

Divine and Human Action in Euripides' *Ion*

by

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A paradoxical feature of the plot of *Ion* is that the happy ending does not seem to be the product of a consistently successful action. Ion and Creusa are eventually reunited, a glorious future predicted for Ion and his descendants, and at the end of the play he departs impressively for Athens under the escort of Athena. This is essentially the result intended by Apollo, as outlined by Hermes in his prologue speech, and Athena says that he acted well in all respects (1595). But Apollo's plan repeatedly threatens to go wrong during the play: Ion is indeed, as planned, accepted by Xuthus as his son and accepts him as a father, but he shows no enthusiasm for the life intended for him in Athens and would rather stay in Delphi; Creusa finds out about the plan and tries to kill him; he then threatens to kill Creusa himself, and is only reconciled with her by the intervention of the Pythia; and finally, even when mother and son have been reunited, Ion refuses to believe that Apollo is his father until he is enlightened by Athena's appearance *ex machina*. The god of prophecy fails to foresee these obstacles to his own plan. Apollo's earlier behaviour can also be criticized: the anguish caused to Creusa by his rape of her is frequently expressed in the play, and even Ion is horrified that he might have acted in the way that she described.¹

There have been various approaches to this problem. Some scholars have seen the play as an attack on Apollo, and have argued that the difficulties which beset his plan show that he is inefficient as well as immoral. Gilbert Murray, for example, thought that 'the *Ion* is, of all the extant plays, the most definitely blasphemous against the traditional gods'.² A more modern version of this idea is proposed by H. Erbse, who argues that Euripides does not so much criticize the gods as show that they have lost their meaning: 'möglicherweise sind also die Götter des *Ion* nur

¹ The paradox of *Ion* is well described by D.J. Conacher, *TAPA* 90 (1959), 22–3 = *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967), 269–70. But the problem of the relationship between the patriotic theme and the criticism of Apollo, emphasized by Conacher, is just one aspect of the more general problem that the happy ending emerges from a rather confused and chaotic action. Conacher himself thinks that Euripides is mainly interested in the purely dramatic potential of the story, with only incidental interest in theological satire and national propaganda.

² G. Murray, *Euripides and his Age* (London, 1913), 120–1. Cf. R. Leimbach, *Euripides: Ion. Eine Interpretation* (diss. Frankfurt-am-Main, 1971).

Hilfsfiguren, die demonstrieren sollen, wie Himmlische nicht vorgestellt werden können'.³ The objection to such views is that they fail to do justice to the happy ending. Euripides uses a version of the story which is highly creditable to Athens, in which the paternity of Apollo is essential to the patriotic [end of p. 33] message. Any play in which Ion is regarded as an Athenian king must be patriotic, because Ion was only invented at a relatively late date as an eponym of the Ionians, and fitted into the Athenian king list to support Athens' claim to be the mother city of Ionia.⁴ It was by no means established that Apollo was the father of Ion,⁵ and the effect of this is that the contamination of autochthonous Athenian stock by the immigrant Xuthus is removed while the Athenian royal house gains a divine forefather.⁶ The Dorian and Achaean races are to be descendants of Creusa and Xuthus (1589–94), and thus of Athenian origin but without the divine parentage. The ending is not detachable: patriotic Athenian themes occur throughout the play, and not just at the end.⁷

Other scholars have thus argued that the grandeur of Apollo's plan is such that its flaws are relatively insignificant. Wassermann thinks that he should not be criticized for the rape of Creusa because he cannot be judged by human standards and 'a strong virility is just one aspect of his epiphany'.⁸ Spira and Burnett have argued that the complaints made against him are unjustified: it is not for siring a child but for neglecting it that he is criticized, and this criticism is shown to be mistaken. Burnett thinks that Apollo's guiding hand controls the action throughout, and that it is human passions which threaten to disrupt his plan: 'man-made tragedy is transformed into providential comedy'.⁹ His eye is on the grand plan rather than on the details, and human violence and unreason necessitate only minor revisions to the plan. For Spira, on the other hand, the purpose of the play is no more to praise the gods than to blame

³ H. Erbse, 'Der Gott von Delphi im *Ion* des Euripides', in *Teilnahme und Spiegelung: Festschrift für H. Rüdiger* (Berlin & New York, 1975), 53.

⁴ Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Euripides: Ion* (Berlin, 1926), 1–11; A.S. Owen, *Euripides: Ion* (Oxford, 1939), ix–xvii; P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981), 66–7.

⁵ Cf. G.B. Walsh, *Hermes* 106 (1978), 311 n. 45.

⁶ Cf. F.M. Wassermann, *TAPA* 71 (1940), 589: 'a union between a god and a human woman is an extraordinary event. For a noble family, a dynasty, or a nation this relationship represents the highest degree of nobility and a confirmation of national claims and prestige'.

⁷ Cf. H. Strohm, *WS* 89 (1976), 75–7.

⁸ Wassermann (above, n. 6), 590.

