The earth-born people of glorious Athens are said  
To be no alien race. I should intrude 590  
There marked by two defects, a stranger's son,  
Myself a bastard. And if I remain  
Obscure, with this disgrace they will account  
Me nothing, nobody's son. If I aspire  
To the city's helm, ambitious for a name, 595  
I shall be hated by the powerless.  
Authority is never without hate.  
And those who have ability for power  
But wisely keep their silence, are not eager  
For public life, will mock my folly, blindly 600  
Deserting peace for Athens' crowded fears.  
And then if I invade positions which

Are filled, I shall be countered by the moves  
Of those with knowledge who control affairs.  
For so it always happens, father: men  
Who hold the cities and their dignities  
Above all are opposed to rivalry.

Then, coming to another's house, a stranger,  
To live with one who has no children, who  
Before had you to share the sorrow—now,  
Abandoned to a private grief, she will  
Have cause for bitterness and cause enough  
To hate me when I take my place as heir:  
Without a child herself, she will not kindly  
Regard your own. Then you must either turn  
To her, betraying me, or honor me  
And bring confusion to your house: there is  
No other way. How many wives have brought  
Their men to death with poison or the knife!  
Then, childless, growing old, she has my pity.  
For this affliction does not suit her birth.

The praise of royalty itself is false—  
A fair façade to hide the pain within.  
What happiness or blessing has the man  
Who looks askance for violence, and fear  
Draws out his days? I would prefer to live  
A happy citizen than be a king,  
Compelled to have the evil as his friends,  
Who must abhor the good for fear of death.  
You might reply that gold outweighs all this,  
The joys of wealth—no joy for me to guard  
A fortune, hear reproaches, suffer its pains.  
Let me avoid distress, win moderation.

But father, hear the good points of my life  
In Delphi: leisure first of all, most dear  
To any man, the friendly people, no one  
To thrust me rudely from my path; to yield,  
Give elbow room to those beneath us is

Intolerable. Then I was busy with  
My prayers to gods or talk with men,  
Serving the happy, not the discontented.  
605 I was receiving guests or sending them  
Away again, a fresh face always smiling  
On fresh faces. I had what men should pray,  
Even against their will, to have: duty  
And inclination both contrived to make  
610 Me righteous to god. When I compare the two,  
Father, I think I am more happy here.  
Let me live here. Delight in splendor is  
No more than happiness with little: for both  
Have their appeal.

615 *Chorus (aside)*

Well have you spoken if indeed your words  
Mean happiness for her I love.

*Xuthus*

620 No more of this! Learn to enjoy success.  
Let us inaugurate our life together  
By holding here, where I have found my son,  
A public banquet, and make the sacrifices  
Omitted at your birth. I will pretend  
625 To bring you to my house, a guest, and give  
A feast for you; and then take you along  
With me to Athens, not as my son but as  
A visitor. I do not want to hurt  
My childless wife with my own happiness.  
630 But when I think the time is ripe, I will  
Persuade my wife to give consent to your  
Assumption of my rule. 660

635 Your name shall be Ion, a name to fit  
Your destiny; you were the first to meet  
Me coming from Apollo's shrine. But now  
Collect your friends together, say farewell  
With feast and sacrifice, before you leave 665

This town of Delphi. And, you women slaves,  
I order you, say nothing of our plans.  
To tell my wife will mean your death.

*Ion*

Yes, I will go. But one piece of good luck  
Eludes me still: unless I find my mother,  
My life is worthless. If I may do so,  
I pray my mother is Athenian,  
So that through her I may have rights of speech.  
For when a stranger comes into a city  
Of pure blood, though in name a citizen,  
His mouth remains a slave: he has no right  
Of speech.

670

675

(*Exeunt.*)

*Chorus*

STROPHE

I see tears and mourning  
Triumphant, a sorrowful entrance,  
When the queen hears of the son,  
The blessing bestowed on her husband  
Alone, still childless herself.  
O Latona's prophetic son, what reply have you chanted?  
From where came this child, reared  
In your temple, and who is his mother?  
This oracle does not please me.  
There may be a fraud.  
I fear the issue  
Of this encounter.  
For these are strange matters,  
A strange command on my silence.  
Treachery and chance combine  
In this boy of an alien blood.  
Who will deny it?

680

685

690

ANTISTROPHE

My friends, shall we clearly  
Cry out in the ears of my mistress

695

Blame upon him who alone  
Afforded her hope she could share?  
Now she is maimed by his joy.  
She is falling to gray age, he does not honor his love.  
A stranger he came, wretch,  
To the house, and betrays the fortune  
Bestowed. He wronged her.—Die then!  
And may he not gain  
From god the prayer  
He sends with incense  
Ablaze on bright altars.  
He shall be sure of my feeling,  
How much I love the queen.  
The new father and son are now near  
To their new banquet.

700

705

710

EPODE

O the ridge of the rocks of Parnassus  
Which hold in the skies the watchtower  
Where Bacchus holds the two-flamed  
Torch, leaping lightly with his  
Nighttime wandering Bacchanals:  
Let the boy never see my city,  
Let him die and leave his new life.  
A city in trouble has reason  
To welcome the coming of strangers.  
But Erechtheus, our ancient founder,  
United us long ago.  
(*Creusa enters with an Old Man, a slave and trusted servant  
of the family. They begin to climb the temple steps,  
Creusa supporting him.*)

715

720

*Creusa*

Erechtheus, my father, long before he died  
Made you the guardian of his children: (*pauses*)  
Come up with me to Phoebus' oracle  
To share my pleasure if his prophecy  
Gives hope of children; since it is a joy

725

To share success with those we love; and if—  
I pray that they may not—reverses come,  
There is a balm in seeing friendly eyes.  
And, though I am your mistress, I love you  
As if you were my father, as you did  
My own.

*Old Man*

My daughter, you preserve a noble spirit  
And equal to your noble ancestors:  
You have not shamed your fathers, sons of Earth.  
Give me your help, and bring me to the temple.  
The shrine is steep, you know. Support my limbs  
And heal my weak old age.

*Creusa*

Come then. Be careful how you place your feet.

*Old Man (as he stumbles)*

You see. My mind is nimbler than my feet.

*Creusa*

Lean with your staff upon the path around.

*Old Man*

And that is blind now when my eyes are weak.

