

IO AND THE DARK STRANGER (SOPHOCLES, *INACHUS* F 269a)*

More than a quarter of a century has elapsed since the publication of the Oxyrhynchus papyrus which Lobel identified as a fragment of Sophocles' *Inachus*,¹ and though it has revolutionised our knowledge of the play, it has proved an excellent example of the papyrological commonplace that each new discovery creates more problems than it solves. What could with reasonable confidence be inferred about the *Inachus* from the comparatively numerous ancient quotations and allusions is well summarised in Pearson's introduction:² *Inachus*, Hermes, Argus, and (almost certainly) Iris³ took part in the action, but beyond the fact that the play told of Io's transformation and of blessings bestowed on Argos as a result of Zeus' visitation (not necessarily in that order) the development of the plot could only be conjectured. A majority of those who have discussed the play have shared Hemsterhuys' view that it was satyric,⁴ and the publication in 1933 of a Tebtunis papyrus preserving part of a dramatic composition dealing with Zeus' love for Io and strongly suggesting a satyr-play was welcomed by many as confirmation of this conjecture.⁵ But the ascription of the Tebtunis fragment

* The following books and articles will be cited by author's name alone:

W. M. Calder III, 'The dramaturgy of Sophocles' *Inachus*', *GRBS* 1 (1958), 137 ff.

R. J. Carden, *The Papyrus Fragments of Sophocles* (Berlin–New York, 1974)

C. Froidefond, *Le Mirage égyptien dans la littérature grecque d'Homère à Aristote* (Gap, 1971)

R. Seaford, 'Black Zeus in Sophocles' *Inachus*', *CQ* 30 (1980), 23 ff.

D. F. Sutton, *Sophocles' Inachus* (*Beiträge zur klass. Philologie* 97, Meisenheim am Glan, 1979).

¹ *P. Oxy.* 2369 (Carden 52 ff., Sophocles F 269a Radt). The identification would in any case be plausible in view of the subject-matter, and is put beyond reasonable doubt by the phrase *ἰώ, γὰ, θεῶν* [(1.51) in view of Philodemus' statement (*de piet.* p. 23 Gomperz; cf. S. F 615) that Sophocles *ἐ[ν] Ἰνάχῳ τὴν Γῆν μ[ε]τ[έ]ρα τῶν θεῶν φη[σ]ιν*].

² A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, 1 (Cambridge, 1917), 197 ff.

³ The only evidence for the presence of Iris is the comment of the scholiast on Ar. *Av.* 1203 comparing Pisthetaerus' question to Iris (*ὄνομα δέ σοι τί ἐστι; πλοῖον ἢ κυνῆ;*) with Hermes' words in the *Inachus* *ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰριδος* (F 272) *ἔγνων τίς ἦδε, σὺ δὲ Ἀρκάδος κυνῆς;* (?). M. Mayor (Roscher ii. 347, 12) argued that *Ἰριδος* was a mistake, natural enough given the Aristophanic context, for *Ἰοῦς*; his grounds seem somewhat flimsy, since so little is known about the play, but Iris' function is not obvious, and his doubts should be borne in mind.

⁴ In his edition of Aristophanes' *Plutus* (Harlingen, 1744), p. 248 (on sch. Ar. *Pl.* 727); he did not reveal his reasons. Calder well emphasises the weakness of the arguments which others have adduced in support of this hypothesis, but overstates the case against it. Wilamowitz's view that the *Inachus* was pro-satyric, like the *Alceste*, depends on his own decidedly speculative reconstruction (*Euripides Herakles*, 1 (Berlin, 1889), 88 n. 53). For a survey of the controversy see Sutton 25 ff. Radt ('Sophokles in seinen Fragmenten', *Sophocle: Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 29 [Fondation Hardt, Vandoeuvres–Geneva, 1982], 186 ff.) urges a measure of positive discrimination in favour of Sophoclean satyrs: out of the (probable) total of 122 Sophoclean titles known to us only 13 are expressly designated as satyr-plays, less than half the figure we should expect (given a ratio of three tragedies to one satyr-play), and it is much more likely that some of the missing satyr-plays lurk among the transmitted titles than that they failed to reach the Alexandrian library.

⁵ *P. Tebt.* 692, second century B.C. (Carden 52 ff., Sophocles F 269c Radt). We have no direct proof that this fragment is satyric; the main grounds for so regarding it are the brevity and excitement of the choral songs and the chorus' disorderly reaction to the invisible Hermes playing on the syrinx.

to Sophocles is far from certain,⁶ and its testimony will not allay the doubts of those who are troubled by the lack of direct evidence for satyrs in the *Inachus* and by the feeling that the importance of the moral and theological issues raised makes its theme unusually serious for satyric drama.⁷

The Oxyrhynchus fragment throws no direct light on this problem. Its scene is set before the palace of Inachus, where a distraught speaker, most probably the king himself,⁸ tells the horrified chorus how a mysterious dark-skinned visitor has suddenly absconded after turning Io into a cow; the stichometric numeral $\bar{\Gamma}$ (= 300) in the margin of the fragment's second column establishes (at least) that this episode came nearer the beginning than the end of the play. Carden's invaluable commentary gives a clear picture of the progress of Inachian scholarship up to 1974; since then the play as a whole has been the subject of a monograph by D. F. Sutton, while Richard Seaford, in an ingenious and suggestive article, has argued that there may be more to the dusky skin of Inachus' visitor than meets the eye. Much remains debatable, and the reconstruction of the play exercises the attraction of a cryptogram, its fascination enhanced by the current debate surrounding the *Prometheus Vincitus*, since there must surely be some relation between the *Inachus* and the strange invention of Io's encounter with Prometheus. This article deals with various matters arising from the Oxyrhynchus fragment; for the most part these are details which can be satisfactorily discussed despite the basic uncertainty as to genre, but I shall not attempt to conceal a bias (admittedly subjective) towards tragedy.

