Euripides, Ion

ION

(IΩN)

of Euripides

Translated by

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ION

CAST OF CHARACTERS:
Hermes, god of messages and transitions
Ion, temple attendant
Creusa (Kreousa), daughter of Erechtheus (an early king of Athens)
Xuthus (Xouthos), husband of Creusa
Old Man (Presbutēs), former care giver of Erechtheus
Male Servant of Creusa (Therapōn), gives the messenger speech
Pythia, Delphic Prophetess (Prophētis)
Athena, patron god of Athens, daughter of Zeus; also called Pallas
Chorus of women, attendants (slaves) of Creusa
Chorus Leader: speaks for the group in the episodes (dialogue portions).

SETTING: The temple precinct at Delphi. The stage building (skēnē) is the temple of Apollo from which the Pythia, sitting on a three-footed seat (tripod) over a chasm that exuded fumes that sent her into a trance, uttered prophecies. One parodos (side entrance) leads downhill and toward the road to Athens (parodos A); the other uphill and to other areas of the sacred precinct (parodos B). An altar is needed in the closing sequence and could be used in other scenes. We do not know to what extent the scene building was decorated in the original performance.

DATE OF FIRST PRODUCTION: Ion cannot be precisely dated, but is close to Trojan Women (415): that is, some time in the teens of the fifth century (between 410–420 BCE); suggested dates 415 (Diggle), 413 (Lee).

Hypothesis

A plot summary or blurb (called hypothesis in Greek) precedes the text of Ion in the two surviving manuscripts on which the modern printed texts are based. The information in the narrative part is all found in Hermes’ monologue. A cast of characters and identification of the setting are added.

Apollo raped Creusa, daughter of Erechtheus, in Athens and made her pregnant. She exposed the child that was born under the acropolis, making this same place a witness to the crime and the birthing. Then Hermes lifted up the infant and took him to Delphi, where the prophetess found him and brought him up.

Creusa was married to Xuthus: after assisting the Athenians in battle, he received as a reward the kingship and marriage to the woman in question. No other child was born to him. On the other hand the people of Delphi made the boy who was brought up by the prophetess a temple-keeper. In this way, without
being aware of it, he served his father.


The setting of the drama is Delphi.

There are a few marginal notes in the manuscripts of Ion but not full scholia. It is not one of the plays deliberately preserved in the canon, but belongs to a group of plays that survive in two manuscripts in an incomplete collection of the plays in alphabetical order, those whose titles start with the letters epsilon, eta, iota, and kappa (which includes Helen, Electra, Hercules, Heracleidae, Suppliants [Hiketides], Ion, both Iphigenias, and Cyclops [Kuklops]).

I have used the following texts, commentaries, and notes:
A. S. Owen, Ion, with commentary (Oxford 1939, 1963)
Gilbert Murray, Euripidis Fabulae, vol 2 (Oxford, 1913)
John Gibert, Text with Commentary (Cambridge, 2019). Stellar metrical analysis and thorough scholarly introduction; full up-to-date bibliography.

Diane Arnson Svarlien’s translation with introduction and notes by Matthew Wright (Hackett: Indianapolis/Cambridge 2016), is especially valuable for its easy to read introduction to the metrics and for following the Greek metrical schemes in the translation as well as the easy to read contemporary language.

Laura Swift’s Euripides: Ion in the Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy (Duckworth: London, 2008) is a solid and accessible introduction to the play for students, laymen, and scholars in other fields, with insights of interest to professional classicists.
The Three Actors

In the original productions, each play used a chorus of fifteen men, no more than three actors with speaking roles, and extras to work as attendants, etc. The three actors were masked and changed masks and costumes to perform more than one role.

Possible divisions of roles among the three actors

1. Protagonist (First Actor): Ion
2. Deuteragonist (Second Actor): Hermes, Creusa
3. Tritagonist (Third Actor) Xuthus, Pythia, Athena

The Old Man and the Servant (Messenger) could be played by either 1 or 3

1. Protagonist: Hermes, Creusa
2. Deuteragonist: Ion
3. Tritagonist: Xuthus, Pythia, Athena

The Old Man and the Servant (Messenger) could be played by either 2 or 3

My preference:

1. Protagonist (First Actor): Ion, Servant (Messenger)
2. Deuteragonist (Second Actor): Hermes, Creusa
3. Tritagonist (Third Actor) Xuthus, Old Man, Pythia, Athena

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Euripides, Ion

Prologue (1–183)
Hermes; Ion

1 Hermes’ monologue (1-81)

Enter Hermes.

Hermes

Atlas, who on his bronze\(^2\) back wearily carries
the weight of the sky, the gods’ ancient home,
fathered Maia by a goddess; she gave me birth
by Zeus on high: I am Hermes, servant of gods.
I have come to this land of Delphi, where
Phoebus,\(^3\) sitting at earth’s navel,\(^4\) intones
oracles to mortals: what is and what will be.
For a city, not unknown among the Greeks
named for Pallas of the golden lance,\(^5\) is where
Phoebus by force joined in a union with
Erechtheus’ daughter, Creusa, under the rocky north face
of Pallas’ land, the Acropolis of the Athenians:
the kings of the Attic land call it the Long Rocks.\(^6\)
Unknown to her father she carried to term the
swelling in her belly—that’s what the god wanted.
When her time came Creusa gave birth to her son

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1 I imagine Hermes entering on foot from the upper reaches of Delphi (along parodos B). He delivers his monologue in front of the temple (stage building or skênē). At the end of his speech the character conceals himself behind a (real or imagined) bay tree near the temple; the actor would make an exit, perhaps around to the back of the skênē.

2\(^1\): Bronze back indicates strength and endurance, but it is hard not to think as well of sculptural renderings of Atlas. By naming Maia (3) Hermes identifies himself, just as “son of Leto” identifies Apollo. Zeus has too many sons.

3\(^6\): Phoebus, “the shining one,” another name for Apollo.

4\(^6\): Earth’s navel, Delphi was believed to be the center of the earth; the navel (an outie) was represented by a sculpture inside the temple. A later copy that was outside survives and is now in the Delphi Archaeological Museum.

5\(^9\): Golden lance, an anachronistic reference to Pheidias’ statue of Athena on the acropolis in Athens. Pallas is another name for Athena.

6\(^{13}\): Long Rocks, in Greek just “Longs”.
in the palace and brought the infant to the same cave where she had been raped by the god and exposed him there to die, in a covered round wicker basket, keeping the ancestral custom of the earthborn Erichthonius, beside whom the daughter of Zeus had placed two snakes as protective guards of his life and given him to the daughters of Aglaurus to keep safe. Ever since then for the descendants of Erechtheus the custom is to rear children with gold-studded snakes. And so the girl put what adornments she had with her child when she left him to die. Phoebus, my brother, asked me to do this for him:

“My brother, go to the people of glorious Athens, born of the earth—you are familiar with the goddess’ city—and take the newborn baby from the hollow rock with his hamper and whatever clothes he is wrapped in and carry him to my oracle in Delphi. And lay him right in front of the entrance to my temple. The rest, —he is my own son, just so you know—I will take care of.” As a favor to Loxias, my brother, the riddler, I took the woven basket, carried it away and placed the baby on the top step of the temple. I opened the hinged lid of the contraption so the baby could be seen.

At the time of the returning cycle of the sun’s chariot, the prophetess entered the god’s oracle: when she caught sight of the tiny baby, she was surprised that a daughter of Delphi had dared to cast out her secret spawn at the god’s house and was ready to remove him from the sacred space.

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721: Erichthonius, early king of Athens, born from the earth, grandfather or great-grandfather of Creusa. In early legends Erichthonius and Erechtheus are not distinguished from each other (see Homer, Iliad 2. 547). Erichthonius had a son Pandion who became king of Athens, but Pandion’s name is absent from Ion. According to Apollodorus, Erichthonius was born from the sperm of Hephaestus when he tried to rape Athena. She wiped it to the Earth who then gave birth to Erichthonius. Athena wanted his birth kept secret.

823: Aglaurus, wife of Cecrops (Kekrops), earthborn first king of Athens. Their daughters, Herse, Pandrosus, and Aglaurus were put in charge of the baby Erichthonius.

936: Apollo is called Loxias (23 times in Ion), often in his prophetic mode. Loxias, perhaps < loxos, “oblique,” “slanting” > “of twisted speech;” “who speaks two ways at once” (Di Piero, Oxford, 1996). Apollo is more than one thing: he is “radiant” as the name Phoebus implies and “devious” in his role as Loxias, seducer and giver of questionable oracles (see Lee ad 36, p 164).
Pity overcame that cruel impulse and the god worked for his child, so he wouldn’t be put out of the temple. She picked him up and fed him. She did not know Phoebus was his father, hadn’t a clue who his mother was. And the boy knows nothing of his parentage. As a child he played, not straying far from the altars that sustained him. But when he blossomed into young manhood, the Delphians made him keeper of the god’s gold and trusted steward of all his treasure. Here in the temple compound his life is devoted to the god. Creusa, the boy’s mother, was married to Xuthus under the following circumstances: hostilities broke out between Athens and the Chalcodontians who occupy the land of Euboea. He signed on for this conflict and with his spear led Athens to victory, for which he won the honor of marrying Creusa, though he was not native born. He is in fact an Achaean, son of Zeus’ son Aeolus. Even after sharing the marriage bed for some time he is childless; so, of course, is Creusa. That is why they have come here to the oracle of Apollo, out of desire for children. Loxias takes the lead in this. He has not forgotten, as you might think. He will give his own son to Xuthus when he comes to consult the oracle and he will tell him that he is his, so that when he reaches his mother’s home he will be recognized by Creusa, but Loxias’ sexual assault will remain secret and the boy will enjoy what is his right. Apollo will give him the name Ion, known throughout Hellas as founder of the Asian land. Well, now I’ll move aside into this grove of laurel, so I can learn just what is decided concerning the boy. I see Loxias’ son coming out here

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1056: Devoted: Greek semnon is hard to translate. In Hippolytus (93), the title character’s slave, reproving his young king for disregarding the goddess Aphrodite, says “to hate to semnon” is an established law among mortals. There to semnon is pride, an expectation that one is different from the common run of people, and a person who is semnos is haughty, arrogant, or sanctimonious (see Barrett, W. S., Euripides: Hippolytus, Oxford, 1964 ad loc.). Here in Ion, it seems to mean “reverent” or “pious”; “holy”; “his life has been one song of purity” (W. S. DiPiero, trans. Oxford, 1996). The character Ion is not aloof, but friendly, curious, sympathetic, and outspoken to the visitors to the oracle. Only when Xuthus becomes more touchy-feely than he would expect from a visitor, does Ion become huffy.

1175: Ion, “going/coming” from Greek ienai (“to go”). The Greek cities in Asia Minor and the islands near the coast are known as Ionian.
to festoon the doors of the temple with bay branches. And I first among the gods call him Ion, with the name that is going to be his.

Exit Hermes to bay trees (at the side of the temple).
Enter Ion from the temple. The silent attendants (therapes) enter along the sides.

2 Ion’s Monody (Solo) (82–183)

ION (astrophic anapestic opening)
Shining chariot drawn by four horses!
Helios the sun sheds his light over the earth;
the stars are put to flight by fire in the sky back into holy night.
The peaks of Parnassus, untroudden by humans, catching the first light, receive day’s returning, a blessing for all mankind.
The smoke of Phoebus’ arid Arabian incense wafts to the rooftops.
The woman of Delphi\(^{12}\) is seated on the sacred tripod, singing to the Hellenes whatever noises Apollo calls out to her.