*Creusa*

Yes, true. But fight against your weariness.

*Old Man*

I do. But now I have no strength to summon.

*(He turns slowly and with Creusa's help settles himself on the temple steps, looking toward the audience. They are now face to face with the Chorus. Creusa addresses the Chorus.)*

*Creusa*

You women, faithful servants of my loom  
And shuttle, what hope of children did my husband  
Receive before he left? We came for that.

730

Tell me; and if the news is good you will  
Not find your mistress faithless or ungrateful.

750

*Chorus*

An evil fate!

*Old Man*

Your prelude is not one that suits good luck.

735

*Chorus*

Unhappy lot!

*Old Man*

But what is wrong about the oracle?

755

740

*Chorus*

What can we do when death is set before us?

*Creusa*

What strain is this? Why should you be afraid?

*Chorus*

Are we to speak or not? What shall we do?

*Creusa*

O speak! You know of some misfortune coming.

*Chorus Leader*

You shall be told then, even if I die  
Twice over.—You will never have a child  
To hold, or take one to your breast.

760

*(Creusa sinks down to the steps beside the slave.)*

*Creusa*

I wish I were dead.

*Old Man*

Daughter—

*Creusa*

O this blow  
Is hard, this pain put upon me,  
I cannot endure it, my friends.

*Old Man*  
 Hopeless now, my child.

*Creusa*  
 Yes, ah! yes.  
 This blow is fatal, a heart-thrust.  
 The sorrow has pierced within. 765

*Old Man*  
 Mourn no more—

*Creusa*  
 I have reason enough.

*Old Man*  
 Till we know—

*Creusa*  
 Is there anything to know? 770

*Old Man*  
 —If you alone have this misfortune, or  
 Our master too must share the same.

*Chorus Leader*  
 To him Apollo gave a son, but this  
 Good luck is his alone, his wife has nothing. 775

*Creusa*  
 One after the other you have cried out my griefs.  
 This is the worst to deplore.

*Old Man*  
 And did the oracle concern a living son,  
 Or must some woman yet give birth to him?

*Chorus Leader*  
 Phoebus gave him a son already born,  
 A full-grown youth; and I myself was witness. 780

*Creusa*  
 How can it be true? No! an incredible thing.  
 It is surely fantastic.

*Old Man*  
 Fantastic! Tell me how the oracle  
 Is carried out, and who the son can be. 785

*Chorus Leader*  
 He gave your husband for a son the one  
 He should meet first as he came from the temple.

*Creusa*  
 Then it is settled.  
 Mine is the childless part,  
 The solitary life in a desolate house. 790

*Old Man*  
 Who then was chosen for Xuthus to meet?  
 And tell me how and where he saw his child.

*Chorus Leader*  
 There was a boy who swept the temple here.  
 You know him? For he is the son. 795

*Creusa*  
 Would that I might fly  
 Through the gentle air far away  
 From Greek earth to the evening stars.  
 Such is my anguish, my friends.

*Old Man*  
 What was the name his father gave to him?  
 You know it? Or does that remain uncertain? 800

*Chorus Leader*  
 He called him Ion, since he met him first.

*Old Man*  
 Who is his mother?

*Chorus Leader*  
 That I cannot say.  
 But Xuthus, to tell you all I know, old man,  
 Has gone away unknown to her, his wife,  
 To offer in the consecrated tent  
 A birthday sacrifice, to pledge the bond  
 Of friendship in a banquet with his son. 805

*Old Man*  
 My lady, we have been betrayed by your  
 Own husband—for I share your grief; we are

Insulted by design, cast from the house  
 Of Erechtheus: this I say not out of hatred,  
 But rather since I love you more than him:  
 The foreigner who married you and came  
 Into the city and your house, received  
 Your heritage, and now is proved the father  
 Of children by another—secretly.  
 How secretly I will explain to you.  
 Aware that you would have no children,  
 He scorned to suffer equally with you  
 In this mischance, and had a secret child  
 By some slave woman, and sent him away  
 For someone in Delphi to rear. The boy  
 Was dedicated to Apollo's temple,  
 And there grew in concealment. While the father,  
 Now knowing that the boy was grown, pressed you  
 To travel here because you had no child.  
 And so Apollo did not lie, but he  
 Who has long reared the child. This is his web  
 Of deceit: discovered, he would lay the blame  
 Upon the god; if not, to guard against  
 The blows of time, his plan was to invest  
 Him with the city's rule. As time went on,  
 The new name Ion was invented, suiting  
 This trick of meeting him outside the temple.

*Chorus Leader*

I hate all evil men who plot injustice,  
 Then trick it out with subterfuge. I would  
 Prefer as friend a good man ignorant  
 Than one more clever who is evil too.

*Old Man*

Worst shame of all that he should bring into  
 Your house a cipher, motherless, the child  
 Of some slave woman. For the shame at least  
 Would have been open, if, with your consent,

810 Because you could not bear a child yourself,  
 He had an heir by one highborn. If this  
 Had been too much, he should have been content  
 To marry an Aeolian. 840

815 And so you must now act a woman's part:  
 Kill them, your husband and his son, by sword,  
 By poison or some trick before death comes 845  
 To you from them. Unless you act your life  
 Is lost; for when two enemies have met  
 Together in a house, the one must be  
 Unlucky. Now I will help you kill the son: 850  
 Visit the place where he prepares the feast,  
 To pay the debt I owe my masters, thus,  
 To live or die. A slave bears only this  
 Disgrace: the name. In every other way 855  
 An honest slave is equal to the free.