ἐκ Διὸς ἀρχώμεθα. The most important question raised by the papyrus concerns the identity of Inachus' visitor. Lobel saw no particular difficulty in supposing the mysterious stranger to be Zeus himself; as he observed, this was not a complete surprise in view of the statement by the scholiast on Aristophanes, *Plutus* 806 (F 275) that in the *Inachus* τοῦ Διὸς εἰσελθόντος⁹ πάντα μετὰ ἀγαθῶν ἐγένοντο, though the scholiast's words would not of course by themselves justify the inference that Zeus actually appeared. Lobel's conception of the part played by the god may be found in his note on the phrase which the chorus use to describe the visitor, ὁ πολυφάρμακος || κάρβανος αἰθός (53–4): 'In view of the fact that Io's son by Zeus was black (κελαινὸν *Ἐπαφον* PV 851), it is not far-fetched to infer that in Sophocles' version of the story (which would have resembled that of Apollodorus l.c.¹⁰) Zeus visited Io both to beget Epaphus and to metamorphose her into a cow in the disguise of a "foreign blackamoor".'

Lobel appears not to have been unduly discomposed by the inference that in the earlier part of the play Sophocles had brought Zeus on stage in the guise of a negro,¹¹

⁶ We cannot pretend to be completely informed about the range of dramatic compositions dealing with this theme which might have circulated in Ptolemaic Egypt; Körte suggested (*APF* 11 [1935], 253–4) that the papyrus might represent that long-felt want of students of the *Ars Poetica*, a Hellenistic satyr-play.

⁷ Sutton, though himself convinced that the play was satyric, well adverts (53–4) to 'the seriousness of the thematic issues raised' and emphasises the real suffering of the characters; he also (51, 78) calls attention to stylistic features which seem nearer to tragedy than to satyric drama.

⁸ For the sake of brevity I shall assume this to be so; for other possibilities see Carden's note on 29 ff. (pp. 61–2).

⁹ εἰσελθόντος: ἐθέλωντος Sutton, *perperam*.
¹⁰ 2. 1. 3: ταύτην (sc. Ἰώ) ἱερωσύνην τῆς Ἥρας ἔχουσιν Ζεὺς ἐφθείρε, φωραθεὶς δὲ ὑφ' Ἥρας τῆς μὲν κόρης ἀψάμενος εἰς βοὴν μετεμόρφωσε λευκήν, ἀπωμόσατο δὲ ταύτη μὴ συνελθεῖν. Cf. Hyg. *fab.* 145: hanc Iuppiter dilectam compressit et in vaccae figuram convertit, ne Iuno eam cognosceret.

¹¹ 'Negro' is convenient, though possibly too specific; however, black people of non-negroid type must have been much less familiar to fifth-century Athenians.

but others have not found this so easy to accept. There is no secure parallel for the presence of Zeus on the tragic stage in the classical period, and many scholars have inferred that convention forbade it. Some have accordingly canvassed the possibility that the visitor's arrival was merely narrated; but the effect would surely have seemed rather contrived, and it is hard to imagine what, on this hypothesis, could have occupied the earlier part of the play. Others have advocated the claims of Hermes acting as Zeus' emissary, underestimating, as it seems to me, the difference between agent and principal. For it is simply not true that, as one interpreter asserts, 'There is nothing Zeus could do that could not be done equally well by his agent Hermes':¹² the procreation of Epaphus could not be delegated. It has also been maintained that the inclusion of Zeus among the *dramatis personae* would have been more acceptable in a satyr-play than in a tragedy, and that this apparent anomaly provides the evidence needed to settle the long-standing uncertainty about the play's proper classification. This last view appears to be gaining ground steadily, but its basis seems to me questionable.

It is not clear why the alleged inhibition against representing Zeus in tragedy should not have been felt to apply with equal force to satyr-plays, though no doubt the scantiness of the material encourages us to form a more permissive view of the conventions governing satyric drama. But, bearing in mind the dangers of formulating general rules when what survives is only a fraction of what was actually produced, we ought to consider whether the undeniable rarity of Zeus' appearances on the tragic stage should not be explained primarily by reference to certain mythological preconditions. Like an Oriental monarch, Zeus keeps his distance; he can declare and enforce his will from afar and, as we may observe from Homer, does not, like the other Olympians, normally descend to earth to achieve his purposes. There are thus, we may infer, relatively few circumstances in which the tragedians might be tempted to bring him on stage. But his amours with mortal women absolutely require his presence on earth, and to assess the force of this supposed tragic ban we need to concentrate on tragedies based on this body of legend.

Within this group the mythological data would at times have cramped the dramatists' style; it is hardly surprising or significant if those who handled the seduction of Europa preferred to avoid the problems of a visibly tauriform Zeus. The surviving fragments of plays which we might expect to be relevant to this question are not, on the whole, very informative. But in one case, Euripides' *Alcmene*, the arguments for supposing Zeus to have been among the *dramatis personae*, though not absolutely irrefutable, are fairly strong.

The principal witness is Plautus' Mercury, who, anticipating objections to Jupiter's appearance in the *Amphitruo*, cites tragic precedent (*Am.* 88–92):

'ipse hanc acturust Iuppiter comoediam.
quid? admiratin estis? quasi uero nouom
nunc proferatur Iouem facere histrioniam;
etiam, histriones anno quom in proscaenio hic
Iouem inuocarunt, uenit, auxilio is fuit.'