To the attendants.

But, Delphians, attendants of Phoebus, go first to the silvery eddies of Castalia and bathe in her pure waters, then come back to the temple.

The attendants begin to leave by parodos B to the stream Castalia.

Keep a reverent silence and let only suitable words be heard from your lips by those who come to consult the oracle. As always I toil at these tasks I have had since childhood, with sacred branches of laurel tied together, I will keep Phoebus’ doorways clean, keep the ground moist with drops of water, and with my bow and arrows will turn to flight the flocks of birds that befoul the sacred offerings. Since I have no mother, have no father, I serve these temples of Phoebus that have been both father and mother to me.

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\(^{12}\)91: Woman of Delphi: the Pythia or Pythian Prophetess who sat on the tripod and uttered the noises that were interpreted by the seers.
Strophe

Come, fresh sprouting invention (to the broom)
of splendid laurel leaves,
that sweep the stairways
of Phoebus climbing to the temple,
from the ever-green gardens,
where the holy waters,
flowing forth
in a perpetual stream,
water sacred myrtle boughs.
With this I sweep the temple floor
through the day by the swift wing
of the sun:
my service day after day.

Paean,13 O Paean,
I pray for your well-being,
son of Leto.

Antistrophe

The work I perform
at your temple is noble, Phoebus,
in honor of the oracular seat.
The toil is glorious for me
to ply my menial hand,
not for mortals, but for the everlasting gods.
At such glorious labors
I do not tire of toiling.
Phoebus is a father to me, my begetter.
I bless the one who feeds me,
and say the name of father,
so kind to me,
of Phoebus, present in this temple.

Paean, O Paean,
I pray for your well-being,
son of Leto.

And now I will end the work
of sweeping with the laurel,
and from golden vessels will spatter
water that springs from earth,

13 125: Paean, another name for Apollo; also a hymn of praise.
that wells up from the streams of Castalia;
casting pure water,
because I am pure and untouched by love. 150
May I never cease to serve Phoebus
this way forever,
or else meet good fortune some other way. 14
Hey, hey,
the birds are already thronging
and leaving their nests on Parnassus. 155
I tell you not to alight on the eaves
nor touch the golden house. Herald
of Zeus, 15 I will stop you again with my bow
though your beak
is too strong for other birds. 160
Now another bird is winging its way to the altars,
a swan. Move those red feet of yours
to another place!
Phoebus’ lyre that accompanies
your song cannot save you from my bow. 165
Fly off somewhere else.
Go to the lake of Delos.
If not, your beautiful swan song
will end in blood.
Hey, hey! 170
What is this new bird coming?
Are you making a straw nest
for your young under the eaves!?
The twang of my bow will put a stop to that.
Better obey me. Go to the eddies
of Alphaeus and raise your young 175
or to the Isthmian glen,
so the offerings and temple
of Phoebus are not soiled . . . .
But I am ashamed to kill you
who bring the gods’ words 180
to mortals. I will serve Phoebus
in whatever tasks are assigned to me
and will not cease tending those who feed me.

14151–3: *This way forever*: Ion is more flexible than Hippolytus who, in his play (*Hippolytus*, 87) at the end of his homage to Artemis, prays that he reach the end of his life just as he began it. Prayers in *Hippolytus* have consequences more than they do in *Ion*.

15157–8: *Herald of Zeus*, the eagle. Birds are messengers of the gods. Ion may threaten them but he does not harm them (see also 179–81, 1196–8).
Ion continues his tasks at the temple doors.\textsuperscript{16} The chorus enters along Parodos A.

**Parodos (184–237)**\textsuperscript{17}

Chorus; Ion (from 219)

**CHORUS**

_**Strophe 1**_

—It isn’t only in holy Athens that the halls of gods are graced with fine columns marking worship of Apollo Agyieus, guardian of the ways, but also here in the home of Loxias, Leto’s son, the light of beautiful eyes shines from the two façades.

—Look over here, see the son of Zeus is killing the Lernaean Hydra with a golden sickle. Take a look, my dear.

_**Antistrophe 1**_

—I see it. And beside him someone else who is holding up a fiery torch—is this the story told in my weaving, Iolaus, the shield-bearer, who toiled through the labors

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\textsuperscript{16}183: Or he may exit into the temple for the golden pitchers (mentioned at 146 and 434–5) and return at or before line 219.

\textsuperscript{17}**Parodos:** entrance song of the chorus. The chorus files in and takes up its place in the orchestra. In this song different members of the chorus take different parts: changes within _strophe_ 1 and 2 and _antistrophe_ 1 are indicated by dashes (—). In the second _antistrophe_ Ion takes part to answer their questions. _Strophe_ and _Antistrophe_ are metrically equivalent stanzas, probably accompanied by the same dance movements. The women of the chorus are admiring various works of art they see around the temple complex: 1. Heracles dismembering the Hydra of Lerna with the help of Iolaus (190–200); 2. Bellerophon astride Pegasus killing the Chimera (201–4); 3. The battle of the Giants (206–218): Athena against Enceladus; Zeus vs. Mimas; Dionysus fighting another of the Earthborn. All seem suitable subjects for the temple’s metopes and pediments. “The subjects of the scenes here are the same as those embroidered on the Panathenaic peplos offered to Pallas every fifth year, and would be familiar to these women from Athens” (Owen _ad_ 190, p. 84).
he shared with the son of Zeus?  
—Oh, look at this one  
mounted on a winged horse,  
a man is killing the mighty three-bodied,  
fire-breathing monster.  

*Strophe 2*

—My eyes are racing  
in every direction. See the battle  
of the Giants on the stone walls!  
—We see it, friends.  
—Do you see *her* swinging her shield  
with the Gorgon’s face against Enceladus?  
—I see Pallas, our own goddess.  
—What next? The mighty thunderbolt  
burning at both ends in the hands  
of Zeus who hurls from afar?  
—I see it. He is setting  
the wretched Mimas on fire.  
And Bacchus, the roarer Bromius,  
is killing another spawn of Earth  
with the ivied thyrsus, no weapon of war.  

The chorus notices Ion beside the temple gates.

*Antistrophe 2*

**CHORUS**

Hello, there, I mean you by the temple.  
Is it lawful to enter the sacred hollows  
on women’s feet?  

**ION**

No, it is not lawful, strangers.  

**CHORUS**

May we  
inquire something of you?  

**ION**

What is it you want to know?  

**CHORUS**

Is the central navel of the earth really  
inside the temple of Phoebus?  

**ION**

Yes, wrapped in bands of wool with Gorgons all around it.

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18194–200: *Iolaus* cauterized the wound as Heracles cut off each of the Hydra’s hundred heads. Otherwise they would have grown back.

That is the story we’ve heard too. 225

If you have sacrificed the meal offering before the temple and need to ask something of Phoebus, you may go to the altars. But without the sacrifice of sheep do not enter into the inner sanctum of the temple.

I do understand. We do not want to trample on the god’s law. 230

What is outside is a pleasure to see.

Look at everything, whatever is open to all.

Our masters gave us permission to look at the god’s sacred precinct.

In whose halls are you servants?

The halls that raised our kings share a roof with Pallas’ temple. 235
But here she is: you can ask her in person.

Enter Creusa on parodos A.

Episode 1 (237-451)
Ion, Creusa, Chorus; Xuthus (from 401)

Yours is a demeanor that attests to your nobility and character, madam. 240
For usually in seeing the appearance of people one can tell if they are well-bred.
Huh (ea)!
You startled me, closing your eyes and letting tears wash over your noble cheeks, when you caught sight of Loxias’ sacred oracles. What is this sorrow that has come over you? Everybody else on visiting the god’s precinct feels joy, but your face is drenched with tears.

Stranger, your being surprised at my tears shows you’ve been brought up to be kind-hearted. When I caught sight of Apollo’s halls
an ancient memory coursed back through my mind.
My heart dwelt on my life at home, though I am here.
Women’s lives are full of woe. Gods can be so ruthless. 20
What can be done: where, how can we recover justice
if we are ruined by the injustice of those who rule us?

ION
Why are you so inexplicably despondent? 255

CREUSA
It’s nothing. I’ve let fly my arrow. For the rest
I’ll be silent. Please don’t fret about it any more.

ION
Well, who are you? Where are you from? In what
fatherland were you born? What name should I call you?

CREUSA
My name is Creusa. I am daughter of Erechtheus.
My fatherland is the city of the Athenians.

ION
You live in a famous city and were born and raised
by noble fathers. You have my greatest respect, madam.

CREUSA
That’s the extent of my luck, stranger, no more.

ION
By the gods is it true, as the story goes among mortals . . . 265

CREUSA
What are you asking, my friend, that you want to know?

ION
Did your father’s forefather really burst forth from Earth?

CREUSA
Erichthonius? Yes. But my birth does not benefit me.

ION
And Athena lifted him up from the earth?

CREUSA
Yes she took him in her virgin hands; she was not his mother. 270

ION
But she gave him as it’s depicted in paintings . . .

CREUSA
to the daughters of Cecrops to keep out of sight.

ION
I have heard that they opened the goddess’ chest.

CREUSA
And for that they shed their blood on the rocky crags.

20252: Ruthless: I thought of translating this line, “Women’s live are full of sorrow. Gods
can be real SOBs.”
Ah, yes.
What about this? Is it true or a story idly told?

What are you asking? I have plenty of time.

Did your father Erechtheus sacrifice your sisters?

He took it upon himself to kill the girls for his country.

How did you survive, alone among your sisters?

I was a newborn baby in my mother’s arms.

Is your father actually buried in a chasm of the earth?

The blows of the sea god’s trident killed him.

The place there is called the Long Rocks?

Why are you asking about that? You’ve brought back a memory.

The Pythian honors it with Pythian flashes of lightning.

Honors it, honors it! How I wish I had never seen it!

Why do you hate one of the god’s favorite places?

It’s nothing. Something shameful happened in the caves.

What husband did you marry from among the Athenians, lady?

He’s not from the city, but a stranger from another land.

Who is it? He must be a person of noble birth.

Xuthus, son of Aeolus, descendant of Zeus

And how did a foreigner manage to marry you, a native?

There is a city, Euboea, a neighbor of Athens...

Separated by water, as I hear, from the mainland.

He sacked this land fighting alongside the people of Cecrops.
ION
He came as an ally? And then got your hand in marriage?

CREUSA
Yes, he won me as the dowry of war and the prize of his spear.

ION
Have you come to the oracle with your husband or on your own?

CREUSA
With my husband. He turned off at the shrine of Trophonius. 300

ION
As a tourist to see the sights or to visit the oracle?

CREUSA
He wants to hear from him and from Phoebus together.

ION
Did you come for a bountiful harvest or for children?

CREUSA
We have no children, though we’ve been married a long time.

ION
You have never given birth, but are childless.

CREUSA
Phoebus knows the story of my childlessness.

ION
I’m so sorry. In other ways you are lucky, but not in this.

CREUSA
But who are you? How I envy your mother.

ION
I am called the slave of the god, lady. That’s what I am.

CREUSA
An offering of the city or sold by someone?