⁹ A.P. Burnett, *CP* 57 (1962), 101.

them: the emphasis is on the limitations to which human thought and action are subject.¹⁰ H. Strohm also argues that neither gods nor men should be blamed: the play dramatizes the problems which arise from the interaction of divine planning, concerned with the grandest mythical and historical processes, and the immediate reactions of human beings whose time-scale is much shorter.¹¹

Hermes describes Apollo's plan in the prologue: having raped Creusa (10–11) he ensured that her pregnancy was not noticed by her father (14–15), and then instructed Hermes to bring the infant Ion to Delphi (28–40). Apollo said that he would look after the rest (35–6): it is important that we know this, because Apollo is often accused during the play of having failed to look after his son. He begins by prompting the Pythia to [end of p. 34] relent her initial decision to throw the baby out of the temple precinct (47–8).¹² The next stage of Apollo's plan is to bring the childless Creusa and Xuthus to Delphi: Λοξίας δὲ τὴν τύχην / ἔς τοῦτ' ἐλαύνει, κοῦ λέληθεν, ὥς δοκεῖ (67–8).¹³ Apollo will then give an oracle to Xuthus that Ion is the latter's son,¹⁴ so that Ion will enjoy his privileges in Athens and Apollo's paternity will remain unknown. Later he will be made known to Creusa, and will eventually become famous as the founder of Asia (69–75).¹⁵

Apollo's plan has a good deal to commend it, and there does not seem to have been a preferable alternative. His reason for keeping his paternity secret, that Ion

¹⁰ A. Spira, *Untersuchungen zum Deus ex Machina bei Sophokles und Euripides* (Kallmünz, 1960), 77–9. Strohm (above, n. 7), 70 rightly objects that human ignorance in *Ion* is due to deliberate manipulation by Apollo, rather to intrinsic limitations.

¹¹ Strohm (above, n. 7), 68–79.

¹² Wilamowitz (above, n. 4), ad loc., denies that θεός (47) refers to Apollo. But Apollo is described merely as θεός at 42, 45, and 1614, and the Pythia later says that it was because of him that she reared Ion. Cf. 1347 for a similar piece of prompting by Apollo.

¹³ τύχη is the subject of λέληθεν (thus Paley, Verrall) although the change of subject is awkward [‘Loxias guides fortune to this point, and it has not escaped his notice, as seems to be the case’]. Apollo has not done anything about Ion for some time, and he will regularly be accused during the play of having neglected his responsibilities. It is thus worth saying that he has not in fact been forgetful. Spira (above, n. 10), 38–40, follows Badham in making Apollo the subject: ‘he is not undiscovered by me, as he thinks’. But this attributes a pointless remark to Hermes: it is neither surprising nor interesting that he knows what Apollo is doing, and there is no reason to think that Apollo wanted to escape his notice or thought that he was doing so.

¹⁴ The oracle will state unambiguously that Xuthus is Ion's father (71, 537, 1345), and Creusa has no justification for her later denial of this (1534–6).

¹⁵ With Kuiper's σοί (1567), necessary on linguistic grounds (οὔσαν would be needed with σήν), there is no contradiction between 72–3 and 1566–8.

should enjoy his privileges in Athens (72–3), is later defended by Creusa (1540–5), and even Athena thinks that Xuthus should not know that Ion is not his son (1601–3). It was acceptable for a man to discover that he had sired an illegitimate son (cf. 545–6) but not at all acceptable for a woman to give birth to one, and even if Creusa were to have claimed that Apollo was the father she would not have been believed: Ion is unwilling to believe that she really lay with Apollo, suspecting that she is making excuses for having done so with a mortal (338–41, 1518–27), and in Euripides generally there is a good deal of scepticism about divine births.¹⁶

But although Apollo's plan is the best available, it still leaves much to be desired. Ion does not want to go to Athens on the terms proposed by Xuthus and intended by Apollo, while Creusa will not tolerate him unless she knows him to be her son. Wassermann and Burnett argue that an entirely satisfactory divine plan is obstructed by human faults, with the happy ending only assured by the further operation of divine providence. It will be argued in the present article, by contrast, that the reactions of Ion and Creusa to Apollo's plan are understandable and even justifiable. Furthermore, their resistance leads to a happier ending than that originally planned by Apollo: Ion goes gladly to Athens with the blessing of both Creusa and Athena, rather than surreptitiously and reluctantly, unreconciled with Creusa and unaware of his destiny.¹⁷

The long scene between Ion and Creusa (237–428) confronts not only mother and [end of p. 35] son but also two characters with diametrically opposed views of Apollo. Ion's monody has expressed his unquestioning reverence for the god and the purity of his life at Delphi (82–183),¹⁸ while Creusa will deliver a monody,

¹⁶ Cf. *HF* 353–4, *Hel.* 17–21, *Ba.* 26–9, *IA* 793–800.

¹⁷ The prologue is thus misleading, in that Apollo might be expected to predict the future accurately. But his failure to do so is not explicitly criticized in the play. Cf. Barrett on *Hi.* 42, Dodds on *Ba.* 52, R. Hamilton, *AJP* 99 (1978), 279.