The natural interpretation of this speech is that Jupiter had recently (the previous year, if we may take 'anno' literally) appeared in tragedy as a *deus ex machina*. The number of tragedies in which he might have appeared in such a role is extremely limited, and it is generally supposed that Plautus here refers to the version of Euripides' *Alcmene*

¹² Sutton 56. Against the view that Hermes accompanied Zeus on his visit to Inachus see Carden's note on 34 sqq. (pp. 63–4), Seaford 23 f.

which had so impressed him when he wrote the *Rudens* (86 'non uentus fuit, uerum Alcumena Euripidi');¹³ there is of course much more point to the elements of tragic parody in *Amphitruo* if there had been a recent and memorable production of a tragedy with this subject. The storm to which Plautus alludes saved Alcmena from the pyre to which Amphitryon in his wrath consigned her,¹⁴ but an explanation was still urgently required, and only a god could give it. Zeus might have delegated the task to Hermes, but no words from Hermes could ever quite remove certain suspicions from Amphitryon's mind, and it would surely have been much more satisfactory if Zeus himself appeared in the guise in which he had visited Alcmena, to justify her protestations of undeviating constancy by demonstrating that she had no chance of distinguishing him from her husband. Though no doubt strange alterations had often been made to Euripides' plays by the time they appeared in Latin versions, we should surely be reluctant to deprive the author of the credit for so effective an epilogue in favour of an interpolator. Such extraordinary condescension on the part of Zeus may be deemed a just tribute to the outstanding virtue of Alcmena, the only woman among the many on whom he fathered children against whom no charge of sexual impropriety may be upheld; moreover, apart from these elevated considerations of poetic justice, we should also note that in the *Alcmena*, as in the *Inachus*, the stage-manager would not have needed to face the problems of representing a modified version of the splendour which proved fatal to Semele, since the plot requires Zeus to assume a form quite obviously not his own. While the case for Zeus in Euripides' *Alcmena* may not be sufficiently watertight to convert anyone convinced on other grounds that Zeus on the fifth-century tragic stage is as inconceivable as the First Person of the Trinity on the modern, to those who approach the question with an open mind it will surely seem more probable than not.¹⁵

Exotic as a black Zeus may be, this *alias* ought not to have taken us completely by surprise; it should have occurred to someone before the discovery of the papyrus that κελαινός 'Επαφος (A. Pr. 851) should have a negro father. Epaphos is not an isolated sport; the line of Zeus and Io will not cease with him, and we are here given an explanation for the swarthinness of their descendants, the Egyptians and Libyans.¹⁶

Νείλος γὰρ οὐχ ὁμοιον 'Ινάχω γένος τρέφει observes Danaus.¹⁷ To us the

¹³ I assume that Plautus would have neither expected in his audience a knowledge of Euripidean tragedy in its authentic form nor mechanically reproduced a joke from his Diphilean original without regard to its potential effectiveness in the Roman theatre. See further Z. Stewart, 'The *Amphitruo* of Plautus and Euripides' *Bacchae*', *TAPA* 89 (1958), 348–73, esp. 358 ff., T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), 92–3, A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), 76.

¹⁴ We might wonder whether the legend of Croesus' miraculous deliverance (B. iii 53 ff., Hdt. 1. 87. 2) suggested this development to Euripides. We may note that though Herodotus professes uncertainty about Cyrus' motives in committing Croesus to the flames (1. 86. 2 ἐν νόῳ ἔχων εἶτε δὴ ἀκροβίνια ταῦτα καταγιεῖν θεῶν ὅτεω δὴ, εἶτε καὶ εὐχὴν ἐπιτελέσαι θέλων, εἶτε καὶ πυθόμενος τὸν Κροῖσον εἶναι θεοσεβέα τοῦδε εἵνεκεν ἀνεβίβασε ἐπὶ τὴν πυρὴν, βουλόμενος εἰδέναι εἰ τίς μιν δαιμόνων ῥύσεται τοῦ μὴ ζῶντα κατακαυθῆναι) his subsequent narrative rules out the first two possibilities, since Cyrus could hardly repent of what he had undertaken as a religious duty; this cruel and unusual punishment is thus seen as a quasi-judicial ordeal by fire. This connection of ideas explains Thucydides' air of scepticism in reporting the downpour which frustrated Archidamus' attempt to fire Plataea (2. 77. 6); this timely storm could easily be construed as supernatural vindication of the Plataean cause.

¹⁵ The case for supposing Zeus to have appeared in Aeschylus' *Psychostasia* is shaky: see further O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977), 431–2.

¹⁶ On the descendants of Zeus and Io cf. A. Su. 312 ff., Apollod. 2. 1. 4.

¹⁷ A. Su. 497 f.

difference in pigmentation between Greeks and the Egyptians of the Delta (and few Greeks are likely to have penetrated further south) might not seem too great to be explained as the natural result of frequent and prolonged exposure to a hotter sun. But we notice elsewhere in fifth-century authors a tendency to exaggerate the swarthinness of Egyptian skins. Aeschylus recurs repeatedly to the dark complexions of the Danaids and their cousins.¹⁸ Herodotus, though he claims to have visited the country, expresses himself as if he supposed its inhabitants to be negroes, describing them as black-skinned and woolly-haired (2. 104. 2 *μελάγχροές τε... καὶ οὐλότριχες*).¹⁹ A similar view was evidently held by the unknown dramatist (probably a tragedian) who wrote *χρόαν δὲ τὴν εἰν ἥλιος λάμπων φλογὶ|αἰγυπτιώσει*.²⁰ Originating in simple ignorance, mistaken ideas about Egyptian appearance will have received apparent confirmation from the circumstance that negro slaves came to Greece via Egypt.