ION
I only know one thing. I belong to Loxias.

CREUSA
For this I feel compassion for you in turn, stranger.

ION
Because I don’t know who gave me life nor who is my father.

CREUSA
Do you live in this temple compound or in a house?

ION
The whole house of the god is mine, wherever sleep takes me.

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

21300: Trophonius, Xuthus is conveniently absent so that Creusa has an opportunity to speak about her own mission. Trophonius, a Boeotian seer who helped build the temple at Delphi had an oracular cave about 15 miles from Delphi.
ION  
Those who know best say I came as an infant.

CREUSA  
And who of the Delphian women suckled you with her milk?

ION  
I never knew a mother’s breast. But she nurtured me . . .

CREUSA  
Who, you poor man? I find in you a sickness that I share.  

ION  
Apollo’s prophetess: I think of her as my mother.

CREUSA  
What livelihood sustained you to manhood?

ION  
The altars gave me enough to eat and visitors who are always here.

CREUSA  
I’m sorry for your mother. Whoever she was.

ION  
Perhaps I was born because of a woman’s wrong.  

CREUSA  
You have a livelihood. You are very well-dressed.

ION  
I am dressed in the clothes of the god I serve.

CREUSA  
Have you never undertaken a search for your roots?

ION  
I have not a shred of evidence to start an inquiry, lady.

CREUSA  
Ah!  
Another woman has suffered the same as your mother.  

ION  
Who is it? I would be happy if she would take up the search with me.

CREUSA  
I have come here for her sake, before my husband arrives.

ION  
What is it you require? I will help you, if I can, lady.

CREUSA  
I need to learn a secret oracle from Apollo.

ION  
Please tell me. I will manage the rest as your sponsor.22  

CREUSA  
Hear the story, then. But, no, I’m too ashamed.

22335: Sponsor, the proxenos who acted on behalf of visitors to the oracle with housing and introductions.
ION

Then you will get nowhere. Shame is a lazy goddess.

CREUSA

One of my friends says that she “lay with” Phoebus.

ION

Phoebus with a woman! Don’t say it, stranger.

CREUSA

And she bore a child to Phoebus in secret from her father.

ION

No, it can’t be. She is ashamed of being wronged by a man.

CREUSA

She claims that’s not so, and she has suffered miserably.

ION

What did she do, if she was joined with the god?

CREUSA

The baby she birthed, she exposed him out of doors.

ION

Where is this exposed child? Is he alive?

CREUSA

No one knows. This is what I want to ask the oracle.

ION

If he is dead, how did he perish? Was he killed?

CREUSA

She expects that wild animals killed the poor baby.

ION

Is there evidence that leads her to believe this?

CREUSA

She went back where she left him and couldn’t find him.

ION

Was there any spattering of blood on the path?

CREUSA

She says there wasn’t. And she went over and over it.

ION

How long is it since the child was made away with?

CREUSA

If he were alive he would be about your age.

ION

The god wrongs her: to leave the mother in torment.

CREUSA

Afterward she has not had any other children.

ION

What if Phoebus took him and raised him in secret?

CREUSA

Taking for himself the joy they should share is wrong.
ION

Ah me (oimoi). Her fortune is in tune with my suffering.

CREUSA

And you, I think your poor mother misses you.

ION

Do not draw me into a sadness I have tried to forget.

CREUSA

I will be silent. Carry on with what I asked you about.

ION

Do you know where your story especially falls short?

CREUSA

What is not a disaster for that melancholy woman?

ION

How could the god proclaim what he wants to keep hidden?

CREUSA

He could if he is sitting on the common tripod of Greece!

ION

The deed shames him. Don’t question him about it.

CREUSA

Yet the woman who suffered this tragedy feels it acutely.

ION

There is no one who will give voice to your oracle.
For if Phoebus should be made to appear unjust
in his own house he would have reason to punish
whoever submitted the answer. Lady, give it up!
One cannot question the oracle in opposition to the god.
[This would be a very great folly on our part:
if we try to force the gods against their will
to utter what they do not want to say, whether
by slaughtering sheep on the altar or through
the flights of birds.] Phoebus, not just then and there but here and now you wrong

CHORUS LEADER

Many are the misfortunes of too many mortals,
but they take different shapes. One rarely finds
one continuous good fortune in men’s lives.24

CREUSA

Phoebus, not just then and there but here and now you wrong

23374–8: These lines are suspected on the grounds of relevance to the argument and the frigidity of their style.

24381–3: Many are: the chorus often utters a truism between speeches by the characters. We should not expect profundity, but comforting banality.
the woman who is not here, though her words are, through me. You did not save your son whom you ought to have saved and though a prophet you will not speak to the mother who asks if he is dead, so he may be honored with burial, or if he’s still alive, so that one day his mother might hope to see him again. Well, I must leave off, if I am prevented by the god from learning what I need to know. But, look, stranger, I see my noble husband, Xuthus, coming toward us. He has left the chambers of Trophonius. Keep the words I spoke secret while he is here, so I won’t be embarrassed for coming on a secret mission, and the story won’t get out when I have not explained it to him. Women’s issues are hard for men to grasp and the good women get confused with the bad so we are all disparaged. We are born to misfortune. 395 390

Xuthus arrives along parodos B.

XUTHUS
First hail to the god, who receives the first fruits of my greetings, and then to you, my wife. Has my delayed return caused you any concern?

CREUSA
Not at all. You find us in a state of anticipation. Tell me what divine word do you bring from Trophonius about the mingling of our seed to make children.

XUTHUS
He did not want to anticipate Apollo’s oracles, but he did say that I would not return home from the oracle childless and neither would you.

CREUSA
Revered mother of Phoebus, I pray we have come here happily, whatever our relationship with your son was in the past, may its future fall out better.

XUTHUS
So it will be. But who interprets for the god?

ION
Outside, I do. But inside it is the job of others who sit near the tripod, stranger, prominent men of Delphi, chosen by lot.

XUTHUS
Very well. I have all that I need.

---

25406: Seed (sperma, in Greek) can refer to the contributions of both male and female to the formation of offspring. See Gibert’s note on 406.
I will go in now. I have heard that the common sacrificial victim for visitors to the oracle has fallen before the temple. This is the day—it’s my lucky day—that I want to hear the oracles. But you, my wife, take these sprigs around the altars wreathed in laurel, and pray to the gods that the oracles we receive from Apollo’s house hold promise of children.

Xuthus exits into the temple.

CREUSA

Yes, I’ll do it. I’ll do it. If Loxias is willing now to atone for his earlier misdeeds, he would still not ever be altogether a friend to me, but whatever he wants—he is a god—I will accept it.

Creusa exits on parodos A to decorate the altars.

ION

What is this visitor getting at, reviling the god in riddles and secretive words? Either she has deep affection for the woman on whose behalf she is consulting the oracle or she is silent about something that must be kept secret. Well, what’s the daughter of Erechtheus to me? She is no kin of mine. It’s time for me to pour water from golden pitchers into the holy water fonts. But first I need to give Phoebus a piece of my mind. What is wrong with him. Does he abandon young virgins after raping them? Is he apathetic to the deaths of children born from these affairs? Don’t do it! You have power, you should pursue virtue. Whenever mortals do wrong the gods punish them. How can it be right that you who write the laws for mortals are guilty of transgressing them? If—I know this won’t happen, but for the sake of argument—if you and Poseidon and Zeus who rules the sky had to pay the penalty to humans for rape you would empty your temples atoning for your wrongs. You do wrong seeking pleasure without forethought. It is not right any more to speak ill of men if we imitate what the gods consider “fine” but for those who teach us these things it’s another story.

Ion exits to get pure water, probably along parodos B.
**First Stasimon (452–509)**

**CHORUS**

**Strophe**

We pray to you, our patron Athena,
unvisited by birth’s goddess, Eileithuia,
who relieves the pangs of labor,
but birthed with the help of Prometheus
from the top of Zeus’ head. O happy Victory, come to the Pythian home
to its streets and passageways
from your golden chambers,
on the wing from Olympus,
come here where Phoebus’ altar
at earth’s central navel
beside the tripod, celebrated in dance,
fulfills its oracles,
you and the girl child born of Leto
two virgins, two goddesses,
solemn sisters of Phoebus:
pray, you maidens,
that the ancient line of Erechtheus
with clear oracles meet at last
with lasting fertility.

**Antistrophe**

For it holds out an unshakeable source
of surpassing happiness to mortals
for whom children thriving in their youth
shed a bright light in the ancestral house
leaving a succession of wealth
from fathers
to children who will come later,
protection in bad times,
love in good times,
in war they add a saving strength
to the land of their fathers.
For myself I pray that the caring
for children come before wealth
and royal halls.
I disdain the childless life and reproach

---

26456: *Victory*, that is, as Athena Nike, goddess of victory (see also line 1528–9).

27465: *The girl child born of Leto*, Apollo’s sister, Artemis, the virgin hunter.
anyone who prefers it. 490
With modest resources
let me spend my life blessed with children.

Epode
Shrines of Pan and caves
beside the Long Rocks
where the three daughters of Aglaurus28
in the grassy space in front of Pallas’
temples set their feet in dance
to the panpipes,
when you play them under the sunless cave
where a sorrowing virgin, o Pan,
gave birth to Phoebus’ infant
and exposed it, a bloody feast
for birds and beasts, the crime
of a violent rape.
Not in my weaving nor in other tales
have I heard that children
born to mortals from gods have a share in the happy life.

Episode 2 (510-675)
Ion, Chorus, Xuthus

ION
Servant women, you keep watch by these steps
where sacrifice is made and look out for your mistress,
has Xuthus left the sacred tripod of the oracle yet
or is he still in the temple inquiring about his childlessness?

CHORUS LEADER
He is in the halls, stranger, and not yet come outside.
But he is on his way out as we can hear from the sound
of the doors. Now you can see the master coming out.

Xuthus enters from the temple. Sees Ion and tries to embrace him.

XUTHUS
My boy, be happy: this is a fitting way for me to address you.

28495: Aglaurus: wife of Cecrops, early king of Athens (see lines 23, 267–74): Athena assigned their daughters the role of baby-sitters for Erichthonius, but told them not to open the hamper in which he had been placed. They could not resist this invitation and looked. They went mad and leapt off the acropolis to their deaths.
I’m happy, but you be discreet and we’ll both be fine.

Give me your hand in greeting and let me give you a hug.

Are you OK or did some blow from the god make you mad?

Of course I’m OK when I long to embrace what is most precious to me.

Stop it! You don’t want to break the god’s fillets with your hands.

I will hold you. I’m not seizing another’s property but have found my own.

Leave off before you find an arrow stuck inside your ribs.

Why do you refuse to acknowledge me, your nearest and dearest?

I am not used to humoring crass or deranged strangers.

Do your worst! But if you kill me you will be your father’s murderer.

How are you my father? It’s so bizarre to hear such a thing?

No. A running account would make my story clear to you.

And what are you telling me?

I am your father and you are my son.

Who says so?

Loxias who brought you up, though you are mine.

You are your own witness.

Only after hearing the god’s oracle.

You were tricked by a riddling response.

Then I didn’t hear it right.

---

527: You will be your father’s murderer, it is hard not to remember another oracle relating to fathers and sons given at Delphi. Tragically, after hearing that oracle, Oedipus killed the first man he met on the road who was, as he discovered later, his father.
What were Loxias’ exact words?