¹⁸ It has sometimes been found surprising that when Ion scares birds away from the temple he encourages them to go to some other holy place (164, 174–7): 'the ministrant of Apollo does not seem to mind if the shrines of other gods are defiled by the birds, nor even what happens in Apollo's own shrine in Delos' (Owen on 174–5). But Ion is in fact alluding wittily to the formulae of the ἀποομιπή (sending way) of a malevolent power: 'if he is to spare his intended victim, another (or others) must be shown him on which he can wreak his will ... by no means necessarily ... the person or property of an enemy of the man who makes the prayer' (Fraenkel on Aesch. Ag. 1573, comparing Theognis 351–4, Eur. *Hel.* 360–1). We thus have an Ion capable of sophisticated humour, rather than another Hippolytus, obsessed with his own cult to the exclusion of others.

complementary to that of Ion,¹⁹ expressing hatred and resentment.²⁰ There is a tension throughout the play between the august and oracular god at Delphi and the amorous and anthropomorphic god in Athens.²¹ Creusa accuses Apollo of being unjust *καὶ κεῖ καὶ νῦν* (‘both there and here’, 384), but it will emerge that Apollo is neither as fallible as he seemed in Athens nor as august as he seems in Delphi. After the exit of Creusa, Ion gives vent in a monologue (429–51) to the feelings aroused in him by her puzzling remarks about Apollo. Spira argues that Ion’s criticisms here are incorrect, and that they are based on his as yet incomplete understanding of what is happening.²² He argues that the emphasis in lines 437–9 is on the finite verbs *προδίδωσι* (‘betrays’, 438) and *ἀμελεῖ* (‘neglects’, 439) rather than on the participles *βία γαμῶν* (‘raping’, 437) and *ἐκτεκνούμενος* (‘begetting children’, 438): Ion is not worried about Apollo raping women and begetting children in secret, Spira thinks, but about his betraying the women and allowing the children to die. Similarly, Ion does not condemn Apollo for taking his pleasures, but for doing so *τῆς προμηθείας πάρος* (‘incautiously’, 448). And Ion is, Spira thinks, wrong to make these accusations: Apollo has not acted without foresight, and he has not abandoned his child. Burnett argues that Creusa too complains of desertion and non-support rather than of rape as such (306, 902–6, 953) and that, while she is wrong to blame Apollo, she has only herself to blame for exposing the child.²³

But the complaints made against Apollo cannot be narrowed down in this way to desertion and non-support to the exclusion of the actual rape. Ion is immediately horrified when Creusa says that her imaginary friend lay with Apollo (339), and wonders whether she is concealing the ‘wrongdoing’ of a mortal (341). He would hardly regard it as any less of an offence if he knew that Apollo was indeed responsible, and it is precisely the possibility of ‘wrongdoing’ by the gods that he considers in his monologue (449). Earlier in the monologue he regards rape as an offence for which a penalty would be appropriate (445), and no one could deny that

¹⁹ Cf. S.A. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London, 1971), 45–50.

²⁰ On Creusa’s monody, see W. Schadewaldt, *Monolog und Selbstgespräch* (Berlin, 1926), 161–2; J. LaRue, *TAPA* 94 (1963), 126–36; Burnett (above, n. 9), 95–6; W.-H. Friedrich, *Euripides und Diphilos* (Munich, 1953), 17–23; H. Strohm, *Euripides* (Munich, 1957), 161–3.

²¹ Cf. Spira (above, n. 10), 35–6.

²² Spira (above, n. 10), 54–8.

²³ Burnett (above, n. 9), 91. Since Creusa cannot continue to blame Apollo for neglecting the child when she knows that he has not done so, we must read Heath’s ἡμέλησα (‘I neglected’, 1610). Cf. F.M. Wassermann, *AJP* 62 (1941), 229.

that Apollo's treatment of Creusa comes into this category (cf. 10–11). [end of p. 36] It is thus implausible to argue that the complaint elsewhere is about betrayal and non-support to the exclusion of rape: both complaints are made, and while one is mistaken the other is evidently justified. The rape is described five times in the play (8–13, 338–58, 887–904, 941–65, 1474–1500), and its traumatic effect on Creusa is not minimized. If Ion were not complaining about the rape one would expect Euripides to have been careful to make this clear, especially as it was a standard criticism in such contexts that the gods enjoy irregular sex.²⁴

The problem to which Ion is addressing himself in the monologue, how the gods can enforce morality while being immoral themselves, also disturbed Creusa (253–4; cf. *IT* 380–91). It is not clear what attitude they would take to the rape when Apollo's plan is finally revealed, but the fact that he is absolved of the charges of desertion and non-support does not necessarily mean that he was all along 'moved by serious purposes and not by lust'.²⁵ There is no evidence that his motives were ever other than personal: originally lust, then the desire to benefit his son. It is because he is a god that this has the grandest consequences.

The false recognition of Ion and Xuthus (510–675) appears to be the successful accomplishment of the next stage of Apollo's plan. But the way in which the scene develops shows that the original plan is unsatisfactory: Ion is not very pleased to discover that Xuthus is his father, and he does not want to go to Athens on the proposed terms. The recognition begins comically, with Ion believing himself to be the victim of a pederastic assault and drawing his bow (524). When he is finally persuaded that Xuthus is his father his greeting is curt in the extreme (561–2), and soon gives way to an impassioned wish to find his mother (563–5; cf. 668–75): only this will be a satisfactory conclusion to the play.²⁶ The ensuing choral comment (566–8) reminds us that this recognition leaves Creusa childless and the House of Erechtheus without an heir.

Xuthus will continue to believe that Ion is his son (1601–2), and it is necessary to Apollo's plan that he should do so. Other reasons have been suggested why it is

²⁴ Cf. *HF* 1341, Xenophanes fr. 11–12, Plato, *Resp.* 377e–378e.

²⁵ A.P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), 128, criticized by B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), 342 n. 18.