Given this apparently widespread misconception, a black Zeus provides a neat solution to an awkward problem of physical anthropology. Though some have found the idea rather startling, we should bear in mind that the Greeks of the archaic and classical periods were not unfavourably disposed towards dark skins.²¹ The tallest and most handsome men in the whole world, says Herodotus (3. 20. 1), are to be found among the Ethiopians, while the Egyptians, in his view, are the wisest of men (2. 160). Homer's gods, when they want a holiday, visit the *ἀμύμονες Αἰθιοπῆες*,²² and Zeus himself was *Αἰθίοψ* in Chios.²³ Since the god could expect severe difficulties in evading the attention of Hera while seducing her priestess in a land peculiarly dear to her, and therefore needed an exceptionally effective disguise, there was much to recommend his assuming the features of a race which throughout antiquity bore a reputation for holiness and a special relationship with the gods.²⁴ Whether the idea of a negro Zeus originated with Sophocles we have of course no means of telling.

¹⁸ *Su.* 154, 279 ff., 719, 745, 887.

¹⁹ Cf. 2. 55. 1; 57. 2. This misconception is a long-standing embarrassment to Herodotus' interpreters; the hypothesis that he was confused by the presence of negro slaves and half-breeds (so How and Wells) does little credit to his common sense and powers of observation. He compounds the error by remarking on the strong physical resemblance of Egyptians and Colchians; as with Pindar's *κελαυνώπεσσι Κόλχοισι* (*P.* 4. 212) we evidently have here a reflection of the old conception of Colchis as the most easterly point on a flat earth, where men are toasted by the fierce rays of the rising sun (cf. *Hdt.* 3. 104. 2); but contemporary reality may be found in Hippocrates, who speaks of the yellow skin of those who live on the Phasis (*Aer.* 15). See further D. Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot* (Berlin, 1971), 15–17.

²⁰ *TGrF* Adespota F 161 Kannicht–Snell. Vase-paintings of Heracles and Busiris commonly represent negroes in the king's retinue, and sometimes it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the king himself is supposed to be one; but since negro slaves were common enough in Egypt and there are obvious artistic advantages in thus accentuating the differences between Heracles and his opponent, it would be unfair to treat this material as evidence of real misconception. See further Froidefond 88 ff.

²¹ See further F. M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), *Before Color-Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

²² *Il.* 1. 423 ff., 23. 205–7, *Od.* 1. 22–26. That the poet and his audience understood *Αἰθίοψ* to mean 'Burnt-face' can hardly be doubted: see further *LfgRE*, Frisk, *GEW*, Chantraine, *Dict. étym.* s.v.

²³ *Lyc. Alex.* 537 with sch. *ad loc.*; cf. Eust. 1385. 62 (on *Od.* 1. 22); see further A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, 1 (Cambridge, 1914), 195, 289 f. I imagine Lycophron derived his knowledge of this obscure title from literature rather than from personal study of the antiquities of Chios.

²⁴ The persistence of the Ethiopian character for piety may not be unconnected with the variable location of Ethiopia; see further E. H. Berger, *Mythische Kosmographie der Griechen* (Leipzig, 1904), 22–24, A. Lesky, 'Aithiopika', *Hermes* 97 (1959), 27 ff., A. Dihle, *Umstrittene Daten* (Cologne, 1965), 65 ff.

So much for the colour-problem.²⁵ We may note that in other respects too Inachus' visitor evinces characteristics which Greeks regarded as typically Egyptian. He is skilled with *φάρμακα*, already in the *Odyssey* (4. 227 ff.) an Egyptian specialism.²⁶ He is, as Inachus has found to his cost, sly and crafty: *δεινοὶ πλέκειν τοι μηχανὰς Αἰγύπτιοι*, according to Aeschylus.²⁷ Psychologically as well as physically the visitor thus shews himself peculiarly well qualified to be the progenitor of the race destined to descend from Epaphus, and it is surely absurdly uneconomical to suppose him to be anyone but Zeus. Sophocles offers us an aitiology for Egyptian appearance and national character based on the circumstances in which the founding father of the race was conceived. Io's transformation represents the last stage in the god's dalliance with her; what immediately preceded may be left to our imagination.

It is not my intention to attempt a detailed reconstruction of the earlier part of the play, but it is hardly possible to consider the papyrus without forming some views about what happened in the preceding 280 lines. A fair proportion must have been occupied with the reception of the visitor. Conversation between him and Inachus would provide a natural and convenient way of conveying relevant background information to the audience, and it is an agreeable pastime to imagine how such a dialogue might have run; there would be plenty of scope for ironic overtones and expressions likely to mislead Inachus without positive untruth.²⁸ The stranger has evidently avoided giving his name to Inachus; the king, in accordance with heroic etiquette,²⁹ no doubt avoided badgering his guest with such questions until the latter had eaten, and then found it was too late. The speed of the visitor's departure (which was surely left to the audience's imagination) is a sign of his divinity, rapid movement being characteristic of the Olympians whether or not there is any particular reason for haste.³⁰

We do not know how soon the identity of the visitant was revealed to the audience, nor whether there had been any earlier demonstration of supernatural powers. But certainly another miracle was related in the *Inachus*, the extraordinary and sudden