*Chorus Leader*

825 I too, dear mistress, want to share your fate,  
 To die, or live with honor.

*Creusa*

*(After a pause, then coming to the front.)*

830 O my heart, how be silent?  
 Yet how can I speak of that secret 860  
 Love, strip myself of all shame?  
 Is one barrier left still to prevent me?  
 Whom have I now as my rival in virtue?  
 Has not my husband become my betrayer?  
 I am cheated of home, cheated of children, 865  
 Hopes are gone which I could not achieve,  
 The hopes of arranging things well  
 By hiding the facts,  
 By hiding the birth which brought sorrow.  
 No! No! But I swear by the starry abode 870  
 Of Zeus, by the goddess who reigns on our peaks  
 And by the sacred shore of the lake

Of Tritonis, I will no longer conceal it:  
 When I have put away the burden,  
 My heart will be easier. 875  
 Tears fall from my eyes, and my spirit is sick,  
 Evilly plotted against by men and by gods;  
 I will expose them,  
 Ungrateful betrayers of women. 880

O you who give the seven-toned lyre  
 A voice which rings out of the lifeless,  
 Rustic horn the lovely sound  
 Of the Muses' hymns,  
 On you, Latona's son, here 885  
 In daylight I will lay blame.  
 You came with hair flashing  
 Gold, as I gathered  
 Into my cloak flowers ablaze  
 With their golden light. 890  
 Clinging to my pale wrists  
 As I cried for my mother's help  
 You led me to bed in a cave,  
 A god and my lover,  
 With no shame, 895  
 Submitting to the Cyprian's will.  
 In misery I bore you  
 A son, whom in fear of my mother  
 I placed in that bed  
 Where you cruelly forced me. 900  
 Ah! He is lost now,  
 Snatched as food for birds,  
 My son and yours; O lost!  
 But you play the lyre, 905  
 Chanting your paeans.

O hear me, son of Latona,  
 Who assign your prophecies  
 From the golden throne

And the temple at earth's center, 910  
 I will proclaim my words in your ears:  
 You are an evil lover;  
 Though you owed no debt  
 To my husband, you have 915  
 Set a son in his house.  
 But my son, yes and yours, hard-hearted,  
 Is lost, carried away by birds,  
 The clothes his mother put on him abandoned.  
 Delos hates you and the young 920  
 Laurel which grows by the palm  
 With its delicate leaves, where Latona  
 Bore you, a holy child, fruit of Zeus.

*(She breaks down, weeping, on the temple steps.  
 The Chorus gathers round her.)*

*Chorus Leader*  
 O what a store of miseries is now  
 Disclosed; who could but weep at hearing them?

*Old Man* 925  
 O child, your face has riveted my gaze,  
 My reason is distracted. For just when  
 I banished from my heart a wave of trouble,  
 A second rose at the stern, caused by the words  
 You spoke about your present woes, before 930  
 You trod the evil path of other sorrows.  
 What do you say? What child is this you claim  
 To bear? Where in the city did you put  
 This welcome corpse for beasts? Tell me again.

*Creusa*  
 I will tell you, although I feel ashamed.

*Old Man* 935  
 Yes, I know how to feel with friends in trouble.

*Creusa*  
 Then listen. You know the cave which lies above  
 The north of Cecrops' hill, its name Long Rocks?



*Old Man*

I know. Pan's altars and his shrine are near.

*Creusa*

It was there I endured a fearful trial.

*Old Man*

Yes? My tears spring to meet your words.

940

*Creusa*

Phoebus became my lover against my will.

*Old Man*

My child, could that have been the thing I heard?

*Creusa*

I shall acknowledge truth if you tell me.

*Old Man*

When you were suffering from a secret illness?

*Creusa*

That was the sorrow which I now reveal.

945

*Old Man*

How did you hide this union with Apollo?

*Creusa*

I had a child.—Please hear my story out.

*Old Man*

But where, who helped you? Or were you alone?

*Creusa*

Alone in that cave where I met Apollo.

*Old Man*

Where is the child? You need not be childless.

950

*Creusa*

Dead. He was left for beasts to prey upon.

*Old Man*

Dead? Then Phoebus was false, gave you no help?

*Creusa*

He did not help. The child grew up in Hades.

*Old Man*

But who exposed the child? Of course not you?

*Creusa*

I did: I wrapped him in my robes at night.

955

*Old Man*

And there was no accomplice in your deed?

*Creusa*

No, nothing but the silence and my grief.

*Old Man*

How could you leave your child there, in the cave?

*Creusa*

How, but with many tender words of pity?—

*Old Man*

Ah, you were harsh; Apollo harsher still.

960

*Creusa*

If you had seen the child stretch out his hands!

*Old Man*

To find your breast, lie in your arms?

*Creusa*

To find what I was cruelly refusing.

*Old Man*

But why did you decide to expose your child?

*Creusa*

Because I hoped the god would save his own.

965

*Old Man*

A storm embroils the fortunes of your house.

(A pause.)

*Creusa*

Why do you hide your head, old man, why weep?

*Old Man*

I see your father and yourself so stricken.

*Creusa*  
Such is man's life. All things must change.  
(*A pause, as the Old Man leads Creusa to the front of the stage.*)

*Old Man*  
My child, let us no longer cling to tears. 970

*Creusa*  
What can I do? For pain has no resource.

*Old Man*  
Avenge yourself on him who wronged you first.

*Creusa*  
How can a mortal fight immortal power?

*Old Man*  
Burn down Apollo's sacred oracle.

*Creusa*  
I am afraid.—I have enough of sorrow. 975

*Old Man*  
Then kill your husband. This is in your power.

*Creusa*  
He was once loyal, and I honor that.

*Old Man*  
The son then who has come to menace you.

*Creusa*  
But how? If only I might! I would do that!

*Old Man*  
By putting swords in your attendants' hands. 980  
(*A pause.*)

*Creusa*  
Let us begin. But where can it be done?

*Old Man*  
The sacred tent, where he is feasting friends.

*Creusa*  
Murder is flagrant; slaves are poor support.

*Old Man (despairingly)*  
You play the coward; come, give me your plan now.  
(*A pause, as she prepares to explain her scheme; she goes near to him, speaking softly and urgently, as if to emphasize her own resolution.*)

*Creusa*  
Yes, I have something which is sure and subtle. 985

*Old Man*  
And I can help in both these ways.

*Creusa*  
Then listen. You know the war fought by Earth's sons?

*Old Man*  
When giants fought against the gods at Phlegra.

*Creusa*  
Earth there produced an awful monster, Gorgon.

*Old Man*  
To harass all the gods and help her children? 990

*Creusa*  
Yes, but destroyed by Zeus's daughter Pallas.

*Old Man*  
Is this the tale which I have heard before?

*Creusa*  
Yes, that she wears its skin upon her breast. 995

*Old Man*  
Athene's armor which they call her aegis?

*Creusa*  
So called from how she rushed into the battle.

*Old Man*  
What was the form of this barbaric thing?

*Creusa*  
A breastplate armed with serpent coils.  
(*An impatient pause.*)

Old Man

But my child, what harm can this do to your foes?