²⁶ The real recognition of Ion and Creusa will also be preceded by fears of violence (cf. *Hel.* 546–52, *El.* 215–25), and 1406–7 echoes 523. Cf. E.-R. Schwinge, *Die Verwendung der Stichomythie in den Dramen des Euripides* (Heidelberg, 1968), 248–51; O. Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London, 1978), 137–8.

right that Xuthus should be left in the dark: Wassermann and Burnett think that he is relatively unimportant because he is an alien;²⁷ Friedrich and Spira argue that it is appropriate to his simple and unquestioning character that he should be left in happy ignorance,²⁸ Strohm that he deserves it because he himself planned to deceive Creusa.²⁹ Owen writes: ‘nor can we believe that it would be long before he knew the unpleasant truth about Ion, for the slaves who had disclosed his secret to Creusa when threatened with [end of p. 37] death would not be likely to be more reticent when they found him treating his stepson as though he were really his own son’.³⁰ But Athena’s *ex machina* instruction to Creusa (1601–2) is surely conclusive, whatever the actual improbability of Xuthus remaining ignorant.

Xuthus now tells Ion to accompany him to Athens (569–81), but Ion responds with a worried silence (582–4) followed by a speech in which he asks to be allowed to stay where he is (585–647). The Athenians, he says, are proud of their autochthony while he has the double disadvantage of being both illegitimate and a foreigner (589–94). He then considers the difficulties of a political career: the masses would envy him, the intelligent private citizens despise him for getting involved in politics at all, and the powerful would resent his interference (595–606).³¹ This passage is not very logical: Ion can expect to be king of Athens, not merely to have the opportunity to compete in Athenian politics, and it is tyranny that he rejects later in his speech (621–32).³² There would be nothing to prevent Ion from living a private life in Athens, like those whose contempt he fears (598–9), if an ordinary political career were the alternative.³³ But strict logic is not applicable to the tragedians’ picture of the constitution of early Athens: it is regularly a mixture of the democracy of their own time and the monarchy of myth.³⁴ Ion is being offered public prominence and success: in reality this would have meant tyranny but Euripides, unwilling to have an

²⁷ Wassermann (above, n. 6), 597–8; Burnett (above, n. 9), 91–2. Cf. C. Wolff, *HSCP* 69 (1965), 189.

²⁸ Friedrich (above, n. 20), 10–13; Spira (above, n. 10), 76.

²⁹ Strohm (above, n. 20), 135–6. Cf. Burnett (above, n. 9), 92; Wolff (above, n. 27), 189.

³⁰ Owen (above, n. 4), xxx.

³¹ Ion’s account of Athenian democracy is very different from that of Theseus (*Supp.* 433–43). For historical parallels to Ion’s complaints about public life in Athens, see Wolff (above, n. 27), 191 n. 15.

³² If Diggle’s deletion of 578–81 is accepted, Xuthus has not offered Ion tyranny yet. But he does so at 659–60, and Ion shows later (1296) that this is what he expects.

³³ Cf. D. Kovacs, *TAPA* 109 (1979), 116–24, who deletes 595–606. But the linguistic difficulties which he mentions are only incurable in 602 and do not justify deletion of the whole passage.

³⁴ Cf. Collard on *Supp.* 352–3; P.E. Easterling, ‘Anachronism in Greek tragedy’, *JHS* 105 (1985), 1–10.

unequivocally monarchical Athens, also considers the possibility of political prominence in a democracy. The important contrast between public life in Athens and private life in Delphi would be muddled if the possibility of non-political life in Athens were also to be considered.

Ion goes on to argue that his private life would also be intolerable: Creusa will reasonably resent his presence when she discovers that she alone is now childless, having previously shared this condition with Xuthus. Xuthus himself will face an impossible choice: by siding with Creusa he would betray Ion, but if he supports Ion he will throw his own household into confusion. Furthermore, Ion pities Creusa for her childlessness (607–20). He then takes up the idea of the contrast between appearance and reality with which he began his speech, and argues that no tyrant can be happy (621–32).³⁵ It would be a life of fear, evil friends, and tedious duties for which wealth will be no compensation. Ion concludes by describing his happy and peaceful life in Delphi, and asking to be allowed to stay there (633–47). [end of p. 38]

Ion's objections show that Apollo's original plan is unsatisfactory, because he is unhappy about going to Athens on the terms proposed by Xuthus and gives good reasons for not wanting to do so. But this does not mean that the ending of the play is not really happy. Ion's public life appears in a quite different light when it is revealed that he is of royal Athenian birth, and will go to Athens as a legitimate king with the blessing of Athena. 'He has the right to rule my land' (1574), she says, and Ion is quite satisfied with that (1618).³⁶ A king who has such a patron need not fear popular resentment, still less assassination attempts. Furthermore, Athena will reveal the positive side of Ion's kingship: the emphasis will no longer be on the disadvantages of public prominence, but on the glory that he will gain. The domestic problems that he fears will be solved when Creusa knows that he is her son, as indeed will his longing to find his mother (563–5, 668–75).

A sentimental view of Ion's life in Delphi has sometimes been taken, for example by Norwood: 'no celestial consolations or Athenian throne can compensate

³⁵ For the topos of the rejection of tyranny (cf. *Hipp.* 1013–20, *Soph. OT* 583–602), see D.C. Young, *Three Odes of Pindar* (Mnem. Supp. 9; Leiden, 1968), 9–19. Kovacs (above, n. 33) wants to delete 621–32, but his objections are not sufficient. Read ψόγους (630), and with πόνους (631) cf. *Soph. OT* 591.