That the one who encountered me . . .

What encounter was that?

As I came out of the god’s dwelling . . .

Would meet with what outcome?

Is my natural son.

Your own child or the gift of another?

A gift but still my own.

You first fell in step with me.

No one else, my boy.

Where did this piece of luck come from?

We are both wondering the same thing.

From what mother was I born?

That I cannot tell.

And Phoebus didn’t say?

I was so overcome by this news I didn’t think to ask.

Was I born from mother earth?

Soil does not give birth to children. 30

How could I be yours?

I don’t know, but I defer to the god.

———

30542: Soil does not give birth: With this simple statement, Xuthus discounts the legends of autochthony his wife and other native Athenians are so proud of.
Very well, let’s grapple with another story.

XUTHUS
That’s better, son.

You had an illicit affair.

XUTHUS
The improvidence of youth!

Before you married the daughter of Erechtheus?

XUTHUS
Of course. Never afterward.

And that was when you fathered me

XUTHUS
The time matches.

How then do I come to be here. . .

XUTHUS
That stymies me.

crossing all this distance?

XUTHUS
I’m puzzled by that too.

Have you been to the Pythian crags before?

XUTHUS
Yes, for the torchlight festival of Bacchus.

Did you stay with one of the sponsors?

XUTHUS
Yes, and I was introduced to Delphian girls.

In a sacred band of initiates or what?

XUTHUS
Yes, among the Bacchic maenads.

Sober or under the influence?

XUTHUS
Enjoying the pleasures of Bacchus.

That is where you fathered me.

XUTHUS
Fate has found you, my boy.
How did I arrive at the temple?

Perhaps you were cast out by the girl.

I have escaped slavery.

Take hold of your father, my son.

It is not right to disbelieve the god.

Good thinking.

And what else could I wish for?

Now you see what you ought to see.

To be born the son of Zeus’ son.

Which turns out to be your lot.

Should I touch the man who fathered me.

Yes, in obedience to the god.

Greetings to you, father.

I take that as a term of affection.

And to this day greetings. . .

Which made me a happy man.

Dearest mother will I ever see your face? I long to see you now more than ever before, whoever you are. But it could be that you are dead and we cannot see you even in a dream.

We, too, have a share in the family’s good fortune, but still I would have wanted our mistress to be blessed with children and the house of Erechtheus to prosper.

My son, in finding you, the god has done us a service and joined you to me and you, in turn, have found what is dearest to you, that you did not know before. I too feel that same desire your mind naturally leaps to,
that you, my dear boy, will find your mother
and I will know what sort of woman gave you birth. 575
Maybe, if we give it time we can uncover these things.
But leave the god’s foundations and your homelessness;
come to Athens, sharing your father’s way of thinking. 31

Are you silent? Why do you cloud your face
with worries after your happiness of a minute ago
and cause your father to feel renewed anxiety.

The view of things seen from afar and up close
is not always the same. I am happy with the way
my luck has turned, and finding you as my father,
but hear me out, father, what goes through my mind.
They say the renowned city of Athens is born of the
earth and not an alien people of immigrants to the land, 32
so that I will come in plagued by two drawbacks:
I am the son of a foreign father and a bastard.
With these disadvantages I will remain powerless
and I will be called a nobody from nowhere.
But if I have ambitions to the first rank of the city
and strive to be somebody, I will be the enemy
of the disenfranchised. Excess makes for bitterness.
Those who are sensible as well as good and capable,
and keep their peace and do not aspire to public life
will take me for a fool and a laughing stock
for not keeping my head down in a city eager to find fault.
But if I attain a higher station than those already
having a say in the city I will be stonewalled
by their votes. 33 That’s how these things go, father.
Those who hold sway in cities and reach high office
are most virulently opposed to any rivals.

31 579–82: Probably an interpolation:
[where wealth and your father’s scepter await you,
and you will not be called disadvantaged
on two counts, both ill-bred and poor at the same time,
but well-bred and enjoying the good life.]

32 590: The immigrants in Athens were called metics (metoikoi). They were often business people and artisans (including the Sophists) and had certain rights but not the rights of citizens.

33 604–5: Those who...reach high office: perhaps a reference to the historical practice of ostracism.
Then I will be coming into another’s home as an outsider, to a woman who is childless. She shared your fortunes with you before, but has no part in this, and by herself will bear this change of fortune with resentment. She will have good reason to hate me when I stand at your side while she still has no child of her own and will look with bitterness on all you love. And then either you will give up on me and see to your wife or you will honor me and turn your home into chaos. Think of the bloodbaths and deaths by lethal poison that women have devised for their men? And besides I feel pity for your wife, father, as she grows old without children. With her noble ancestry she does not deserve the curse of barrenness. The face of absolute power, so foolishly overrated, may look sweet, but it is bitter to live in the same space. Who, really, can feel happy, who can be comfortable if he spends his life in fear and suspicion of conspiracy? I would prefer to be a well-off private citizen much more than to be a tyrant who takes pleasure in counting criminals among his friends and hates honest people because he fears assassination at their hands. You could say that gold is more than a match for this and being rich is its own reward. I do not want to hear abuse for hoarding wealth and I don’t want the stress. I hope for a life of moderation without anxiety. Father, let me go over the good things I’ve had here: first, what humanity treasures most: leisure, and then, troubles in moderation and no thug has pushed me off the street, an insufferable offence, to yield one’s place giving way to baser people. And in the prayers to the gods and talk of people I served those in happy spirits, not the disgruntled. I send some on their way as other visitors arrive, so that I am always pleasant and a new face to new folks. And what people pray for, even if they don’t want it, to be just, custom and nature both have made me that to the god. With all this going on in my head, I think I prefer to be here rather than there, father. Let me spend my life here. For the pleasure is the same to be happy with a lot as to find delight in small things.

CHORUS LEADER
That’s well said. If only the ones I care for turn up among your successful friends.
XUTHUS

Stop this talk. Learn to accept good fortune.
My boy, I want to start out here where I found you,
with a public table participating in a feast for all,
and to make sacrifices for your birth we did not make before.
And now I shall take you as my guest of my home
and treat you to a feast, and from there to the land
of Athens as a sight-seer, not as my son.
For I do not want to cause pain to my wife,
who remains without children, though I have been blessed.
But in time, when an opportunity can be taken I will persuade
my wife to let you have dominion over the land.
I’ll give you the name Ion in line with what happened:
when I was coming out of the god’s precinct
you first joined your step with mine.\(^{34}\) Now gather
all your friends and bid goodbye with a joyous
feast since it’s time for you to leave the city of Delphi.
And you, servants, keep this quiet or death will be
your reward, if you inform my wife of these events.

ION

I’m coming. One thing is missing for my happiness.
Unless I find my mother who gave birth to me, father,
my life isn’t worth living. I make this prayer, if I may:
I pray the woman who gave me life is from Athens,
so I’ll have freedom of speech on Mother’s side.
For when a foreigner chances to come to a city
of pure stock, even if he’s a citizen in name, still he has
a slave’s tongue and does not enjoy the right to speak freely.

Second Stasimon (676–724)

CHORUS

Strophe

I see tears and grieving
and a deluge of lamentation
when my queen learns
that her husband is blessed with a son
but she is left barren and without children.
Soothsaying son of Leto, what song
did you unravel?

\(^{34}\)661–3: Ion (“coming/going”), because he first joined his step with Xuthus exionti
(“coming out”, 662) of the temple. Diane Arnson Svarlien (and others) translates 662 ‘because
you were the very first I cast my “Eye On”’ (2016: 40).
Where did he come from, this boy sustained at your temple? From what woman?
The oracles do not flatter me into thinking there is no deceit in this. I’m afraid of what will happen, whatever it will come to. The god’s strange utterance offers an outcome that baffles me: the boy reared from foreign blood has about him some trickery and chance.35

Who does not agree this is so?

Explication

My friends, should we speak these things clearly into our mistress’ ear, she who, poor soul, shared with her husband all their hopes?

But now circumstances fail her: he is happy and she slips into gray old age. Her husband is disrespectful of his loved ones.
The wretch, who came as a stranger to our home into great wealth, but did not share the luck equally.

Curse him! Curse him for deceiving my mistress,

And may he not reach the gods’ blessing with his offerings burnt on the altar’s fire.

He will know my views: what is dear to the royal house.

Already they are close to committing villainous deeds, this new son and this new father.

Epode

Rocky ridges of Parnassus with lookouts from a station high in the sky where Bacchus holds torches in both hands, leaps with graceful feet among Bacchants who rove at night.

Keep this man-child from reaching my city. Let death cut off his young life.

Our city would have a motive for keeping off foreign incursion, with our former leader, king Erechtheus, marshaling the troops.

35 Owen ad 692: “there is some trickery and chance about the boy”.
Episode 3 (725-1047)
Creusa, Old Man, Chorus

Creusa and Old Man enter by parodos A.

CREUSA
You were caretaker of my father Erechtheus of old, as long as he lived in the daylight; now you have grown old, too. Raise yourself up to climb to the god’s oracle, so that you can be happy with me if lord Loxias has uttered a prediction favoring the birth of children. It is sweet to do well in the company of friends. Though—god forbid!—if something bad happens it is sweet to look into the eyes of a sympathetic friend. And though I’m your mistress, I care for you just as you did, once upon a time, for my father.

OLD MAN
My daughter, you keep the upright traditions of your upright ancestors and do not cause shame to your family of the ancient earthborn folk. Give me a hand; pull me up; help me get to the temple. The way to the oracle’s shrine is steep. Be a healing salve for my old age, using your strength along with my legs.

CREUSA
Follow in my steps. Be careful where you put your feet.

OLD MAN
Look here.
The slowness of my feet. The quickness of my mind.

CREUSA
Lean on your staff. The path is on uneven ground.

OLD MAN
The staff too is blind, since my vision has grown dim.

CREUSA
That’s true. But don’t give in to fatigue or despair.

OLD MAN
Not if I can help it, but I have no power over what I have lost.

CREUSA
Women, faithful servants of my loom and shuttle, with what fortune regarding children—the reason we came here—has my husband left the area? Tell me this, if you have any sound information: you will not waste this favor on a disloyal mistress.

CHORUS LEADER
Oh god!

CREUSA
That’s not an introduction that bodes well.
CHORUS LEADER
   Oh misery!
CREUSA
   Well, are your masters in trouble because of the oracle?
CHORUS LEADER
   Aiai! What are we to do when death is the option?
CREUSA
   What refrain is this? Where is your fear coming from?
CHORUS LEADER
   Should we speak or keep silent or what should we do?
CREUSA
   Speak: you seem to have some disaster to tell me.
CHORUS LEADER
   It will be told, even if I must die twice over.
   My lady, there is no chance for you to hold children
   in your arms or ever clasp them to your breast.

Kommos (763–99)
Creusa (singing); Chorus, Old Man (speaking in iambics)

CREUSA
   Ah me! (omoi.) I wish I were dead.
OLD MAN
   My daughter.
CREUSA
   Oh my life is ruined,
   I have suffered a stunning blow; my friends
   I cannot live with such grief, my friends.
   I am lost.
OLD MAN
   My child.
CREUSA
   aiai aiai
   A stabbing pain has struck me
   inside my chest.
OLD MAN
   Don’t lament yet
CREUSA
   The song in my heart is sad.
OLD MAN
   . . .until we know.
CREUSA
   Know what?
OLD MAN
   Whether the master has the same misfortune
and shares this with you, or you suffer alone.