Creusa

You know Erichthonius?—Of course you must.

Old Man

The founder of your house, the son of Earth.

1000

Creusa

A newborn child, Athene gave to him—

(*She pauses.*)

Old Man

Yes, what is this you hesitate to say?

Creusa (*slowly*)

Two drops of Gorgon's blood.

Old Man

And these have some effect on men?

Creusa

One is poisonous, the other cures disease.

1005

Old Man

But how did she attach them to the child?

Creusa

A golden chain which he gave to my father.

Old Man

And when he died it came to you?

Creusa

Yes, I always wear it on my wrist.

Old Man

How is the twofold gift compounded then?

1010

Creusa

The drop extracted from the hollow vein—

Old Man

How is it to be used? What power has it?

Creusa

It fosters life and keeps away disease.

Old Man

What action does the other of them have?

Creusa

It kills—a poison from the Gorgon's snakes.

1015

Old Man

You carry them apart or mixed together?

Creusa

Apart. For good and evil do not mingle.

Old Man

O my dear child, you have all that you want!

Creusa

By this the boy shall die, and you shall kill him.

Old Man

But when and how? Tell me, it shall be done.

1020

Creusa

In Athens when he comes into my house.

(*A pause, as the slave considers.*)

Old Man

No, I distrust this plan as you did mine.

Creusa

Why?—Can we both have seen the same weak point?

Old Man

They will accuse you, innocent or guilty.

Creusa

Since foster mothers must be jealous,

1025

Old Man

But kill him now and so deny the crime.

Creusa

And in that way I taste my joy the sooner.

*Old Man*

And turn his own deceit upon your husband.

*Creusa*

You know then what to do? Here, take  
 This golden bracelet from my hand, Athene's  
 Old gift; go where my husband holds his feast  
 In secret; when they end the meal, begin  
 To pour the gods' libation, then drop this,  
 Under cover of your robe, into  
 The young man's cup—in his alone, no more.  
 Reserve the drink for him who would assume  
 The mastery of my home. Once this is drained,  
 He will be dead, stay here and never see  
 Our glorious Athens.

1030

1035

*Old Man*

Now go to our host's house, and I will do  
 The task appointed for me.

1040

(Pause.)

Old foot, come now, take on a youthful strength  
 For work, although the years deny it you.  
 March with your masters upon the enemy,  
 And help to kill and cast him from the house.  
 Right that the fortunate should honor virtue,  
 But when we wish to harm our enemies  
 There is no law which can prevent.

1045

(Exeunt.)

*Chorus*

STROPHE

Demeter's daughter, guarding the roadway, ruling  
 What wings through the paths of the night  
 And the daytime, O guide the potion  
 Of the death-heavy cup  
 To whom the queen sends it, brew  
 Of the blood drops from the Gorgon's severed throat,  
 To him who lifts his presumptuous hand

1050

1055

Against the house of Erechtheus.

Let no others ever have

Sway in the city:

Only the sons of Erechtheus.

1060

ANTISTROPHE

My mistress is planning a death, and if it should fail,  
 The occasion of action go past,  
 Now her sole anchor of hope,  
 She will sharpen a sword  
 Or fasten a noose to her neck,  
 Ending sorrow by sorrows, pass down to the realm of change.  
 For she would never endure to see  
 Foreigners ruling the house,  
 Not while living her eyes  
 Still have their clarity—  
 She, born of a noble line.

1065

1070

STROPHE

O the shame to many-hymned Dionysus, if by the springs  
 Where lovely choruses are danced,  
 Apollo's bastard son shall behold  
 Unsleeping, keeping the watch,  
 The torches burning on the festival night,  
 When the star-faced heavens join in the dance,  
 With the moon and the fifty Nereids  
 Who dance in the depths of the sea,  
 In perennial river-springs,  
 Honoring the gold-crowned Maid  
 And her mother, holy Demeter:  
 There, where he hopes  
 To rule, usurping  
 What others have wrought.

1075

1080

1085

ANTISTROPHE

All you poets who raise your unjust strains  
 Singing the unsanctioned, unholy loves

1090

Of women, see how much we surpass  
 In virtue the unrighteous race  
 Of men. Let a song of different strain  
 Ring out against men, harshly indicting  
 Their love. For here is one  
 Of the offspring of Zeus who shows  
 His ingratitude, refusing  
 To bring good luck to the house  
 With his and Creusa's child:  
     But yielding to passion  
     For another, has found  
     A bastard son.

*(Enter a Servant of Creusa, greatly agitated.)*

*Servant*

Women, can you tell me where I may find  
 Erechtheus' noble daughter? I have searched  
 The city everywhere without success.

*Chorus Leader*

What is it, friend? Why are you hurrying?  
 What is the message you have brought?

*Servant*

They are behind. The Delphian officers are looking  
 For her to stone to death.

*Chorus Leader*

What do you mean? Have they discovered then  
 The secret plot we made to kill the boy?

*Servant*

Correct—and you will not be the last to suffer.

*Chorus Leader*

How was this scheme, unknown to them, discovered?

*Servant*

The god refused to be defiled, and so  
 Found means of combating the victory  
 Of justice over the unjust.

*Chorus Leader*

1095

But how? I beg you tell me that: for if  
 I have to die, I shall die more content  
 Because I know my fate.

1120

*(The women press nearer to the Servant.)*

*Servant*

1100

Creusa's husband came out from the shrine  
 Of Phoebus, and then took his new-found son  
 Away to join the feast and sacrifice  
 He was preparing for the gods. Xuthus  
 Himself was going to the place where  
 The sacred Bacchanalian fires leap,  
 To sprinkle the twin crags of Dionysus  
 With victim's blood for having seen his son.

1125

1105

"My son," he said, "will you stay here and see  
 That workmen build a tent inclosed on all  
 Its sides. And if I should be long away,  
 While sacrificing to the gods of birth,  
 Begin the banquet with such friends as come."

1130

1110

He took the victims then and went away.  
 Ion had the framework built in ritual form  
 On upright poles without a wall, and paid  
 Attention to the sun, so that he might  
 Avoid its midday and its dying rays  
 Of flame, and measuring a square, its sides  
 A hundred feet, so that he could invite  
 All Delphians to the feast. To shade the tent  
 He took from store some sacred tapestries,  
 A wonder to behold. And first he cast  
 Above the roof a wing of cloth, spoil from  
 The Amazons, which Heracles, the son  
 Of Zeus, had dedicated to the god.