²⁵ Seaford has argued that there is a further, theological, significance, and that Zeus is here Zeus Chthonius, his sombre hue deriving from his role as lord of the dead; in developing this conception here Sophocles may, he argues, have been influenced by what he knew of Osiris, with whose spouse, Isis, Io was certainly identified in the Hellenistic age (Call. *Ep.* 57. 1, cf., perhaps, fr. 383. 12 ff.). Obviously we cannot rule out the possibility that Sophocles' mind moved on some such lines, but I find it hard to believe that he could have expected his audience to follow him. If we may take Herodotus as representing general Greek conceptions about Egyptian religion, we may note that (a) he does not equate Osiris with Zeus or Hades, but with Dionysus (2. 42. 2; 144. 2), (b) he does not suggest any connection between Apis (= Epaphus) and either Osiris or Isis, (c) though he alludes (2. 41. 2) to the iconographical resemblance which favoured the identification of Io and Isis (and which, almost certainly, accounts for the extension of Io's wanderings from Euboea to Egypt), he is clearly unaware that they might be identified; for him Isis is Demeter. That this theologically much more satisfactory equation was already well established is suggested by the presence of a figurine of Isis in the grave of a rich lady buried at Eleusis c. 800 B.C. (the so-called 'Isis-grave'), where the unusually copious grave-offerings have been thought to suggest that the lady herself served Demeter as priestess of the local cult (see *AEphem.* 1898, pl. 6, *BSA* 64 [1969], 145 f., pl. 35b, J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* [London, 1977], 79 f.). See further Roscher ii. 270 s.v. Io (Engelmann), *RE* ix. 1737 (Eitrem).

²⁶ We may compare Herodotus' observation that Egypt is full of doctors (2. 84); see further Froidefond 58 ff.

²⁷ Fr. 726 Mette; the trait is well illustrated by Herodotus' tale of Rhampsinitus and the dishonest architect (2. 121); see further Gow on Theoc. 15. 49, Froidefond 93 ff., 225 f.

²⁸ It would be pleasant to suppose that the condescending and sententious couplet F 282 was addressed by Inachus to his divine guest.

²⁹ Cf. *Od.* 1. 169 ff., 3. 69 ff., 7. 236 ff.

³⁰ Cf. *Od.* 1. 319 f., 410 (*οἶον ἀναίεσθαι ἄφαρ οἴχεται*), 3. 371 ff.; for cases where there is no motive for haste cf. *Il.* 13. 63–72, 18. 616, 24. 121.

abundance which followed the advent of Zeus (F 275 τοῦ Διὸς εἰσελθόντος πάντα μετὰ ἀγαθῶν ἐγένοντο).³¹ This is generally supposed to have occurred at the conclusion of the play, marking the resolution of the troubles afflicting Inachus' kingdom (and providing the happy ending needed in a satyr-play). Yet τοῦ Διὸς εἰσελθόντος suggests a much earlier point in the action, and it may be worth considering the possibility that this miracle marked the god's union with Io, a counterpart to the spontaneous fertility with which the earth greets the union of Zeus and Hera in the *Iliad* (14. 347 ff.).³²

This motif also well suits a theoxeny; we may recall the unfailing supply of wine which alerted Baucis and Philemon to the presence of divinities under their humble roof (Ov. *Met.* 8. 679–80). F 283 τοιόνδ' ἐμὸν Πλούτων' ἀμεμφείας χάριν³³ looks like an announcement of this benefaction: Zeus promises Inachus a generous return for his irreproachable conduct.³⁴ In the heroic world (and not there only) hospitality offers a useful yardstick of morality in general; Inachus may be deemed to have passed triumphantly the test devised by Zeus inspecting, *mortali specie*, conditions on earth.³⁵

Whether, however, this miracle could already have been revealed to the audience before Io's transformation is another matter; there would scarcely have been time to do it justice if it was reported in the earlier part of the play. Perhaps the horror of Io's metamorphosis was rapidly offset by good news of simultaneous developments within the palace's storerooms, affording temporary grounds for optimism until it became clear that Io was not to be permitted the placid existence of ordinary cows.

Faced with the sudden horror of Io's transformation the chorus explicitly, Inachus by implication (since otherwise he would not so revile the stranger), shew that they have mistaken miracle for magic, a common, but regrettable, misapprehension in those who are directly exposed to divine intervention. The irony of the situation will escape us if we lose sight of the distinction between two quite different explanations for happenings outside the normal order of events: the chorus assumes unscrupulous manipulation of the laws of nature, but we know that those laws have simply been overridden. The dramatic potential of such misconception is well illustrated, in rather different ways, by the reactions of Euripides' Pentheus and Plautus' Amphitruo to their disturbing visitors.³⁶

³¹ See above, p. 293.

³² We have perhaps another parallel for this miraculous bounty in the unexpected wealth which the golden shower brought to the palace of Acrisius in Euripides' *Danae* (fr. 324–8); see further Schmid-Stähelin i, 3. 596.

³³ Both τοιόνδ' and ἐμὸν have been suspected.

³⁴ Or, perhaps, ἀμεμφείας χάριν means 'so that Inachus will have no cause to find fault'. The effect of this miracle would be enhanced, as would the merit of Inachus' hospitality, if Wilamowitz (loc. cit. n. 4) was right in supposing that at some point in the play the land of Argos was afflicted by a plague or blight which brought famine (cf. F 276, 284, 286, 294); he put this disaster after Zeus' union with Io, but it might be worth considering the possibility that Argos was gripped by famine at the opening of the play. But the evidence for this blight is not absolutely unambiguous.