CHORUS LEADER
Loxias gave him a child, old sir,
and he is happy on his own without her. 775

CREUSA
You pile up this evil on top of the other,
more grief for me to lament.

OLD MAN
So, is the child you mention yet to be born
from a woman or did he say he’s already alive?

CHORUS LEADER
Loxias gave him a young man already alive
and well on his way to manhood. I was there. 780

CREUSA
What are you saying? I have no words! You are
telling me something I can’t bear to hear.

OLD MAN
Me either. How was the oracle fulfilled?
Tell me more clearly who is this child? 785

CHORUS LEADER
Whoever it was to first meet your husband
when he left the temple: the god gave him as his child.

CREUSA
otototoi! And he declared my life childless.
I will live in loneliness,
in my house without a child. 790

OLD MAN
Who then was named by the god. Who was the first to meet
the poor woman’s husband? How and where did he see him?

CHORUS LEADER
You know him, my dear mistress: the young man
who was sweeping the temple. That is the child. 795

CREUSA
May I fly through the watery ether beyond the land
of Greece to the stars in the west
such a grief I have suffered, my friends.

OLD MAN
What name did his father give him?
Do you know or does it remain unstated? 800

CHORUS LEADER
Ion. Since he first came into his father’s path.
From what sort of mother he comes, I cannot say.
But he’s gone. So you’ll know all we know, old man,
her husband has gone without her knowledge
805
to a sacred ceremony to make guest and birthday offerings
for the boy. He plans a common feast for his new son.

OLD MAN
Mistress, we have been played false by your husband and his machinations—I feel your pain—and we are insulted and cast out of the house of Erechtheus.

I’m not saying this because of any animosity toward your husband, but I love you more than I care for him.
First he immigrated to this land as a stranger;
then he married you and took your home and inheritance;
now he is found in secret to be producing children by another woman. I can explain how he managed it:
when he discovered you were barren, he did not desire to share the same ill fortune with you,
but he took a slave woman to his bed and secretly fathered the child and put him in the care of one of the women of Delphi to bring up. The boy grew up freely in the god’s precinct, so he could be kept secret.
When Xuthus realized the child would be grown up, he persuaded you to come here because of your childlessness.
So the god did not lie, your husband was the one who lied, long ago, rearing the boy, he wove this kind of deceit.
He has been caught out and is trying to palm it off on the god.
He came here desiring to fight for time, intending to invest the boy with the rulership of the country; he fabricated the new name to suit the timing, Ion, because the boy met his father coming to him.

CHORUS LEADER
Oimoi! How I hate evil-doing men and always will, men who plot out dishonest deeds and dress them up with clever rationalizations. I’d much prefer to have a friend who is humble but good to one whose evil is disguised by cleverness.

OLD MAN
And you will suffer this, the final evil of all:
a motherless, no account, born from some slave woman is brought in as master of your house.
It would be a simple evil if he had settled in the house a child from a noble mother,
arguing your barreness. And if this were bitter to you he ought to have arranged a marriage among the Aeolians.
Therefore you must do the womanly thing: either taking up the sword or with some guile or using poisons you must kill your husband
and the boy before death comes to you from them.  

. . .

And I am willing to abet you in this. I will go 
to the place where the feast is prepared to murder 
the boy and thus repay my masters for my keep, 
I am ready to die or continue living in the day light. 
Only one thing brings shame to slaves: the name. 
In everything else a slave is no worse 
than a free man provided that he is a decent man.

CHORUS LEADER
I too, my dear mistress, am willing to share 
this disaster and either to die or live with honor.

Creusa’s Monody (859–922)

Creusa

Oh, my life! How can I keep silent? 
And yet how can I reveal that hidden coupling 
and abandon my shame? 
What is there left to stop me? 
What prize for virtue am I competing for? 
Hasn’t my husband turned out to be a traitor? 
I am deprived of a home, deprived of children; 
my hopes are dashed which I wanted to manage honorably 
but was not able, 
though I hid my union 
and hid my childbirth with all its tears. 
By the starry seat of Zeus 
and the goddess above my own city’s peaks 
and the sacred shore of Triton’s 
deep-watered lake, 
I will no longer hide the union: by unburdening 
my chest, my heart will feel lighter. 
My eyes are dripping with tears. 
My soul is in torment, bombarded by cruel plots 
of men and immortals, 
whom I will reveal 
as thankless betrayers of marriage vows.

36847–9: These lines are deleted as an interpolation, to needlessly explain why Creusa is 
in danger.

[If you let this pass your life is lost. 
For when two enemies enter under the same roof 
one or the other of them must suffer ill.]
You were crooning to the tune of the seven-stringed lyre
which in the lifeless horns of beasts that rove the fields
sounds the melodious songs of the Muses,
I make this reproach to you, son of Leto:
that I address by the light of day.
You came to me, your hair gleaming with gold,
when I was gathering in my lap
saffron strands, reflecting the golden rays.
You took me by my white wrists
to lie on the floor of the cave,
as I cried aloud, “Mother, Mother”
you, a rapist and a god,
you brought me to shame
doing your part in service to love’s goddess, Kupris.
And in my misery I bore you
a son whom I cast out,
because of a mother’s fear,
I lay him in your bed,
where you harnessed me, a woman in despair,
in this tragic coupling.
Ah me! (Oimoi moi!) And now he is lost,
seized as a feast by carrion birds,
my son and yours.
Wretch, and on the lyre you drone on and on
singing paeans.

Oe
I address the son of Leto
who allots the responses
at the golden steps
and dais at earth’s center:
my voice is a herald into the light,
io, io dastardly vile seducer
who sends home a son for my husband
when no favors have been given.
But my child and yours
is gone, preyed on by birds,
has lost his mother’s birthday tokens.
Delos despises you and the shoots
of laurel beside the delicate fronds of palm
where Leto gave birth to you, blessed as you were then,
in the gardens of Zeus.

CHORUS LEADER
Ah me (oimoi) a vast storehouse of evils
opens, over which anyone would shed tears.
OLD MAN
   My daughter, looking at your face I am filled with pity and my mind is not thinking straight. I was just draining out a surge of evils from my heart when your words caused another to flood over the side. In making these claims you have moved from the ills of today into the evil paths of still other tragedies. What are you saying? What charge against Loxias? What child do you say you birthed? Where in the city did you cast him out in a grave for beasts to feed on. Go back over it for me to understand.

CREUSA
   I’m ashamed to tell you, old man, but still I’ll speak.
OLD MAN
   Yes, do speak. I know how to grieve nobly with those I love.
CREUSA
   Listen, then. You know the northern cave of the Cecropian crag that we call the “Long Rocks”?
OLD MAN
   Yes, it is near the shrine and altars of Pan.
CREUSA
   It was there I underwent a fearful struggle.
OLD MAN
   What happened? How my tears flow to meet your words.
CREUSA
   Against my will I entered an unhappy union with Phoebus.
OLD MAN
   Was that what I noticed back then, my daughter?
CREUSA
   I don’t know. If you tell me what it was, I’ll tell you.
OLD MAN
   When you grieved in secret from a hidden illness.
CREUSA
   This was the sadness, as I now reveal openly.
OLD MAN
   How then did you hide the coupling with Apollo.
CREUSA
   I gave birth. Bear up when you hear this from me, old man.
OLD MAN
   Where? Who helped with the birth? Or were you on your own?
CREUSA
   I was alone in the cave where I was raped.37

37949: Raped, she sarcastically uses the term “yoked in marriage.”
OLD MAN
   And where is the child? You might not still be childless.  950
CREUSA
   Dead, old man, he was exposed to wild beasts.
OLD MAN
   Dead? Did Apollo, the craven, not come to his aid?
CREUSA
   He didn’t help. The boy is reared in Hades now.
OLD MAN
   Who was it that exposed him? Not you, surely.
CREUSA
   I did. I wrapped him in garments in the dark of night.  955
OLD MAN
   Did anyone else know about the exposure of the child?
CREUSA
   Only the tragic story itself and its secrecy.
OLD MAN
   How did you have the heart to leave your baby in the cave?
CREUSA
   How? Crying my heart out in pitiful sobs.
OLD MAN
   *Pheu.*
   Hard-hearted in your boldness and the god was even more so.  960
CREUSA
   If you had seen the baby stretching out his hands to me.
OLD MAN
   Reaching for the breast or a mother’s embrace?
CREUSA
   And when he didn’t get it, he suffered from my neglect.
OLD MAN
   What thought came over you to expose the child?
CREUSA
   In the hope the god would save him, his own child.  965
OLD MAN
   *Ah me* (*oimoi*)! The long prosperity of your house receives a blow.
CREUSA
   Why do you cover your head and weep, old man?
OLD MAN
   It hurts to see you and your father in such distress.
CREUSA
   That’s the way of the world: nothing remains the same.
OLD MAN
   Let us not still hold onto pitiful cries, my daughter.  970
CREUSA
   What must I do? Misfortune stifles the mind.
OLD MAN
   Pay back the god who first wronged you.
CREUSA
   How can I, as a mortal, outdo a god’s power?
OLD MAN
   Set fire to the venerable oracle of Loxias.
CREUSA
   I am afraid to. Even as it is, I have enough suffering.
OLD MAN
   Then undertake what’s possible: kill your husband.
CREUSA
   I have respect for our marriage, from when he was a good man.
OLD MAN
   Then the child who has turned up to replace you.
CREUSA
   How? I would be happy to do it if it’s possible.
OLD MAN
   By arming your attendants with swords.
CREUSA
   I would go that far, but where would it be staged?
OLD MAN
   At the sacred space where he is holding a feast for his friends.
CREUSA
   Murder will out . . . and the slave’s hand is weak.
OLD MAN
   Ah me! You are playing the coward. Come, you plan something.
CREUSA
   Yes, I do have something, deceptive and feasible.
OLD MAN
   To both of those I would be a willing accomplice.
CREUSA
   Listen. Do you know the battle of the Earthborn?
OLD MAN
   I do. In which the Giants made a stand against the gods at Phlegria.
CREUSA
   And there Earth gave birth to the Gorgon, dire monster.
OLD MAN
   In alliance with her children, trouble for the gods.
CREUSA
   Yes, and Zeus’ daughter, the goddess Pallas, killed her.
OLD MAN
   Is this the tale that I heard so long ago?
CREUSA
   That Athena wears this monster’s pelt of on her chest.
OLD MAN
   Her aegis as it’s called, Athena’s breastplate.

CREUSA
   It got this name when she hurtled into the gods’ battle. 38

OLD MAN
   What is the outline of the savage shape? 992

CREUSA
   A breastplate armored with the coils of a viper. 993

OLD MAN
   My daughter, how does this lead to your enemies’ undoing? 998

CREUSA
   You’ve heard of Erichthonius, right? Of course you have.

OLD MAN
   Your first ancestor, sent forth by the earth. 1000

CREUSA
   When he was just born Pallas gave him . . .

OLD MAN
   What was it? Something you are reluctant to bring up.

CREUSA
   Two drops of the Gorgon’s blood.

OLD MAN
   What power do they have on human life?

CREUSA
   One is lethal, the other an antidote to diseases. 1005

OLD MAN
   What did she use to attach them to the child’s body?