1135

1140

1115

And there were figures woven in design:  
 For Uranus was mustering the stars  
 In heaven's circle; and Helios drove his horses  
 Toward his dying flame and trailed the star

1145

Which shines bright in the West. While black-robed Night,  
 Drawn by a pair, urged on her chariot,  
 Beside the stars kept pace with her. The Pleiades  
 And Orion, his sword in hand, moved through  
 The sky's mid-path; and then, above, the Bear  
 Who turned his golden tail within the vault.  
 The round full moon threw up her rays, dividing  
 The month; the Hyades, the guide most sure  
 For sailors; then light's herald, Dawn, routing  
 The stars. The sides he draped with tapestries  
 Also, but of barbarian design.  
 There were fine ships which fought with Greeks, and creatures,  
 Half-man, half-beast, and horsemen chasing deer  
 Or lion hunts. And at the entrance, Cecrops,  
 His daughters near him, wreathed himself in coils  
 Of serpents—this a gift which had been given  
 By some Athenian. Then in the center  
 He put the golden mixing bowls. A herald  
 Then went and announced that any Delphian  
 Who pleased was free to attend the feast. And when  
 The tent was full, they wreathed their heads with flowers  
 And ate the food spread in abundance till  
 Desire was satisfied. When they had done  
 With eating, an old man came in and stood  
 Among the guests, and threw them into laughter  
 With his officious antics. He poured out water  
 From jars to wash their hands, or burned  
 The ooze of myrrh, and put himself in charge  
 Of golden drinking cups. And when the flutes  
 Came in together with the bowl which all  
 Had now to drink, he said, "Enough of these  
 Small cups, we must have large; the company  
 Will then be all the sooner in good spirits."  
 And now they busied themselves with passing gold  
 And silver cups; but he, as though he meant  
 To honor his new master, offered him

A chosen cup of wine, and put in this  
 A fatal poison which they say our mistress  
 Had given, to have an end of this new son.  
 And no one knew. But when like all the rest  
 He held his cup, one of the slaves let fall  
 Some phrase of evil omen. He had been reared  
 Among good prophets in the temple, and knew  
 The sign and ordered them to fill another.  
 The first libation of the god he emptied  
 On the ground and told the rest to pour  
 As he had done. A silence followed when  
 We filled the sacred bowls with Byblian wine  
 And water. While this was being done, there came  
 Into the tent a riotous flight of doves—  
 They haunt Apollo's shrine and have no fear.  
 To slake their thirst, they dipped their beaks into  
 The wine the guests had poured and drew it down  
 Their well-plumed throats; and all but one were not  
 Harmed by the god's libation. But she had perched  
 Where Ion poured his wine and tasted it.  
 At once her feathered body shook and quivered,  
 She screamed strange cries of anguish. All the band  
 Of guests looked on amazed to see her struggles.  
 She died in her convulsions, her pink claws  
 And legs relaxed. The son the god foretold  
 Then stretched his uncloaked arms across the table,  
 And cried, "Who planned my death? Tell me, old man,  
 Since you were so officious; you handed me  
 The drink." He held the old man by the arm  
 And searched him instantly, so that he might  
 Convict him in the act. His guilt was proved  
 And he revealed, compelled against his will,  
 Creusa's plotting with the poisoned drink.  
 The youth bestowed by Loxias collected  
 The guests, went from the tent without delay,  
 And took his stand before the Delphian nobles.

“O rulers of the sacred city,” he said,  
 “A foreign woman, daughter of Erechtheus,  
 Has tried to poison me.” The lords of Delphi  
 By many votes decided that my mistress  
 Be put to death, thrown from the rock, for planning  
 The murder of a sacred person there  
 Inside the temple. Now all the city looks  
 For her whom misery advanced on this  
 Unhappy path. Desire for children caused  
 Her visit here to Phoebus, but now her life  
 Is lost, and with her life all hopes.

*Chorus*

There is no escape, we are doomed,  
 No escape from death.  
 It has been made clear,  
 The libation of Dionysian grapes  
 Mingled for murder with blood drops  
 From the swift-working viper,  
 Clear that in sacrifice to the gods below  
 Our lives are set for disaster.  
 They will stone my mistress to death.  
 What winged flight can I take,  
 Down to what dark caverns of the earth  
 Can I go to escape the stones of destruction?  
 By mounting a chariot  
 Drawn by horses with speedy hooves,  
 Or the prow of a ship?  
 There is no concealment, unless a god wishes  
 To withdraw men from sight.  
 O unhappy mistress, what sufferings  
 Wait for your soul? Shall we not,  
 For the will to do harm to our fellows,  
 According to justice, suffer ourselves?

*(Creusa rushes in, wildly agitated and despairing.)*

1220

*Creusa*

They are in pursuit, my friends, they want to butcher me;  
 By the judgment of the Pythian vote my life is forfeit.

1250

*Chorus Leader*

Yes, we know in what distress you are, unhappy woman.

1225

*Creusa*

Where can I find refuge then? For I have evaded them  
 By a trick, just left the house in time to save my life.

*Chorus Leader*

Where, but at the altar?

*Creusa*

What advantage will that give me?

1255

1230

*Chorus Leader*

God defends the suppliant.

*Creusa*

Yes, but the law condemns me.

1235

*Chorus Leader*

They must seize you first.

*Creusa*

And here my bitter rivals come,  
 Pressing on with sword in hand.

1240

*Chorus Leader*

Sit at the altar now.  
 For if you die sitting there, your killers will be made  
 Guilty of your blood. Now destiny must be endured.

1260

1245

*(Creusa retires quickly to the altar at the back of the stage. She  
 has hardly had time to sit there before Ion, sword in hand,  
 comes in at the head of a group of armed men, closely  
 followed by a crowd of Delphians. For some time  
 he is not aware that Creusa is at the altar.)*

*Ion*

O Cephisus, her bull-shaped ancestor,  
 What viper or what serpent glancing out  
 A deadly flame of fire did you beget

In her, this woman who will balk at nothing,  
Match for the Gorgon drops with which she tried  
To poison me! Take hold of her and let  
Parnassus' top, when like a quoit she bounds  
From rock to rock, comb out those perfect tresses.