³⁵ Cf. *Od.* 17. 485–7. The New Testament well illustrates the prevalence of such beliefs. Apart from the reception accorded to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra in Phrygia Galatica (*Act. Ap.* 14. 11 f.), we may note that the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* supports his (or her) injunctions about hospitality (13. 2) not by an appeal to general humanitarian considerations nor, as we might expect in a Christian context, by reference to the teaching embodied in the parable of the sheep and the goats (*Ev. Matt.* 25. 31 ff.), but by an allusion to a strange episode in the life of Abraham (*Gen.* 18–19): διὰ ταύτης (sc. τῆς φιλοξενίας) ἐλαθόν τινες ξενίσαντες ἀγγέλους.

³⁶ For specific references to the divine visitors as foreign magicians see E. *Ba.* 234, Pl. *Am.* 1043. W. H. Friedrich, *Euripides u. Diphilos, Zetemata* 5 (1953), 271, offers some suggestive observations on the resemblances between Pentheus and Amphitruo; see also Stewart op. cit. (n. 13).

We may now consider two vexed questions relating to Io's metamorphosis; both centre on far-fetched comparisons with other animals.

The concluding lines of Io's transformation are a long-standing enigma (40–43):

ποδῶν δὲ χηλ[αὶ
κροτοῦσι θράν[
γυνή λέαινα π.[
ῆσται λυεργ[

While most scholars have supposed γυνή λέαινα to involve a comparison to the sphinx, perhaps embroidered or woven on a tapestry, we can hardly ignore the objection trenchantly stated by A. M. Dale:³⁷

The whole metamorphosis is being directly and forcefully described by Inachus in eight lines of indignant pity, leading up to *ποιαῦτα*, and comparisons with other compound monsters or descriptions of embroidered cloths or carpets would tail off with debilitating effect. The seated woman can only be Io.

But her own suggestion, that λέαινα is here used in a generalised way to mean 'beast',³⁸ has found scant support. The failure to reach a satisfactory solution to this problem undermines confidence in attempts to answer the larger questions raised by this piece, since it is hard altogether to dismiss the suspicion that so odd a detail may be significant.

Pfeiffer called for an Oedipus to read the riddle and banish the monster; what I have to offer may seem more reminiscent of the less subtle method by which Heracles disposed of the leviathan threatening Hesione. But it seems not to have been observed that the sphinx could be removed by a slightly different articulation: γυνή (ἐ)λέαιν' απ.[. In view of the comparatively generous provision of accents and breathings in the papyrus we might have expected that *scriptio plena* would alert the reader to the augment which, on this interpretation, drops out by prodelision, but ἡ ἵθαδε (21) is similarly treated. Though λε(ι)αίνω is not attested elsewhere in drama, it is Homeric,³⁹ and can hardly be regarded as beneath the dignity of tragedy (much less that of a satyr-play); for the short first syllable we may compare *λεάντεια*, guaranteed by metre in an epigram by the Hellenistic poet Phanias.⁴⁰ On this hypothesis Io was making something smooth (to use as non-committal a rendering as possible) at the time of, or shortly before, her transformation, but could no longer continue when her hands changed to hooves. What clatters on the bench (41) (on which, I imagine, she had been sitting) must then be either her front hooves, since she can no longer sit upright,⁴¹ or the work which she drops. λυεργ[(43) may indicate that she had been spinning, an occupation so commonplace that no special significance need attach to it beyond the pathos inherent in the fact that this simple and useful activity is now impossible for her, but I prefer to see a reference to her clothes⁴² (e.g. ῆσται λυεργ[οῦς

³⁷ 'The transformation of Io, Ox. Pap. xxiii 2369', *CR* n.s. 10 (1960), 194–5 (= *Collected Papers* [Cambridge, 1969], 137–8).

³⁸ She compared E. *Hel.* 375–80, where Callisto, having been transformed into a bear, is said to have a *σχῆμα λεαίνης*. On this interpretation Carden well comments '(i) The Euripides passage is corrupt, and therefore shoddy "support" for our passage, (ii) it is hard to accept this shift in meaning'.

³⁹ *Il.* 4. 111, 15. 261, *Od.* 8. 260.

⁴⁰ *A.P.* 6. 295. 5 = *HE* 2982. See also Frisk, *GEW*, Chantraine, *Dict. étym.* s.v. *λεῖος*.

⁴¹ So Miss Dale, who supposed that Io had been spinning (cf. λυεργ[(43)). This meets a difficulty raised by Lobel, who, finding it 'perhaps unreasonable to suppose that Io, even after her change, climbed on the furniture', suggested that *θράνος* was here used with the unusual sense of 'floorboard' (cf. *LSJ* s.v. *θράνος* ii 1).

⁴² So Seaford, though he adopts a rather different approach otherwise.

ἐν ῥακώμασι στολῆς *vel. sim.*), potentially an awkward point in so detailed and realistic description of an indoor metamorphosis.⁴³

λείανω might not doubt describe the performance of various domestic tasks, spinning, for example, envisaged as the production of smooth thread from raw wool, or folding down washing for tidy storage. But the verb most obviously suggests grinding something down to a powder or paste, a familiar enough employment for ancient and modern housewives alike, though it seldom attracts the attention of poets. There is nothing intrinsically implausible in the supposition that at the time of her transformation Io was (or had lately been) occupied with pestle and mortar, and this odd detail of domestic realism looks decidedly significant if we bear in mind the association of λείανεις with the preparation of φάρμακα.⁴⁴ Was Io perhaps inveigled into assisting her πολυφάρμακος seducer in his operations? This hypothesis presupposes that something has already been said on this topic; whether it will seem plausible to others I cannot tell, but it should at least establish that the sphinx is not an absolutely immovable fixture.