CREUSA
   Golden bands. He gave them to my father.

OLD MAN
   When he died they came to you?

CREUSA
   Yes, and I carry them on my wrist.

____________________________

38997: Aegis is usually said to be derived from aix, aig- “goat” (one of Chimera’s parts), but here Euripides gives its etymology from aissein “rush, dart, move quickly”. For these lines I have followed the transposition of the lines from the order of the original manuscripts by some editors beginning with Kirchoff, 1867–8. The received text reads:

OM: What is the outline of the savage shape? 992
Cr: A breast armored with the coils of a viper. 993
OM: Is this the tale that I heard so long ago? 994
Cr: That Athena wears this monster’s pelt of on her chest. 995
OM: Her aegis as it’s called, Athena’s breastplate. 996
Cr: It got this name when she hurtled into the gods’ battle. 997
OLD MAN
   How then is this twofold gift of the goddess put to use? 1010
CREUSA
   Blood that dropped from the hollow vein . . .
OLD MAN
   What is that used for? What power does it hold?
CREUSA
   It wards off diseases and sustains life.
OLD MAN
   And the second item you spoke of, what does it do?
CREUSA
   It kills: it’s the venom from the Gorgon’s snakes. 1015
OLD MAN
   Do you wear them mixed together or in separate vials?
CREUSA
   Separate. The good does not mix with the evil.
OLD MAN
   My dear, dear child, you have everything you need.
CREUSA
   This is how the boy will die. And you are the one to kill him.
OLD MAN
   Where and how? Yours to speak, mine to dare. 1020
CREUSA
   In Athens when he arrives at my house.
OLD MAN
   Not a good idea. You even rejected it earlier.
CREUSA
   How so? Do you have the same suspicion that just occurred to me?
OLD MAN
   Yes, everyone will think you killed him, even if you didn’t.
CREUSA
   You’re right. Everybody says stepmothers hate their stepchildren. 1025
OLD MAN
   Kill him right here where you can deny the murder.
CREUSA
   And I’ll get the satisfaction all the sooner.
OLD MAN
   Plus deceive your husband as he strives to deceive you.
CREUSA
   You know what to do: take this gold, gift of Athena, from my hand, an ornament from the distant past. 1030
   Go where my husband is holding sacrifice in secret; when they finish the feasting and are about to pour libations to the gods, keep this hidden in your robe and pour it into the young man’s drink, just his;
be careful to keep it separate from the others—
that young man who is on his way to being master
of my house. And if it reaches his gullet, he will never reach
the glorious city of Athens, but death will detain him here.

OLD MAN
You, go now inside, into the lodging for guests.
And I will go to carry out my designated task.

Come, aged foot, be a boy again
in your deeds, even though your time is long past.
In aid of your mistress, proceed after the enemy
and with her, murder him and remove him from the house.

For the prosperous it is a fine thing to respect piety,
but if one wishes to do harm to one’s enemies,
there is no law or custom that stands in our way.

Creusa exits on parodos A.

Old Man exits on parodos B.

Third Stasimon (1048–1105)

CHORUS

Strophe 1
Einodia of the crossroads, daughter of Demeter,
you are queen of assaults that come at night
and now during the daylight
guide the filling of the deadly drinking cup
against those whom my mistress aims them
with drops from the earthborn
Gorgon’s slit throat
against the man trying to lay siege
to the house of the Erechthidae.
Let no outsider come
to take sovereignty of the city
except one of the noble people of Erechtheus.

Antistrophe 1
And if death and my mistress’s desire
are thwarted and the time for boldness is lost,
she who just now saw a glimmer of hope,
either will thrust in the sharpened sword
or fasten a noose about her neck and
enduring suffering on top of suffering

39 Einodia, a goddess of crossroads, often associated with Hecate. Perhaps the reference to assaults (1049) at the crossroads picks up the Oedipus theme. Here she is called Demeter’s daughter, identifying her with Kore/Persephone.
she will descend into another
form of existence.
As long as she lives
in the shining rays of the sun
she will not put up with outsiders
from foreign lands lording it in her home,
born as she is of a line of noble ancestors.

Strophe 2
I’d feel shame before Bacchus,
god of many hymns, if beside the streams of Callichorus,\(^{40}\) sleepless during the night he will look at
the torch, witness to the festival\(^{41}\) day celebration
when the starry sky
of Zeus leads the dance
and the moon dances
and the fifty daughters
of Nereus, who on the sea
and in eddies of swift flowing rivers
celebrate in dance
the golden-crowned maiden
and her revered mother.
This is where he hopes to be king
taking over the toil of others,
Phoebus’ wandering hobo.

Antistrophe 2
All of you who walk with the Muses,
and sing inharmonious songs
of our marriages and unions
performed by Kupris who knows no right
see how much we surpass in piety
the unjust sowing of men.
Let the song be sung in reverse
and the muse sing out of tune against men
for their heedless couplings.
The son of Zeus’ sons shows
his ingratitude,
not fathering children in the house
and sharing this happy fate

\(^{40}\)1075–86: Callichorus (“of beautiful dances”), a spring at Eleusis. The chorus is singing
about the Eleusinian Mysteries, celebrated from the fifteenth to the twenty-third day of the
month Boedromion (the third Attic month, roughly equivalent to second half of September to
early October): the twentieth was the day of the procession from Athens to Eleusis.

\(^{41}\)1077: Festival: in Greek, “twentieth.” See n. 40 above.
with our mistress. But giving pleasure
to another Aphrodite,
he begot a bastard.

Fourth Episode (1106–1228)
Servant, Chorus

Servant enters on Parodos B.

Servant
Tell me, women, where I can find the renowned
daughter of Erechtheus. I have been all over the city
looking for her and haven’t been able to find her.

Chorus Leader
What is it, my fellow slave? Why have you come
with such speed of foot? What tale do you have to tell?

Servant
We are objects of a manhunt. The local authorities
are searching for her, to put her to death by stoning.

Chorus Leader
Ah me (oimoi)! What will you tell us? Not that we
are caught perpetrating the secret murder of the boy?

Servant
You got it. You will soon have a share in the punishment.

Chorus Leader
How did the secret stratagems come into the light?

Servant
The god exposed them: he wanted to avoid pollution.

Chorus Leader
How? I am your suppliant and beg you to tell.
If we must die all the same, death would be easier
when we know what happened, or if we are to live.

Servant
When Creusa’s husband left the god’s oracular shrine
with his new son, he set off to arrange the sacrificial
feast that he was preparing for the god.
After that Xuthus would go where Bacchus’ fires
leap up, so he could drench with sacrifices Dionysus’
twin rocks as thank offerings for the birth of the lad.

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42 1117: [Injustice was defeated by justice.] This line is probably an interpolation by a
teacher that made its way into the text.

43 1225–6: Bacchus’ fires: lights seen on Mount Parnassus, whether the torches of
celebrating Bacchants or natural phenomena seen at twilight.
He said to his son, “My boy, you stay here and see that
the workers put up well-constructed canopies.
If I am gone a long time sacrificing to the gods
of birth, serve the feast to your friends who are there.”
He took the calves and left. The young man was intent
on framing the enclosure for the canopies
with uprights: there were no walls. He guarded well
against the sun’s beams, not facing towards
the midday beams of blazing sun, nor again
those rays completing their life’s daily course.
He marked off a square the length of a hundred feet\(^\text{44}\)
having the internal area measure of ten thousand
feet as experts direct, so he could invite
the whole population of Delphi to the feast.
He brought sacred weavings from the treasuries
to use for shade, a real feast for the eyes.
First he cast over it a flap made of robes for a roof,
offerings made by Zeus’ son, which Heracles
gave to the god, spoils he took from the Amazons.
Images had been designed into these weavings:
Uranus gathering the stars in the circle of the sky;
Helios driving his horses into his fiery sunset,
drawing along Hesperus’ gorgeous twilight.
Night, garbed in black, whirled her chariot with a team
of two—no trace horses—and the stars escorted the goddess.
The Pleiades made their way through the middle course
of the sky and sword-bearing Orion; above them
was the Bear, turning her golden tail at the pole;
the circle of the full moon shot rays up as if
at mid-month. And there were the Hyades, the clearest
sign to sailors, and Eos the Dawn, bringer of light
chased away the stars. And on the sides, for walls,
he put around weavings from foreign lands
evenly-oared ships arrayed against Greeks
and creatures half man, half beast, and hunting for deer
on horseback and the pursuit of ferocious lions.
At the entrances, Cecrops with his daughters
beside him, twisting with snaky spirals: the offering

\(^{44}\)1137–9: A hundred feet: a Greek plethron, one sixth of a stade. The experts (hoi sophoi)
would be like present-day wedding planners. See Owen’s note ad 1137 (p. 145): “in a booth 100
ft. square, allowing for passages and spaces, 336 people can be seated at table.”
of some Athenian. In the middle of the dining hall he set up golden wine bowls. A herald in his official capacity went around and invited any of the residents who wished to attend the dinner. And when the hall was full, the guests, with garlands in their hair, filled their spirits with the fine food. After they had had enough to eat, an old man came along and stood in the middle of the space. Laughter rippled through the assembly of feasters because of his bumptiousness. He poured out water from pitchers for washing hands and lit incense of myrrh resin; he took charge of the golden cups: each of these tasks he assigned to himself. When it was time for music and the shared bowl of the symposium, the old man said, “We must get rid of the small wine cups and bring out bigger ones so folks can more quickly reach a pleasurable high.” There was general commotion of people bringing silver and gold drinking cups. The old man picked one out specially, as if to favor the new master and gave him the full vessel of wine to which he had added the lethal drug they say mistress had given him to do away with the young man. At the time no one knew this. While this newly identified son was making a libation with all the others one of the servants uttered an inauspicious word. And because he was raised in the temple among noble seers, he took it as an omen and ordered another fresh bowl to be filled. He poured the earlier one on the ground as libation to the gods and told everyone to pour theirs out. A hush fell over the party as we filled the sacred vessels with water and Bybline wine.

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45 1163–5: Athenian: there is no need to wonder about Ion’s extensive knowledge of Athenian history and legend: he would learn from the offerings (art treasures to us and to the ancients, as we see from poems by Theocritus, Idyll 15 and Herodas, Mimiambus 4, for example) and from the visitors themselves.

46 1166: Wine bowls are kraters (“mixing bowls”) in which water and wine were mixed together in the ancient Greek custom.

47 1194: Bybline wine, a sweet wine from Thrace. Hesiod in Works and Days (589–93) praises Bybline as a refreshing wine to drink on a hot day in June while sitting on a shady rock. It had a good nose (euōdē) at four years as if just pressed according to the host in Theocritus Idyll 14 (lines 15–16), who served it at his drinking party where it had the effect of loosening up the group, too much so, for it led to tears, violence, and heartbreak. In Athenaeus’
While we were doing this a throng of doves on the wing descended on the structure (they live fearlessly in Loxias’ halls). They were thirsty and they put their beaks into the puddles of spilled wine and gulped it down into their feathery throats. For all the others the offering to the god was harmless but the one that alit in the drink the new son had poured out and tasted it, all at once its feathered body went into a divine seizure; it let out a cry no one could interpret. The entire company of feasters was astonished at the bird’s distress. She died in convulsions, turning up the claws on her red legs. The son named by the oracle threw his arms, bare of his cloak, up over the table and shouted, “Who is it that was trying to kill me? Tell me, old man, for the officiousness was all yours and I received the drink from your hand.” He seized him by his aged arm and searched him so he would catch him red-handed, in possession of the poison. He was found out, but only under compulsion did he tell of Creusa’s daring and her stratagem with the drink. He took along some of the feasters and ran outside—Loxias’ young man, delivered by the Pythian oracle. He took a stand among the Pythian leaders and said, “Holy Earth, the daughter of Erechtheus, the foreign woman, has attempted to murder me by poison.” The leaders of the Delphians decided that my mistress be put to death by stoning, and not by a single vote, on the charges of trying to murder the holy man in the temple and polluting it with death. The whole city is hunting her, that woman sadly making her way on a tragic journey. From Phoebus she acquired a longing for children and now has lost her life and the hope of children with it.