Luck favored me before I went to Athens  
To fall a victim to a stepmother.  
For here, among my friends I learnt to measure  
Your mind, your menace, and your enmity.  
But if I had been trapped inside your house,  
You would have sent me straight to death.

*(He suddenly catches sight of Creusa cowering  
at the altar. He strides up to her.)*

The altar will not save you, nor Apollo's  
House, since my greater pity is reserved  
For myself and my mother. For although  
She is not here, my thought of her is constant.

*(He appeals to the people with him.)*

You see her treachery—how she can twist  
One scheme upon another! She has fled  
To cower at the god's own altar, hoping  
Thus to avoid her penalty for wrong.

*Creusa*  
I warn you not to kill me—and I speak  
Not only for myself but for the god  
Who guards this place.

*Ion*  
What can you have in common with the god?

*Creusa*  
My body is his to save, a sacred charge.

*Ion*  
You tried to poison me and I was his.

*Creusa*  
No longer his; for you had found your father.

*Ion*  
I belonged to Phoebus till my father came.

*Creusa*  
But then no more. Now I belong to him.

*Ion*  
Yes, but I had the piety you lack.

*Creusa*  
I tried to kill the enemy of my house.

*Ion*  
I did not march upon your land with arms.

*Creusa*  
You tried to set Erechtheus' house in flames!

*Ion*  
What fiery flame, what torches did I carry?

*Creusa*  
You hoped to force possession of my home.

*Ion*  
My father's gift—the land he gained himself.

*Creusa*  
How can Aeolians share Athenian land?

*Ion*  
Because he saved it, not with words, but arms.

*Creusa*  
An ally need not own the land he helps!

*Ion*  
You planned my death through fear of my intentions?

*Creusa*  
To save my life in case you ceased intending.

*Ion*  
Childless yourself, you envied my father's child.

*Creusa*  
So you will snatch those homes without an heir?



*Ion*

Had I no right to share my father's state?

*Creusa*

A shield and spear, these are your sole possessions.

*(Ion loses his temper.)*

*Ion*

Come, leave the altar and the shrine of god.

*Creusa*

*(Her moral indignation yielding to spite.)*

Go, find your mother and give her advice.

*Ion*

While your attempted murder goes unpunished?

*Creusa*

Not if you wish to kill me in the shrine.

*(She grasps the wreaths on the altar as if in supplication.)*

*Ion*

What pleasure can the god's wreaths give to death?

*Creusa*

I shall thus injure one who injured me.

*Ion*

O this is monstrous! The laws of god for men  
Are not well made, their judgment is unwise.  
The unjust should not have the right of refuge  
At altars, but be driven away. For gods  
Are soiled by the touch of wicked hands. The just—  
The injured man, should have this sanctuary.  
Instead both good and bad alike all come,  
Receiving equal treatment from the gods.

*(The Pythian Priestess now enters from the temple. She is old and very dignified, wearing long white robes fastened by a golden girdle at the waist; on her head is a wreath of bay leaves and the riband or fillet which is the sign of her office. She is carrying a cradle wrapped in bands of wool.)*

*Priestess*

O stop, my son. For I, the prophetess  
Of Phoebus, chosen by all the Delphians  
To keep the tripod's ancient law, have left  
The seat of prophecy to pass these bounds.

1320

*(Ion greets her with great respect.)*

*Ion*

Dear mother, hail! Mother in all but name.

*Priestess*

Then let me be so called. It pleases me.

1325

*Ion*

You heard how she had planned to murder me?

*Priestess*

I heard—but your own cruelty is sinful.

*Ion*

Have I no right to kill a murderer?

1310

*Priestess*

Wives are unkind to children not their own.

*Ion*

As we can be ill used by them.

1330

*Priestess*

No. When you leave the temple for your country—

1315

*Ion*

What must I do? What is your advice?

*Priestess*

Go into Athens, with good omens.

*Ion*

All men are pure who kill their enemies.

*Priestess*

No more of that.—Hear what I have to say.

1335

*Ion*

Then speak. Your message could not be unfriendly.

*Priestess*

You see the basket I am carrying?

*Ion*

I see an ancient cradle bound with wool.

*Priestess*

I picked you up in this, a newborn child.

*Ion*

What do you say? This tale is new to me.

1340

*Priestess*

I kept it secret. Now I can reveal it.

*Ion*

How have you kept it from me all these years?

*Priestess*

The god desired to hold you as his servant.

*Ion*

And now he does not wish it? How can I know?

*Priestess*

Revealing your father, he bids you go from here.

1345

*Ion*

Why did you keep the cradle? Was that an order?

*Priestess*

Apollo put the thought into my mind.—

*Ion*

What thought? Tell me. I want to hear the end.

*Priestess*

To keep what I had found until this time.

*Ion*

And does it bring me any help?—or harm?

1350

*Priestess*

The swaddling clothes you wore are kept inside.

*Ion*

These clues you bring will help to find my mother.

*Priestess*

Which now the god desires—though not before.

*Ion*

This is indeed a day of happy signs!

*(She offers him the cradle.)*

*Priestess*

Take this with you—and now look for your mother.

1355

*Ion*

*(Taking the cradle.)*

Throughout all Asia, to Europe's boundaries!

*Priestess*

That is your own affair. I reared you, child,  
For Phoebus' sake, and these restore to you,  
Which he wished me to take and keep, although  
Without express command. Why he so wished  
I cannot say. There was no man who knew  
That I had these or where they were concealed.  
And now farewell. I kiss you as my son.

1360

*(She embraces him. She turns and takes a few steps toward the temple entrance. Then she faces him again, to prolong her farewell with a few last words of advice.)*

As for the search, begin it as you ought:  
Your mother might have been a Delphian girl  
Who left you at the temple; inquire here first,  
And then elsewhere in Greece. Now you have heard  
All that we have to say—Apollo, who had  
An interest in your fate, and I myself.

1365

*(She leaves the stage through the temple door.)*

*Ion*

*(Putting his hands to his face.)*

O how the tears well from my eyes whenever  
My mind goes back to the time when the woman  
Who gave me birth, the child of secret love,  
Disposed of me by stealth, and kept me from

1370

Her breast. Instead, unnamed, I had a life  
Of service in Apollo's house; and fate  
Was cruel, though the god was kind. I was  
Deprived of my dear mother's love throughout  
The time I might have lain content and happy,  
Held in her arms. My mother suffered too;  
She lost the joy a child can bring.