We must now turn to a line which might have been expected to occur in this passage and does not, F 279. Erotian, in his lexicon to Hippocrates,⁴⁵ quotes Sophocles' description of Io ἀποταυρουμένης to illustrate the meaning of κερχνώδεα, a term used in the Hippocratic corpus with reference to swellings like mosquito-bites.⁴⁶ His definition runs thus: ἔστι δὲ τὰ τραχείας ἐπαναστάσεις ἔχοντα. καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἀττικοῖς κερχνάδῃ ἀγγεῖα λέγεται τὰ τραχείας ἀνωμαλίας ἔχοντα, ὡς καὶ Σοφοκλῆς περὶ τῆς ἀποταυρουμένης φησιν Ἴους (ἰχθὺς codd.). "τραχὺς ᾧ χελώνης κέρχνος ἐξανίσταται."⁴⁷ Though Erotian does not specify the *Inachus* as the source of his quotation (and, indeed, the reference to Io itself depends on Elmsley's conjecture), it is not easy to think of an alternative provenance for such a passage, and the general assumption that it must come from our play seems well founded even if a slight margin of doubt remains.

The line has generally been supposed to refer to the growth of Io's horns, though Carden's suggestion that it describes the conversion of her feet into hooves has seemed to some more probable.^{47a} Either way, the expression appears remarkably artificial. Both Sophocles' audience and the characters in his drama must be supposed to have been perfectly familiar with the horns and hooves of cattle, and it would be pointless to compare either feature with the shell of a tortoise. The actual process of transformation, to be sure, is not a matter of everyday experience, and might well call forth a bizarre comparison; but the growth and development of a tortoise's shell will not help us at all to visualise the physiological particulars here. To argue, as some have done,

⁴³ Thus Apuleius (*Met.* 3. 24) anticipates any queries on this point by making his hero undress before applying the ointment which effected his transformation. With outdoor metamorphoses we easily imagine wind, water or briars removing the victim's clothing if it is not explicitly said to be dissolved as part of the transformation process.

⁴⁴ See further P. Chantraine, 'A propos de l'adverbe ionien λείως, λέω', *Glotta* 33 (1954), 25 ff., esp. 35 f.

⁴⁵ κ 8 Nachmanson.

⁴⁶ [Hp.] *Epid.* 2. 3. 1. ἐγένοντο δὲ ἐν τοῖσι θερινοῖσι πυρετοῖσι. . . τρηχύματα ἐν τῷ χρωτὶ, κερχνώδεα, τοῖσιν ὑπὸ κωνόπων μάλιστα εἴκελα ἀναδήγμασιν.

⁴⁷ The text is far from secure. Ἴους is Elmsley's emendation for ἰχθὺς; he also deleted ᾧ to restore a trimeter. The slightly surprising word-order τῆς ἀποταυρουμένης φησὶν Ἴους, though easily remediable, may be a symptom of something more seriously amiss; χελώνης has also been suggested. See further Carden (pp. 66–8), W. Luppe, 'Die Verwandlung der Io in einem Sophoklesverweis bei Erotian (Fr. 279 P.)', *Philologus* 120 (1976), 296–9.

^{47a} For an ingenious, but to my mind unconvincing, attempt to enlist Tryphiodorus' description of the Trojan horse (87–9) in support of Carden's interpretation see E. Livrea, *ZPE* 52 (1983), 40 ff.

comparing *Ichneutae* 128, that *χελώνης κέρχνος* refers to the croaking of a lyre, runs counter to an essential part of Erotian's evidence.⁴⁸ It is also difficult to imagine how Io's transformation could be described in detail for a second time without anticlimax: reported by an eye-witness straight afterwards the event has a horrible fascination which could hardly be evoked on a second occasion. Inevitable (if untimely) recollections of Housman's *Fragment of a Greek tragedy* may leave many readers feeling that any repetition would be slightly comic; certainly it would steer perilously near to bathos.

A radical solution to these problems has recently been proposed by Wolfgang Luppe,⁴⁹ who argues that there is a lacuna in the text of Erotian after *φῆσιν* and that whatever illustrative material was originally adduced here from Sophocles has dropped out; *ἰχθὺς*, in his view, is sound (but *χελώνης* corrupt) and what follows concerns the use of the epithet *κερχνώδης* to denote a species of fish.

A further difficulty however remains, and though it has received little attention, it may provide the vital clue for a solution which will save the phenomena. No-one appears to have been troubled by the oddity of *ἀποταυρόομαι* used to describe transformation into a heifer.⁵⁰ Yet the catachresis implied by this interpretation, emphasised as it is by the prefix *ἀπο-*, is hardly comparable to the application in the Oxyrhynchus fragment of an epithet like *ταυρωπός* or *ταυρώδης* to a particular feature. Erotian's own style is sober and businesslike; even if this unusual verb were in effect part of his quotation we might expect him to tone down with a brief explanation the slightly puzzling conceit involved in applying it to Io's metamorphosis.

It seems worth considering the possibility that *ἀποταυρουμένης* might mean something else. If we bear in mind that (a) Erotian is here glossing an epithet applied to swellings like mosquito-bites, and (b) *ἀποταυρόομαι* is used as a psychological metaphor in the only other place where it is attested in extant classical literature,⁵¹ we might wonder whether Erotian's citation originally referred to the effects of the gadfly's stings: infuriated by the assaults of that malicious insect Io might, without serious improbability, be reported as behaving more like a savage bull than a sedate heifer.