_Deipnosophists_, there is the additional information about the origin of the name (alternatively spelled Bibline or Biblian) that it is named after a region or mountain range in Thrace (Athenaeus 1.56). Thanks to Owen for the references, Perseus for the texts, and A. S. Gow for a lengthy note in _Theocritus_, vol. II, 250–1, Cambridge, 1950 (reprinted 2008).

48 1221: _Foreign woman_, the play may be set in Delphi, but it is performed in Athens, where Creusa is proud of being one of the autochthonous natives.

49 1223: _Not by a single vote_ probably just means that it was not close: “not (just) one” is litotes for “many”. It is also possible that the rulers took separate votes on the two charges.
Astrophic Choral Interlude (in place of Fourth Stasimon) 1229–49

CHORUS

There is no escape from death
for me in my distress, no way, none.
It’s clear now; everything comes clear:
the offerings from Dionysus’
clusters of grapes, mixed in murder
with the gore of slithering snakes.
Clear too the sacrifices to the dead below,
the end of my life,
mutilation and death by stoning for my mistress.
With what flight on wings
or under the dark caverns of earth may I go
to avoid death’s destruction
by stoning; mounting a chariot
of swift steeds
or the stern of a ship?
There is no way to hide unless a god
decides to spirit one away from the scene. 1245
What then, unhappy mistress, awaits
your soul to suffer? Will we, too, in our willingness
to do harm to our neighbor ourselves
suffer a just reward?

Exodos (Closing Sequence) 1250–1622

1 Creusa, Chorus, Ion (1250–1319)

CREUSA

Servants, we are pursued to deadly slaughter,
defeated by the Pythians’ verdict, and I am given up.

50 After 1228: it is not obvious from the text by which parodos the Servant (messenger) exits after his speech. He comes from above (B) since he was a witness to the feast. Does he continue his search by going down along parodos A? Creusa will enter by that route after the choral ode, which might be awkward. On the other hand, the warning of the Servant and pursuit by others might be what motivates Creusa to sneak out of the lodging where she has been sheltering. Or does he exit along parodos B because the actor will soon return that way as Ion?

51 1244–5: Spirit one away: as they sometimes do in battle scenes in epic poetry.
CHORUS LEADER
We know, poor woman, what troubles fortune has left you in.

CREUSA
Where can I run? I barely got away from the guest house
to avoid death and reached here by stealth, escaping my enemies.

CHORUS LEADER
Where else than to the altar?
CREUSA
And how does that help me?

CHORUS LEADER
It is sanctioned to kill a suppliant.
CREUSA
But it is by law that I am to be put to death.

CHORUS LEADER
Yes, once you are caught.
CREUSA
Look there. My bitter foes are upon us.
With drawn swords.

CHORUS LEADER
Hurry. Take your place at the altar. Now!
Creusa takes her place as a suppliant at the altar.

ION
Cephisus,\(^{52}\) with your bullish face, look what you
produced as a descendant in this woman: a viper,
a serpent, her eyes flashing a blood-red flame.
Her daring knows no bounds and she’s as potent
as the Gorgon’s blood with which she meant to kill me.
Take her. Let the highlands of Parnassus comb out
the still unspoiled locks of her hair from which
she will be hurled like a discus in a rocky plummet.
It was a piece of good luck that I fell into
a stepmother’s clutches before arriving in Athens.
Among my friends I got the measure of your mind,
how destructive your hostility toward me was.
If you had cornered me inside your house
you would have dispatched me at once to Hades’ halls.
Well, the altar and house of Apollo will not
protect you. Any pity for you belongs more to me

\(^{52}\)1261: Cephisus: Creusa’s great-grandfather on her mother’s side, an Attic river god
taking the shape of a bull, depicted as a man sprouting horns.
and my mother. She may not be with me in person, but the name of Mother is never far from my heart. Look at the criminal mind at work: from one scheme she weaves another: she crouches at the god’s altar so she will escape the just penalty for her deeds.

CREUSA
You cannot kill me. I forbid it, speaking on my own behalf and for the god at whose altar I stand.

ION
What do you and Phoebus have in common?

CREUSA
I give my body to the god as a sacred possession.

ION
And yet you tried to poison one who belonged to the god.

CREUSA
You no longer belonged to the god, but to your father.

ION
I had just met my father. I am speaking of my real father.

CREUSA
You were his then. But now I am and you are not.

ION
You are not devoted. My life then was one of devotion.

CREUSA
I wanted to kill you because you are an enemy to my house.

ION
I didn’t invade your land leading an armed force.

CREUSA
You did! To set fire to the house of Erechtheus.

ION
Where are the torches? Where the blazing fires?

CREUSA
You plan to live in my home, to take what’s mine by force.

ION
You were trying to kill me in fear of my intentions?

CREUSA
So I would not die if they became more than intentions.

ION
With no child of your own you resent my father finding me.

CREUSA
And you were going to usurp the homes of the barren?

Nauck (1889) and many subsequent editors place lines 1296 after 1303.
ION
Yes. When my father gave me the land he possesses. 1296

CREUSA
What portion of Pallas’ land belongs to Aeolus’ progeny? 1297

ION
He rescued it with the force of arms, not words. 1298

CREUSA
As a mercenary, he could never be a landowner in the country. 1299

ION
Then was there no share in the land for me and Father? 1304

CREUSA
Whatever shield and spear possess. That is your inheritance. 1305

ION
Leave the altar and the god’s holy seat.

CREUSA
Give that advice to your mother, whoever she is.

ION
Won’t you accept the consequences of trying to kill me?

CREUSA
Yes, if you are willing to slaughter me in this sacred space.

ION
Do you get a thrill from dying among the god’s sacred symbols? 1310

CREUSA
I will grieve someone by whom I have been grieved.

ION
Phew (pheu)
What a mess. The gods have laid down these laws badly for mortals and have not used wise planning. It is not right that the unjust can sit at the altar, but they should be driven away. It is not right for the wicked hand to touch what belongs to the gods, but only the just: those who have been wronged should sit at the holy place. The good and the evil going to the same altar ought not to have equal protection from the gods.

2 Prophetess (Pythia) (1320–1368)
Prophetess and Ion, speaking; Creusa silent

The Pythian Prophetess, carrying a wicker-work hamper, enters from the temple.

PROPHETESS
Stop, child. For it is I, priestess of Phoebus. Leaving my prophetic post, I cross over the temple’s threshold. It is I who preserve the ancient custom of Apollo’s tripod, chosen for this out of all the women of Delphi.
Greetings, dear mother, though you did not give me birth.

So I am called and the name does not offend me.

You have heard this woman tried to kill me with her plots.

I have heard, but you are wrong to be so unforgiving.

Shouldn’t I pay back in kind someone who tried to kill me.

Wives are always hostile to children from an earlier union.

Yes, and so are we to stepmothers who try to harm us.

Stop! Leave the holy shrine. It’s time to go to your fatherland.

To do what, if I follow your advice?

Go to Athens guiltless, under good omens.

Everyone is guiltless who kills his enemies.

You would not be. Receive from me the words I have to say.

Tell me then. Anything you say has my interest at heart.

Do you see this basket I am holding in my arms?

I see an ancient hamper decorated with ribbons.

It was in this that I picked you up back then, a new born baby.

What are you saying? A new chapter is brought into the story.

Yes, I kept them secret. Now I am bringing them to light.

Why did you hide them when you took me in, long ago?

The god wanted to keep you as a servant in his house.

And now he doesn’t want it? How can I be sure of this?

When he named your father, he was sending you away.
ION
  Was it from his orders, or why did you save these things?

PROPHETESS
  Loxias put the thought in my head at that time.

ION
  To do what? Tell me. Fill in the details.

PROPHETESS
  To keep the things I found right up to the present time.

ION
  What profit or loss does it have for me? 1350

PROPHETESS
  In here are the baby clothes in which you were wrapped.

ION
  Are you offering these things as a way to search for my mother?

PROPHETESS
  The god is in favor of this now. Earlier he was against it.

ION
  These revelations make this is a happy day for me.

PROPHETESS
  Take them now and search hard for your mother. 1355

    Prophetess hands the hamper to Ion.

ION
  I will go all over Asia and the borderlands of Europe.

PROPHETESS
  You will discover this for yourself. For the god’s sake
  I reared you, my child, and hand these over to you,
  which he wanted me to take, without asking,
  and to keep safe. I cannot say what his purpose was. 1360
  No one among mortal men knew that I had
  these things; no one knew where they were hidden.
  Goodbye now. Just as if I had given you birth, one last hug.54

    Exit Prophetess back into the temple.

3 Ion, Creusa (1369–1552)

ION
  Pheu, pheu. My eyes are brimming with tears

______________________________

541364–8: [You must begin with where to look for your mother:
  first if one of the Delphian girls gave you birth
  and exposed you in this temple, an unmarried maiden.
  Then if some Greek woman. From me you have
  everything; from Phoebus too. He has a share in your fate.]
Probably an interpolation to explain what is going on, but unnecessary and vapid.
as my mind draws me there, where my mother, after
a secret liaison, in secret bargained my life away;
did not give me her breast, but left me nameless
in the god’s temple where I lived the life of a slave.
The god’s part has been fine, but my fate is grave,
for the time I should have basked, cradled
in my mother’s arms, and taken a child’s joy in life
I was deprived of my own dear mother’s nurture.
And my mother too is wretched because she suffers
the same grief, deprived of her child as a source of joy.
Now I will take the chest and offer it to the god
as a dedication, so I won’t find anything I don’t want
to find. If it turns out my mother is a slave
it would be worse to find her than to leave her to silence.
“Phoebus, I dedicate this to your temple . . .”
But wait. What’s come over me? I am fighting
the god’s wish, who saved tokens of my mother for me.
The truth must be uncovered and whatever is,
whatever is to be, must be endured, I cannot escape it.
Sacred fillets, what is it you have kept hidden so long
and fastenings which guard things precious to me?
Look at this! The covering of the rounded chest,
how it has not gotten old, through some divine working,
there is no mildew in its woven structure. But a long
time has passed in between for these treasured objects.

CREUSA
What is this apparition I see beyond my wildest dream?!

ION
You, be quiet. You’ve already caused me enough harm.

CREUSA
There is no place here for silence. Do not advise that.
I see the carrier in which many years ago I placed you,
oh, my child, when you were still a newborn baby,
at the cave of Cecrops and under the ledge of the Long Rocks.
I shall leave the sanctuary of this altar even if I must die.

Creusa leaves the altar and rushes toward Ion.