³⁶ Cf. D.J. Mastronarde, *CSCA* 8 (1975), 175 n. 49.

the youth for the loss of what filled his heart only this morning'.³⁷ There can be no doubt that he is happy in his tasks (128–35, 151–3) but it is made equally clear that he is a slave and does the tasks of a slave: δοῦλος, δουλεύειν (132, 182, 309, 327, 556), θεραπεύω (111, 183), λατρεύω (124, 129, 152), πόνος, μόχθος (102, 103, 128, 131, 134, 135, 144, 181). Walsh goes too far in saying 'although he loves serving the god he hates his servile status (130 ff., 181 ff.), and longs for nothing so much as to discover himself free of it'.³⁸ But Ion's prayer at 151–3 does suggest the beginnings of a wish to escape slavery,³⁹ at 556 he seems glad that his parents were not slaves, and he is extremely anxious at 1382–3 lest his mother should turn out to be a slave. He prefers his present life to that offered by Xuthus, but the whole situation changes when he discovers that he is the son of Creusa. Similarly, he has been happy to think of Apollo as a substitute father (109–11, 136–40, 183) and of the Pythia as a substitute mother (321), so that he is not entirely pleased to have Xuthus as a father, but he will eventually discover that Apollo is really his father, and his delight at being reunited with Creusa cannot be doubted.

This speech does not, therefore, show that the ending of the play is in some way unhappy because Ion does not want to go to Athens at all, but that there are flaws in Apollo's original plan. The way in which the action develops brings about a conclusion that satisfies everyone, and the surreptitious introduction of Ion into the royal house of Athens is replaced by a ceremonious exit at the end of the play under the escort of Athena. But for the moment Ion complies with Xuthus' proposal: it would be dramatically pointless for his objections to be pressed any further.⁴⁰ [end of p. 39]

The situation is not only unsatisfactory to Ion but also, as he had feared, to Creusa when Xuthus' plot is revealed by the chorus.⁴¹ The chorus begins by telling

³⁷ G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London, 1920), 238. Cf. J.O. de G. Hanson, *Museum Africum* 4 (1975), 27–42; Wolff (above, n. 27), 188.

³⁸ Walsh (above, n. 5), 301.

³⁹ Thus Wilamowitz (above, n. 4), ad loc.

⁴⁰ Kovacs (above, n. 33) supports his deletion of 595–606 and 621–32 by arguing that Xuthus makes no effort to answer Ion's objections to his proposed political status (650–67). But a prolongation of this argument would be pointless, since Ion's problems will be solved in a hitherto unexpected way. The point of the scene is to show Ion's dissatisfaction with Xuthus' proposal: his acquiescence (668) enables the scene to come to an end, but hardly shows that Ion is completely satisfied.

⁴¹ The convention that choruses do not give away plots is observed elsewhere in tragedy. Cf. Horace, *AP* 200; Barrett on *Hipp.* 710–12; Hamilton (above, n. 17), 280–1; Taplin (above, n. 26), 118.

her that she will never have a child (761–2). Burnett writes: ‘nothing that they have overheard has given them the slightest grounds for such a prophecy’,⁴² but it is reasonable for them to believe that if Apollo gives a child to Xuthus while saying nothing about one for Creusa then she will not actually have one. The old man then puts his own construction on what has happened (808–31, 836–43): after he had discovered that Creusa was childless Xuthus got a child by another woman, gave it to a Delphian to bring up, and when he calculated that the child had grown up persuaded Creusa to come to Delphi in search of children. This account of events resembles Verrall’s rationalistic account of what actually happened, but the whole point is that the play is anti-rationalistic: the old man fails to understand what has happened precisely because he tries to explain it without taking account of the part played by Apollo. He assumes that the oracle is truthful (825), but Apollo has lied; he realises that it is no accident that they have come to the very place where Ion is living, but he is not to know that the plan is not Xuthus’ but Apollo’s; and he is actually correct that Xuthus is plotting to introduce a son of his own into the royal house of Athens (659–60).⁴³ Xuthus has no right to do this, and his position is made all the weaker by his being a foreigner: as the only surviving child of Erechtheus, Creusa is an *epikleros* and her inheritance is thus held in trust for her children.⁴⁴ The emphasis placed on the dynastic situation helps to explain Creusa’s reaction,⁴⁵ and our sympathy for her is increased by the anguish which she expresses most vividly in her monody (859–922).

The monody is followed by a stichomythia (934–1028), the first part of which is an iambic recapitulation of the monody (934–69), while the remainder is devoted to the plot (970–1028). Solmsen points out that in other plays of this type the plot comes after the recognition, while in *Ion* it is subordinated to it,⁴⁶ and that it is characteristic of such plots to be instigated by aporetic questions.⁴⁷ Creusa rejects the old man’s suggestions that she burn down Apollo’s temple or kill Xuthus, and decides to kill Ion

⁴² Burnett (above, n. 25), 112.

⁴³ ‘We are being thrown out’ (811) is a pardonable exaggeration. Walsh (above, n. 5), 304, unfairly describes the old man’s theory as ‘a paranoid fantasy’.

⁴⁴ Cf. Burnett (above, n. 25), 106 n. 6; W.K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (London, 1968), 139–46; A.R.W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens* (Oxford, 1968), i. 132–8.