1375

And now

I will resign the cradle as a gift  
To god to ward away unpleasant news.  
If by some chance my mother were a slave,  
To find her would be worse than ignorance.  
O Phoebus, to your shrine I dedicate—

1380

And yet, what does this mean? It is against  
The god's own wish; he has preserved for me  
My mother's tokens. I must have the courage  
To open it. I cannot shun my fate.  
O sacred bands and ties which guard my precious  
Tokens, what secret do you hide from me?

1385

*(He unties the bands of wool from the cradle.)*

A miracle! See how the cradle's covering  
Is still unworn; the wicker is not decayed,  
Yet years have passed since they were put away.

1390

*(Creusa is trembling with excitement, her eyes  
riveted upon the cradle.)*

Creusa

But what is this I see—beyond my hopes?

1395

Ion

Silence. You were my enemy before.

*(Creusa controls her excitement with a great effort and gradually  
raises herself to a standing position by the altar. The  
crowd of Delphians, her own women, and Ion  
all gaze toward her in tense silence.)*

Creusa

This is no time for silence. Do not try  
To check me. In that cradle I exposed

You then, my son, a newborn child,  
Where the Long Rocks hang over Cecrops' cave.  
I will desert the altar even though  
I have to die.

1400

*(She rushes away from the altar, runs up to Ion,  
and throws her arms round his neck.)*

Ion

Seize her! God's madness has made her leap away  
From the altar's images. Now bind her arms.

Creusa

Go on and kill me. I will not lose you,  
The cradle, or the tokens it contains.

1405

Ion

O hypocrite to cheat me with a trick!

Creusa

Oh no! You have found one who loves you.

Ion

What, you love me?—And try a secret murder?

Creusa

You are my son: a mother must love her son.

Ion

Stop spinning lies.—For I am sure to have you.

1410

*(Decides to trick her.)*

Creusa

O do so then! That is my aim, my son.

Ion

This cradle—has it anything inside?

Creusa

It has the things you wore when I exposed you.

Ion

And can you give their names before you see them?

Creusa

I can; and, if I fail, consent to die.

1415

*Ion*

Then speak. Your audacity is strange indeed.  
*(He opens the cradle, standing far enough away from Creusa  
to prevent her seeing inside it.)*

*Creusa*

Look for the weaving which I did in childhood.

*Ion*

Describe it; girls do many kinds of work.

*Creusa*

It is unfinished, a kind of trial piece.

*Ion*

And its design—You cannot cheat me there. 1420

*Creusa*

There is a Gorgon in the center part.

*Ion (aside)*

O Zeus! What fate is this to track us down!

*Creusa*

The stuff is fringed with serpents like an aegis.

*Ion*

And here it is—found like an oracle!

*Creusa*

The loomwork of a girl—so long ago. 1425

*Ion*

And anything else? Or will your luck fail now?

*Creusa*

Serpents, the custom of our golden race.

*Ion*

Athene's gift, who bids you wear them?

*Creusa*

Yes, in memory of Erichthonius.

*Ion*

What do they do with this gold ornament? 1430

*Creusa*

It is a necklace for a newborn child.

*Ion*

Yes, here they are.

*(Shows them. He is now anxious for her success.)*  
I long to know the third.

*Creusa*

I put an olive wreath around you, from  
The tree Athene first planted on the rock;  
If that is there, it has not lost its green, 1435  
But flourishes because the tree is holy.

*(Ion, quite convinced, throws himself into his mother's arms.)*

*Ion*

O dearest mother, what happiness to see you,  
To kiss you, and know that you are happy!

*Creusa*

O child! O light more welcome than the Sun.  
—The god forgives me—I have you in my arms. 1440  
I have found you against all my hopes,  
Whom I thought underground in the world  
Of Persephone's shades.

*Ion*

Dear mother, yes, you have me in your arms,  
Who died and now have come to you alive.

*Creusa*

O radiant heaven's expanse, 1445  
How can I speak or cry  
My joy? How have I met  
Unimagined delight, and why  
Am I made happy?

*Ion*

There was no more unlikely chance than this, 1450  
To find that I am, after all, your son.

*Creusa*

I am trembling with fear.

*Ion*

That I am lost, although you hold me now?

*Creusa*

Yes, since I had cast all hope away.  
But tell me, priestess, from where  
Did you take the child to your arms?  
Whose hand brought him to Apollo's house?

1455

*Ion*

It was the work of god. But as we have suffered  
Before, so now we must enjoy our fortune.

*Creusa*

My child, you were born in tears,  
In sorrow torn from your mother.  
But now I can breathe on your cheek,  
And am blessed with tender joy.

1460

*Ion*

I have no need to speak. You speak for both.

*Creusa*

I am childless no longer,  
No longer without an heir.  
The hearth is restored to the home,  
The rulers return to the land,  
And Erechtheus is young once more;  
Now the house is delivered from night  
And looks up to the rays of the sun.

1465

*Ion*

Mother, my father should be here with me  
To share the happiness I bring you both.

*Creusa*

My child, my child—  
How am I put to shame!

1470

*Ion*

Yes?—Tell me.—

*Creusa*

You do not know your father.

*Ion*

So I was born before your marriage then?

*Creusa*

The marriage which gave you birth  
Saw no torches or dancing, my son.

1475

*Ion*

A bastard son—My father? Tell me that.

*Creusa*

Athene who slew the Gorgon,  
I call her to witness—

*Ion*

Why this beginning?

*Creusa*

By the rocks where the nightingales sing,  
Apollo—

1480

*Ion*

Why name Apollo?

*Creusa*

Became my lover in secret—

*Ion*

Speak on; for what you say will make me happy.

1485

*Creusa*

When the time passed, I bore you,  
The unknown child of Apollo.

*Ion*

How welcome this news is—if it is true.

*Creusa*

And these were your swaddling clothes;  
In fear of my mother I wrapped you

1490

In them, the careless work of a girl  
At her loom.  
I gave you no milk,  
You were not washed with my hands,  
But in a deserted cave,  
A prey for the beaks of birds,  
Delivered to death.

1495

*Ion*  
O mother, what horror you dared.

*Creusa*  
Myself in the bondage of fear,  
I was casting away your life,  
But against my will.