ION
Seize her. She must be maddened by the god to rush away
from the altar and images of the gods. Secure her arms.
The armed men move to restrain Creusa, but she is able to approach Ion and reach for the
hamper.

CREUSA
Go ahead and kill me. I will take hold of this and you
and what is hidden inside that belongs to you.
Isn’t this awful. I am seized as property, by trickery.

The armed men restrain Creusa while Ion examines the hamper and goes through its contents.

As Creusa identifies the objects Ion holds each one up.

No, but you are found dear to those who love you.

I dear to you? And yet you secretly tried to kill me.

Yes, as my child, which is the dearest thing to a parent.

Stop weaving your lies. I’ll catch you yet.

I hope it comes to that. I’m all for it, my son.

This chest, is it empty or does it contain various items?

What you were wearing when I exposed you.

And will you be able to tell what they are before seeing them?

If I cannot, I will submit to my death.

Tell me then. Your audacity is disquieting to me.

Look for a weaving I made as a child.

What was it? Examples of young girls’ handiwork are common.

Not finished, but more like a sampler from the loom.

What does it look like? I don’t want to be taken in by this.

A Gorgon in the center of the garment’s fabric.

O Zeus! What destiny is hunting me out?

It is surrounded with a fringe of snakes like the aegis.

Look here!

This is the weaving! We find it a bit mysterious.

Ah, the girlish working of my loom so long ago.

Anything else? Or did you get lucky in only that one?
CREUSA
Two serpents glistening with solid gold jaws,
a gift of Athena with which she tells us to rear children
as an imitation of Erichthonius of olden days.

ION
What is it for? Tell me how the golden ornament is used. 1430

CREUSA
For the new-born baby to wear around his neck, my child.

ION
These are in here. And the third: I want to know about the third.

CREUSA
Back then I put around you a garland of olive
which Athena’s rocky ground first brought forth
and if it’s there it has never lost its fresh green color
but still flourishes because it’s from an incorruptible olive.

ION
My dear, dear mother, I’m so glad to find you;
let me bend down and press my cheek to yours. 1435

CREUSA
My son, light brighter than the sun to your mother
(I know the god will forgive me\textsuperscript{55}), I have you in my arms, found against all expectation, whom I believed to be living down below with the dead in the earth, in Persephone’s hands.

ION
My dear mother, in your arms I seem to move between the worlds of the living and the dead.

CREUSA
Io, io. Bright unfolding of the shining ether, what sound shall I cry out? How has this unexpected sweetness happened to me? Where has my happiness come from?

ION
For me, mother, anything was likely to have happened rather than this: that I am yours!

CREUSA
I am still trembling in fear.

ION
In fear that it isn’t me you hold, though you do?
CREUSA
Yes, I had thrown all my hopes

\textsuperscript{55}1440: \textit{Forgive me}: when characters compare themselves to gods they usually make a token apology.
away.

Ah (*io*) woman, where was it, where did you take
my baby into your arms?56
In whose hands did he come to Loxias’ halls?

**ION**

This was a god’s doing. May we enjoy our good luck
in the future after our luckless past.

**CREUSA**

My child, your birth was full of tears;
you were parted from your mother’s arms amid cries of anguish.
But now with my lips pressed to your cheeks, I draw breath
feeling a most sublime pleasure.

**ION**

My own pleasure is the same as yours.

**CREUSA**

I am no longer childless;
our home has a hearth; the land has its kings;
and Erechtheus is young again.
The home of the Earthborn no longer looks on darkness,
but looks up on the sun’s shining rays.

**ION**

Mother, Father should be here, too, to share
in this gladness that I have given you both.

**CREUSA**

My son,

what are you saying? How I am caught out!

**ION**

What do you mean?

**CREUSA** You were fathered somewhere else.

**ION**

Oh my (*omoi*). Your girlhood bore me as your bastard.

**CREUSA**

Not with wedding torches or dancing
did my marriage rite
bear your dear person.

**ION**

*Aitai.* Am I ill-born, mother? Where did I come from?

**CREUSA**

Let the Gorgon-killer know.

**ION**

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56 1454: *io, woman*: as if addressing the Pythian priestess (Prophetess), though she is not there. But we in the audience already know the answers to these questions from Hermes’ monologue in the prologue and that Ion is right (1456).
Why do you say that?

CREUSA
She who presides over my rocky land
on the olive-bearing hill. 1480

ION
Your words are obscure and not at all clear.

CREUSA
By the nightingales’ rockface, with Phoebus...

ION
Why speak of Phoebus?

CREUSA
I had a secret liaison.

ION
Tell me: what you are saying is my good fortune. 1485

CREUSA
In the tenth circle of the months
I bore a child in secret to Phoebus.

ION
That’s welcome news if what you say is true.

CREUSA
Your mother’s maiden work
I put around you as baby clothes
the back and forth of my loom. 1490
I did not hold you to my breast for milk,
a mother’s nourishment, nor bathe you with my hands
but in an empty cave as food to be preyed on
by the sharp talons of birds
you were left to go to Hades.

ION
What terrible daring, mother.

CREUSA
Crippled by fear,
my child,
I threw away your life.
Against my will I meant to kill you.

ION
And by my hand
you nearly died. 1500

CREUSA
Io, io. We have had a terrible time of it
and still are:
we are twisted this way and that
by ill fortune
and then again by good fortune. 1505
But the winds keep shifting.
At last let them stay put.
The old evils were enough; now let a fair wind take us away from troubles, my child.

CHORUS LEADER
No one should ever think anything is beyond hope for mankind, in the light of what’s happening now.

ION
Ah, chance, you have shifted for thousands of mortals, now to be unhappy and then again to do well, to what a turning point of life we had come, almost to slay a mother and suffer unworthily.

Pheu.
Is it possible to understand in the shining courses of the sun all these changes day after day? In you, mother, we have made a discovery dear to us and I’m sure my origin cannot be disparaged. But I want us to talk alone about other things. Come here—I want to whisper words into your ear. and to hide them in darkness with the deeds.

Ion and Creusa withdraw a few steps and speak quietly together.

Look, mother, to see if in a weak moment as happens to young women, you stumbled into a secret liaison, and then laid the blame on the god and, to avoid any disgrace that would fall on me, you claim you bore me to Phoebus though I’m not the god’s.

CREUSA
By Athena Nike who carried her shield in her chariot beside Zeus against the children of the Earth, I swear no mortal man is your father, my son, but lord Loxias, the very one who raised you.

ION
How is it that he gave his own child to another man and said that I am Xuthus’ natural son?

CREUSA
Not that you are Xuthus’, but he is giving you as a gift, though you are his own, as a friend might give his son to a friend to adopt as his heir and master of his house.

ION
Is the god true, or are his oracles in vain? It troubles me in my mind, as is natural.

CREUSA
Listen, then, son, to what has come into my mind: Loxias has settled you in a noble home for your benefit. If you were called the god’s you would not ever have a traditional inheritance
nor a father’s name. How could it be, when I hid
my liaison and tried to kill you in secret?
It is to help you that he gives you to another father.

ION

I will not treat this so lightly,
but I will go into the temple and inquire of Phoebus
whether I am born of a mortal father or of Loxias.

_Ion moves toward the temple but hesitates._

Whoa (Ea). What god is this above the halls, sweet
with incense, revealing a face silhouetted in the sun?
Mother, let’s get away, so we won’t look upon
the gods’ presence unless it is favorable to us.

_Athena appears on the roof of the temple._

4 Deus ex Machina (1553–1622)

_Athena, Ion, Creusa, Chorus_

ATHENA

Do not run off. I am not an enemy to flee from,
but friendly to you both here and in Athens.
I have come here, Pallas, the namesake of your
land, in all haste, from Apollo himself,
who did not want to come into your sight,
to avoid blame that would arise from his earlier act,
but he sent me to pass on these words: this woman
bore you to Apollo, who is your father, and he gave you
to whom he gave you, not because he’s your father,
but so that you might become part of a noble family.
When the whole affair was brought into the open,
he was afraid you would die from your mother’s plot
and she from yours. He saved you through his own devices.
Lord Apollo kept these things secret, but intended
to make it known to you in Athens, that you were born
from her and from himself, Phoebus, your father.
To bring closure and extend the god’s oracles:
for this I yoked my chariot—hear me out.

57 After 1549: _Athena’s entrance_: it cannot be determined whether the mēchanē (or
machine, a crane used to fly in gods and Medea in the play that bears her name) was used. Gods
can appear at stage level, on the roof of the stage-building (theologeion or god-dais), or in the
mēchanē. Since Athena does not move from her position to come down and join the action, the
machine is not strictly necessary. However, if a startling effect is wanted: Athena flying in and
settling above the temple in her chariot and flying off in it toward Athens (like Medea in all
respects) would accomplish it.
Take your son and go to the land of Cecrops,  
and seat him on the royal throne,  
for he is born of the line of Erechtheus  
and it is right for him to rule my land.  
He will be famous throughout Hellas: his children,\(^5^8\)  
four of them born from one root, will give  
their names to the land, to the different tribes:  
those who dwell on my rocky ground.  
Geleon will be the namesake of the first; second  
the Opletes, Argades, and last the Aigikores, named  
from my aegis, will have one tribe. The children born  
from them will in turn, at the appointed time,  
colonize the island cities of the Cyclades  
and continental coastlines which will increase the power  
of my land. They will dwell on the plains  
of two continents on opposites sides of the straits,  
Asia and Europe. After this man’s name, they will  
be called Ionians, a name everyone will know.  
You and Xuthus will have a family together:  
Doros for whom the city of Doris in the land  
of Pelops will be celebrated in song. The second,  
Achaios, who will be ruler of the land of Rhium  
beside the sea and of the people there, who  
will be called Achaeans after his name.  
Apollo handled all these details very well: first  
he caused you to deliver without sickness, so your family  
did not know; then when you gave birth to this child and  
exposed him in these baby clothes, he instructed  
Hermes to pick the infant up and bring him here.  
He saw to his nurture and did not let him die.  
Now, keep it quiet that this is your child  
so that Xuthus can keep his pleasant delusion,  
and, you, in turn, lady, may enjoy your blessings.  
Farewell now, from this respite from troubles,  
I promise a happy future for you all.  

\(^{5^8}\)1575–81: His children . . . will give their names: on the early tribes (phylai) see Owen’s “Appendix on the Names of the Tribes” (194–6) and Gibert’s notes on lines 1575–81.
because, though he neglected his son, he returns him to me now. 1610
These doors and the god’s oracular shrine are a welcome sight
though I shrank from them before. But now with gladness in my heart
I hold my hands on the knocker and greet these temple gates.

ATHENA
I commend your change of heart in blessing the god.
Gods take their time. But in the end they are far from feckless. 1615

CREUSA
My child, let us go home.

ATHENA
Go and I will follow.

ION
Our escort is worthy.

CREUSA
And loves our city.

ATHENA
Take your seat on the ancient throne.

ION
A worthy possession for me.

ION and CREUSA exit toward Athens on parodos A.

If the mēchanē is used Athene will be lifted in the same direction; otherwise she will turn as if to
accompany them.

CHORUS
Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, farewell. Anyone
whose house is beset by disasters must honor the gods and bear up. In the end the noble meet with good results
and the bad, as is their nature, never can fare well.

Members of the chorus file out following their mistress on parodos A.