I do not pretend that this hypothesis extricates us at a stroke from all difficulties. Certainly we need an explicit reference to the gadfly; *ψ*, which serves no apparent purpose, may be a relic of such a word (or phrase), but, in any case, since Erotian's text is generally agreed not to be entirely sound here,⁵² there can hardly be any objection to the assumption that something is actually missing.

⁴⁸ Lobel's account of the dilemma could not be bettered: 'I do not myself find particularly convincing the interpretation of these words as "a harsh excrescence of a tortoise (i.e. like the carapace of a tortoise) rises up", with reference to the sprouting of horns from Io's head, but to take them as meaning "a harsh croaking of the lyre resounds" is to reject the part of Erotian's testimony which it is inconvenient to accept while retaining the part which falls in with our preconceptions'.

⁴⁹ Op. cit. n. 47.

⁵⁰ Contrast the scholiastic agonising over Lycophron's application to Io of the epithet *ταυροπάρθενος* (*Alex.* 1292); *κόλοικον φαίνεται... οὐ γὰρ ἀρρενόθηλος ἦν ὥστε λέγειν αὐτὴν ταυροπάρθενον· οὐ γὰρ ταῦρος ἐγένετο, ἀλλὰ βοῦς*. Lycophron's Io is to some extent assimilated to Isis and his odd coinage (as it must surely be) may be justified as an allusion to Isis' hermaphroditic role in the procreation of Harpocrates; see further S. West, 'Lycophron on Isis', *JEA* (forthcoming).

⁵¹ E. *Med.* 187–8 *καίτοι τοκάδος δέργμα λεαίνης | ἀποταυροῦται δμωσί*ν (picking up *ὄμμα ταυρουμένην* 92). The verb is also used figuratively in the sense of 'rage like a bull' by Cyril of Alexandria (*Jo.* 3. 6 [4. 311c], *glaph. Gen.* [1. 16b], *Soph.* 41 [3. 619c]).

⁵² See above, n. 47.

Comparison of the afflicted animal's hide, however swollen and uneven, to the carapace of a tortoise may still seem a shade far-fetched; visually the resemblance may be satisfactory, but the effect is slightly marred by the tortoise's reputation for insensibility.⁵³ We expect a word meaning 'hide' or 'back': if *χελώνιον* can be used of part of the back (LSJ s.v. ii), we might wonder whether *χελώνη* could bear the required sense, and thus be construed with *ἐξανίσταται*. The unusual *κέρχνος* might have been used for the sake of a *calembour* on *Κερχναία* (Cenchreae).⁵⁴

Some may feel that such a detailed description of the physiological effects produced by the gadfly's attacks is hardly conceivable in Sophocles. Yet there is much to be said for detail as a means of imparting verisimilitude to an otherwise unconvincing narrative, and the poet undoubtedly faced an unusual task in attempting to convey the peculiar horror of Io's supernatural persecutor.

From such torments Io will, no doubt, be glad to seek relief in the sea, as a *ποντόπορος βοῦς*, but attempts to reconstruct the latter part of the play, whatever their merits as creative writing, must be regarded as guesswork. One negative point, however, ought surely to be beyond dispute: whether or not Io appeared in the part of the play preceding the Oxyrhynchus fragment, it is inconceivable that she was brought before the audience after her transformation. Her father must have represented her interests, and this very likely explains why the play was called *Inachus* rather than *Io*; we should not infer from the title that Sophocles found the king's situation in itself more interesting than his daughter's.

In considering Io's story it is difficult altogether to discard preconceptions created by the *Prometheus Vincitus*, where her fate as the unhappy victim of a callous philanderer and his jealous wife is presented in a manner calculated to cast a murky light on Zeus. Yet, as Solon told Croesus, *σκοπέειν χρὴ παντὸς χρήματος τὴν τελευτήν κῆ ἀποβήσεται*. Sophocles has already encouraged us to look towards the Egyptian terminus of Io's wanderings by highlighting the aitiological aspect of her union with Zeus. This is enough to remind us that she was to be famed as the ancestress of great nations; her future glory may be judged a more than adequate recompense for her strange but transitory afflictions. We can hardly doubt that Inachus was granted some knowledge of his daughter's exalted destiny before the play was over; if any further *apologia* for Zeus' conduct was felt necessary, it was no doubt provided at the same time.

But while speculation about the play's theology is unrewarding, its anthropology offers substantial food for thought. As we have seen, the Oxyrhynchus fragment implies an explanation, based on the peculiar circumstances of Zeus' dalliance with Io, for what the Greeks of the fifth century regarded as distinctively Egyptian mental and physical characteristics. In this application of anthropological speculation to traditional legend we have a striking illustration of the vitality of a myth which unequivocally asserted the priority of Greek over Egyptian civilisation.⁵⁵ We should not underestimate the importance of this contribution to our understanding of Greek ideas about Egypt and the Egyptians at this period.

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⁵³ Cf. Ar. *V.* 429, 1292.

⁵⁴ Mentioned among Io's haunts at A. *Pr.* 676.

⁵⁵ Cf. P. *Nem.* 10. 5, P. 4. 14, 56; see further Froidefond 107 ff. We may feel rather more sympathetic towards Herodotus' insistence on the unrivalled antiquity of Egypt, based though his view is on false premises (see in particular 2. 142), if we bear in mind the obvious appeal of this wildly unhistorical alternative sanctioned by the authority of great poets.