*Ion*  
And I attempted an impious murder.

1500

*Creusa*  
Fate drove us hard in the past,  
Just now oppressed us again.  
There is no harbor of peace  
From the changing waves of joy and despair.  
The wind's course veers.  
Let it rest. We have endured  
Sorrows enough. O my son,  
Pray for a favoring breeze  
Of rescue from trouble.

1505

*Chorus Leader*  
From what we have seen happen here, no man  
Should ever think that any chance is hopeless.

1510

(A pause. *Ion* is afflicted with doubt.)

*Ion*  
O Fortune, who has already changed the lives  
Of countless men from misery to joy,  
How near I was to killing my own mother,  
How near myself to undeserved disaster.

1515

(Pause.)

But do the sun's bright rays in daily course  
Illumine such events as this—all this?

(Pause, as he turns to his mother.)

It was so good at last to find you, mother,  
And I can cast no blame upon my birth.  
But there is something else I wish to say  
To you alone. Come here with me; my words  
Are for your ear; your answer shall be hidden.

1520

(He draws her aside.)

Now tell me, mother—are you not, deceived  
As young girls are in love affairs kept secret,  
Now laying blame upon the god, and say,  
Attempting to escape the shame I brought,  
That Phoebus is my father, though in fact  
He is no god at all?

1525

*Creusa*  
No, by Athene, Goddess of Victory,  
Who in her chariot fought by Zeus's side  
Against the Giant race, my son, your father  
Was not a mortal, but the very god  
Who reared you, Loxias.

1530

*Ion*  
If this is true, why give his son to others,  
Why does he say that Xuthus is my father?

*Creusa*  
No, he does not; you are his son, a gift  
Bestowed by him on Xuthus, just as a man  
Might give a friend his son to be his heir.

1535

*Ion*  
But, mother, does Apollo tell the truth,  
Or is the oracle false? With some good reason  
That question troubles me.

Creusa

Then listen. This is what I think, my son:  
It is for your own good that Loxias  
Is placing you within a noble house.  
Acknowledged as his son, you would have lost  
All hope of heritage or father's name.  
What chance had you when I concealed  
The truth, and even planned your death in secret?  
And so to help you he is giving you  
Another father.

1540

1545

Ion

My question cannot be so lightly answered;  
No, I will ask Apollo in his temple  
If I am his, or born of man.

*(As he steps toward the temple, he sees the goddess  
Athene appearing above it.)*

Ah!  
What goddess shows her face above the temple  
To look toward the sun? O mother, let us fly.  
We should not see the gods unless the right  
Is given to us.

1550

*(All on the stage bow their heads to the ground  
and step backward from the temple.)*

Athene

No, stay. I am no enemy to flee,  
But well-disposed in Delphi as in Athens.  
I am Athene, whose name your city bears:  
I have come here in haste, sent by Apollo,  
Who did not think it right to come himself  
Before you, lest he should be blamed for what  
Has happened in the past; he has sent me  
To give his message:

1555

This woman is your mother,  
Your father is Apollo; the one you know  
Received you as a gift, and not because

1560

You are his son; and this was done with purpose,  
To find you an established place among  
A noble house. But when this plan he made  
Was open and laid bare, he was afraid  
Your mother's scheme of murder would succeed,  
Or she be killed by you, and found some means  
Of rescue; but for this he would have kept  
The secret longer and in Athens revealed  
Creusa as the mother and himself  
The father of his child. But I must end  
My task and tell the purpose of my journey.  
Now hear Apollo's revelations.

1565

1570

Creusa,

Go with your son to Cecrops' land, and then  
Appoint him to the royal throne; for since  
He is descended from Erechtheus, he has  
The right to rule my land: and he shall be  
Renowned through Greece. His sons, four branches from  
One stock, shall name the country and its peoples,  
Divided in their tribes, who live about my rock.  
The first shall be named Geleon, the tribe  
Of Hopletes second, then Argades, and one  
Aegicores, the name from my own aegis.  
At the appointed time, the children born  
Of them shall colonize the Cyclades,  
Possess the island cities and the coasts,  
And thus give strength to my own land of Athens.  
They shall live in the two broad plains of Asia  
And Europe, which lie on either side the straits,  
Becoming famous under this boy's name,  
Ionians. Moreover, you and Xuthus  
Are promised children. First Dorus, whose name  
Shall cause the Dorians to be hymned throughout  
The land of Pelops. Then Achaeus, king  
Of that sea coast near Rhion, who shall mark  
A people with his name.

1575

1580

1585

1590

Apollo then  
 Has managed all things well. He made your labor  
 Easy, so that your parents should not know; 1595  
 And when the child was born and you exposed  
 Him in his swaddling clothes, he ordered Hermes  
 To take him in his arms and bring him here,  
 And would not let him die, but reared him. 1600  
 But tell no one that Ion is your son,  
 And Xuthus will be happy in his belief,  
 While you may go away, Creusa, sure  
 Of your own blessings.—Now farewell;  
 You are delivered of your present evil,  
 The future holds good fortune. 1605

*Ion (ironically)*

O Athene, child of mighty Zeus, we have received  
 What you say on trust. And I believe myself Apollo's  
 And Creusa's son—though that was credible before.

*(To the end of the scene Ion stands in silence.)*

*Creusa*

Listen to my tribute. Though before I gave no praise,  
 Now I praise Apollo. For the son he had neglected 1610  
 Is restored to me; and now this oracle, these doors,  
 Wear a friendly look, though they were hateful in the past.  
 Joyfully I cling to them and bid farewell.

*Athene*

I approve this change, this praise of him. The gods perhaps  
 Move to action late, but in the end they show their strength. 1615

*Creusa*

Son, now let us go.

*Athene*

Yes, go, and I will follow you.

*Creusa*

Welcome guardian of our journey, one who loves the city.

*Athene (to Ion)*

Mount the ancient throne.

*(Ion is silent. There is an embarrassing pause.)*

*Creusa*

That is a worthy prize for me.

*(The actors slowly move off the stage in procession.  
 Athene disappears.)*

*Chorus*

*(To the temple.)*

O Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, now farewell.

*(To the audience.)*

He whose house is pressed by trouble should respect the gods, 1620  
 So preserving courage. For at last good men are honored,  
 Evil men by their own nature cannot ever prosper.

*(Exeunt.)*