⁴⁵ Burnett (above, n. 25), 104, argues that because Creusa acts in Delphi ‘the Queen of Athens is no longer a simple defender of her house’. But this depends on a highly speculative contrast with Sophocles’ *Creusa*.

⁴⁶ F. Solmsen, *Hermes* 69 (1934), 400–1.

⁴⁷ Solmsen (above, n. 46), 399. Cf. *El.* 598–600, *IT* 1017–19, *Hel.* 1032–4.

(979). She then rejects an open attack by her servants (983), and goes on to suggest the use of [end of p. 40] poison (987–1017); the old man rejects the idea that they should poison Ion in Athens, and they finally decide to kill him in Delphi.

Creusa's description of the poison is elaborate and interesting: she begins by reminding the old man of Ge giving birth to the Gorgon to help the Giants in the Gigantomachy, and of how Athena then killed it and subsequently wore its skin (the aegis). She goes on to mention two drops of the Gorgon's blood which Athena gave to Erichthonius, one a deadly poison and the other a cure; Erichthonius bequeathed these to Erechtheus, and Erechtheus to Creusa, and it is with this poison that she proposes to kill Ion. Creusa is closely associated with the poison in that she wears it continually on her wrist and, after the discovery of the plot, Ion calls her a snake and says that she is no less deadly than the poison with which she tried to kill him (1261–5). Frequent reference is made in the play to the autochthony of the Athenians (e.g. 29, 589, 737), and to the chthonic origins of the Athenian royal family and its consequent association with snakes.⁴⁸ Erichthonius was born from the earth (20–1, 267–9) and Erechtheus swallowed up into it (281–2);⁴⁹ the partly snake-like Cecrops is represented on Ion's tent (1163–4); Athena uses snakes to guard Erichthonius (21–3), and snake images have subsequently been associated with children of the royal house (24–6, 1427–9). Creusa was raped by Apollo in a cave (17, 288, 892, 936–41), and says that she gave birth to Ion there (949),⁵⁰ and exposed him in the same cave (17, 958, 1398–1401, 1494–6). Ion is thus both conceived and born underground, and is rescued from there to be taken to Delphi.

This association of the Athenian royal family with the earth can be related to the chorus' description in the parodos of the decoration of the outside of the temple. The chorus describes three scenes: Heracles and Iolaus fighting the Hydra (190–200), Bellerophon and the Chimaera (201–4), and a Gigantomachy (205–18).⁵¹ Mastronarde

⁴⁸ Ion asks 'Was I born from the earth?' (542), to which Xuthus, unaware of the history of his wife's family, replies 'The ground does not give birth to children'. Wolff (above, n. 27), 183, remarks that Xuthus is the character in the play 'farthest from the mythical world'. Mastronarde (above, n. 36), 172 n. 8, discusses the chthonic associations of snakes.

⁴⁹ Cf. Mastronarde (above, n. 36), 164–70; V.J. Rosivach, *CQ* n.s. 27 (1977), 288–9. Erechtheus is said to be earthborn at Homer, *Iliad* 2.548, Herodotus 8.55.

⁵⁰ Hermes says that Creusa gave birth at home (16), but Euripides exploits the chthonic associations of the cave in the later passage.

⁵¹ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 284 n. 1, argues that the Gigantomachy is a single scene. On the patriotic connotations of Athena fighting the Giants, see T.C.W. Stinton, *JHS* 97 (1977), 144.

and Rosivach demonstrate that these scenes show earth-born and / or snake-like monsters being conquered by gods and by heroes descended from gods.⁵²

Mastronarde believes that ‘the very expression of their humanity brings men closest to disaster’,⁵³ but is inclined to value human rebelliousness for itself: ‘the very condition of being human requires the presence of those dangerous autochthonous forces which make men ... different from and more interesting than the gods’.⁵⁴ Rosivach sees in the temple decoration ‘a pattern of [end of p. 41] images which underlies the play’s central event, the triumph of Apollo over the opposition of Creusa’.⁵⁵ Rosivach thinks that Creusa is associated with earth-born theomachy when she resists Apollo’s advances in the cave,⁵⁶ obstructs his plan by exposing the child, and most of all when she tries to murder Ion in the temple precinct of Delphi itself.⁵⁷

It is undeniably true that the imagery of the parodos should be related to the action of the play. But this does not show that the play must show the triumph of gods over earth-born theomachy, as in the parodos. Rather, the audience is alerted to the possibilities of conflict between earthborns and Olympians, without being told in advance what will happen in this particular instance. Difficulties certainly arise, but the result should be seen in terms of co-operation, embodied in the child Ion, rather than in terms of victory and defeat. In view of the pride taken by the Athenians in their autochthony, it would be surprising if Euripides, in this patriotic play, were to treat chthonic associations as being intrinsically bad. Creusa herself is not obviously a *theomachos*: there was nothing wrong with a mortal woman resisting being raped by a god,⁵⁸ Creusa did not expose Ion as an act of opposition to Apollo, of whose plan she could know nothing,⁵⁹ and she rejects out of hand the old man’s suggestion that they burn down the temple (974–5). It is in any case the confusion caused by Apollo’s own plan that incites her attempt on Ion’s life.

⁵² Mastronarde (above, n. 36), 166–7; Rosivach (above, n. 49), 285–8.

⁵³ Mastronarde (above, n. 36), 164.

⁵⁴ Mastronarde (above, n. 36), 171.

⁵⁵ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 285.

⁵⁶ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 291.

⁵⁷ G. Müller, *Hermes* 103 (1975), 25–44 discusses the imagery in the parodos, but he is especially perceptive in his treatment of the decoration of Ion’s tent, described in the messenger speech (1141–65).

⁵⁸ Cassandra’s crime was to accept the gift of prophecy and then to refuse Apollo (Aesch. *Ag.* 1208).

⁵⁹ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 291, compares her to the Aglaurides (cf. 270–4), but they disobeyed an explicit order by Athena, whereas Creusa has had no instructions from Apollo.

Nor is it obviously Apollo who defeats Creusa's murder attempt. Rosivach writes: 'the earthborn is once again defeated by the Olympian as Apollo again intervenes, this time through the birds which live in his temple'.⁶⁰ Burnett, similarly, thinks that Apollo sent the bird to save Ion's life: 'in this redeeming bird the spectator recognizes the agent of Apollo'.⁶¹ Knox criticizes this view of the matter: 'his life was saved not by the dove but by the ill-omened word which prompted him to pour the poisoned wine on the ground (or by the piety which inspired that action). The dove's function is to reveal the murder plot'.⁶²

In fact, Euripides seems careful to leave it unclear where the responsibility for Ion's rescue lies. The servant begins his account of the incident by saying that Apollo exposed the murder plot so as to avoid being polluted (1118), but he does not specify what Apollo actually did: the pollution would have been caused by Ion's death, so the servant must believe that Apollo intervened before the appearance of the bird. But he has no special authority, and his account of Apollo's motives is wrong: if Apollo saved Ion at all it was not merely to avoid pollution. The servant's actual account of the incident makes no [end of p. 42] mention of any intervention by Apollo,⁶³ and it is emphasized that Ion's piety in pouring away the wine contributed to his escape (1190). Ion himself attributes his escape to chance (τύχη, 1514–15).⁶⁴ Athena says that Apollo saved Ion (1564–5): this could be taken as a revelation of divine providence hitherto obscure to the eyes of men, or as an implausible attempt by Athena to give maximum credit to Apollo.⁶⁵ More probably, the divine and human

⁶⁰ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 291–2.

⁶¹ Burnett (above, n. 25), 118.

⁶² *CP* 67 (1972), 275 n. 15 = *Word and Action* (Baltimore, 1979), 342 n. 15.

⁶³ Burnett (above, n. 9), 96–7, writes: 'Ion's act of piety brought a strange hush, and into that unnatural quiet Loxias (1197) sent the dove whose death would cheat Creusa's plot'. Burnett (above, n. 25), 117, compares the silence at 1194 to mysterious silences 'marking the intervention of the supernatural' at *Bacch.* 1084–5 and *Soph. OC* 1623. But there is nothing mysterious about *Ion* 1194: everyone is quiet so that the ritual can proceed without any more ill-omened words. The silence at *Soph. OC* 1623 is caused unmysteriously by Oedipus and his daughters stopping their laments. The silence at *Bacch.* 1084–5, on the other hand, is emphatically marked as being mysterious.

⁶⁴ Some scholars think that Ion is right: Owen (above, n. 4), on 1514; Solmsen (above, n. 46), 400; M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie* (2nd ed., Göttingen, 1954), 402–4. They are criticized by Burnett (above, n. 9), 103 n. 33.

⁶⁵ When she appears as *deus ex machina* in *Hippolytus*, Artemis attributes responsibility to Aphrodite which was not apparent from the action itself: she is prepared to forgive Theseus because of the influence of Aphrodite (1326–8, 1406, 1433–4), while the action suggests that, far from having his

explanations should be seen as complementary, neither excluding the other. Apollo's intervention, if any, has been discreet, and the episode bears little resemblance to the scenes of frustrated theomachy described in the parodos.

Similar problems arise when it looks as though Ion might kill Creusa. The messenger describes how the Delphians condemned her to death (1111–12, 1222–6), and soon after the messenger speech she appears in desperate flight. The chorus advises her to take refuge at an altar (1255–60), a proposal at which Creusa initially demurs because she knows that she has been justly condemned (1256), but with which she eventually complies.⁶⁶ Ion is as determined to kill her as the other Delphians (1266–8), but he is stopped in his tracks by her taking refuge at the altar. He orders her to leave the altar (1306), but his threats (1310) and complaints (1312–19) are cut short by the arrival of the Pythia. Creusa is saved, but it is not clear whether the main reason for this was the opportune intervention of the Pythia or Ion's piety in not violating Creusa's sanctuary. The Pythia begins 'Stop, my child!' (1320), recalling other passages in Euripides where violent deeds are prevented by a new arrival (e.g. *Hel.* 1642, *Andr.* 550), and Athena says that Apollo saved Creusa (1564–5) which he could only have done by causing the Pythia to arrive at the crucial moment.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Ion's actual words suggest that he will not violate Creusa's sanctuary: by saying that wrongdoers should not be allowed to take refuge at altars Ion implies that they are safe if they do take refuge there [end of p. 43] (1312–19).⁶⁸ Ion continues to assert that he would be right to kill Creusa (1328, 1334), but this does not imply that he would do so at an altar; the Pythia's rebuke 'you are wrong to be savage' (1327) is for wanting to kill Creusa at all, not necessarily for intended impiety.⁶⁹ The passage is beautifully calculated to leave it open where responsibility lies: Ion is seen to be

judgement affected by Aphrodite, Theseus' readiness to believe Phaedra's accusation was due to his long-standing suspicion of Hippolytus' way of life.

⁶⁶ D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity* (Berkeley, 1979), 110–12, argues convincingly that Creusa's flight to the altar takes place during Ion's speech (1261–81): he threatens her while she is still not near the altar (1261–74), warns her off the altar when he sees her approaching it (1275–8), and finally protests at her having reached it (1279–81). But there are serious linguistic difficulties in 1275–8, and they are deleted by J. Diggle, *PCPS* n.s. 20 (1974), 28.

⁶⁷ Cf. Burnett (above, n. 9), 119–20.

⁶⁸ Cf. Bond on *Hyps.* 60.22: 'Creusa is not in immediate danger; the Pythia actually interrupts a rhetorical speech of Ion about the sanctity of altars'.

⁶⁹ Rosivach (above, n. 49), 292, writes: 'if he is left on his own for much longer, his desire for vengeance will certainly overcome his religious scruple'. But Euripides eliminates precisely such hypotheses by having the Pythia arrive when she does.

pious, while Athena can, not implausibly, claim credit for Apollo. Human and divine interact, and emphasis should not be laid on one to the exclusion of the other.

Creusa reveals that Apollo is Ion's father (1470–87), but Ion is unwilling to believe this, partly because he thinks that Creusa may be concealing an illicit liaison with a mortal (1520–7) and partly because of Apollo's oracle that Xuthus is his father (1532–3). He is unconvinced by her correct interpretation of Apollo's motives (1539–45), and proposes to ask Apollo who his father really is (1546–8). His continued doubt serves as a device to introduce the *deus ex machina*.⁷⁰

Athena speaks of herself as a mere messenger from Apollo (1556, 1559), but she is manifestly much more than that and fulfils a function that Apollo himself could not have done.⁷¹ His plan has not been completely successful, and the present state of affairs has come about through an interaction of his plan with the reactions of Ion and Creusa. The good side of the earth-descended characters is symbolized by the drop of the Gorgon's blood which 'wards off disease and nourishes life' (1013). Burnett thinks that this is 'a part of herself that Creusa will not use, and her human deficiency in mercy has to be made up for by a merciful god'.⁷² But rather, as Taplin says, this panacea is 'a transparent emblem of the unforeseen happy-ending'.⁷³ and it is an ending to which Ion and Creusa have contributed. It was the deficiencies of Apollo's plan that prompted their violent reactions, but the result is better than it would have been if Apollo's plan had worked out as he had intended.

Because the ending is the result of an interaction between the plan of the Olympian Apollo and the reactions of the earth-descended Ion and Creusa, it is appropriate that [end of p. 44] Athena should preside over it. She is an Olympian, but is also patron goddess of the autochthonous Athenians. She collaborated in the birth

⁷⁰ Thus Owen (above, n. 4), on 1549; Friedrich (above, n. 20), 25; Burnett (above, n. 9), 92; Spira (above, n. 10), 72 n. 141). Hamilton (above, n. 17), 282–3, thinks that Ion's continuing doubt has deeper significance: he is seen to move from doubt to certainty in the same way as Creusa.

⁷¹ Athena says that Apollo has not come himself *μη τῶν παρόντων ἐμψυς ἐς μέσον μόλη* (1558), which means that he wanted to avoid reproaches being aired among those present for what he did in the past. *ἐς μέσον* does not mean 'published abroad' (Owen), nor would a personal appearance by Apollo have led to any greater publicity than an appearance by Athena on his behalf. Burnett (above, n. 9), 94, suggests that Apollo wants to save Ion and Creusa from blasphemy like that of Neoptolemus (cf. *Andr.* 49–55): this idea is perhaps included in what Athena says, but so too is the idea that Apollo himself would be embarrassed by the reproaches.

⁷² Burnett (above, n. 25), 116.

⁷³ Taplin (above, n. 26), 97.

of Erichthonius from the earth, and arranged for him to be brought up safely (267–72; cf. 21–4). She gave him the drops of the Gorgon’s blood (1001) which came into Creusa’s possession, and herself wears the Gorgon’s skin. She can destroy earthborn monsters when they get out of hand (209–11, 991), but can also develop the earthborns’ potential for good. Just as Artemis was both huntress and protector of wild animals, so Athena is both Gorgon-slayer and patron of the autochthonous Athenians, and only she can instal Ion as king of Athens. The pattern is similar to that in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, where Athena mediates between Apollo and the Erinyes: she can develop their beneficent and life-giving powers, whereas Apollo had nearly unleashed their destructiveness.⁷⁴ The ending of the play, in which Ion goes ceremoniously to Athens under the escort of Athena, reunited with Creusa, and aware of his glorious destiny, is evidently better than what would have happened if Apollo’s plan had gone smoothly and Ion had gone to Athens unwillingly and surreptitiously. The earthborn characters force change in Apollo’s original plan, and the happy ending is the product of both divine and human action, just as Ion himself is the son of the earth-descended Creusa and the Olympian Apollo.

⁷⁴ The Erinyes are daughters of Night at Aesch. *Eum.* 791–2 (= 821–2), 844, but often of Earth elsewhere (e.g. Hesiod, *Th.* 185).