IV. The Paradox of Euripides' *Ion*

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I

The varied aesthetic delights of the *Ion* distract attention (as they are meant to do) from certain teasing puzzles in its interpretation.[1] When we come to examine the latter, we must never lose sight of the dominant characteristics of the piece: the structural virtuosity of the sustained recognition theme and the various reversals, each packed with theatrical excitement, which contribute to it; the deft and pathetic (though never tragic) characterizations of its leading figures, Ion and Creusa; and above all the pervasive irony which plays over the whole. It is such effects as these which determine the tone of the play and which should also determine our attitude toward it. If we forget them in too solemn a discussion of its meaning, we may ourselves become victims of that irony which, at one time or another, makes sport of so many of its characters and, perhaps, of that prophetic god whom we might suppose, from the prologue, to be in charge of their erratic destinies.

Whatever problems the *Ion* may provide, the problem of structure is not one of them. As Kitto has well observed of Euripides in connection with the plots, character drawing and dramatic

[1] Of the various works consulted in this connection, the following have been found most useful (or, in some cases, most provocative) and will be referred to subsequently in the discussion by the author's name alone: A. S. **Owen,** *Euripides, Ion* (Oxford 1939), introduction and notes; L. Parmentier et H. **Grégoire,** *Euripide,* texte et traduction (Budé edition)3[2] (Paris 1950) 155–247 (Grégoire's introduction and notes to the *Ion*); A. W. **Verrall,** *The Ion of Euripides* (Cambridge 1890), introduction; U. von **Wilamowitz,** *Euripides, Ion* (Berlin 1926), introduction and notes; E. **Delebecque,** *Euripide et la guerre du Péloponnèse* (Paris 1951) chap. x; G. M. A. **Grube,** *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) chap. ix; H. D. F. **Kitto,** *Greek Tragedy*[2] (London 1950) chap. xi; Gilbert **Murray,** *Euripides and his Age* (New York and London 1913) 118–24; Gilbert **Norwood,** *Greek Tragedy* (London 1920) 236–43; André **Rivier,** *Essai sur la tragique d'Euripide* (Lausanne 1944) 123–29; F. **Solmsen,** "Euripides' *Ion* im Vergleich mit anderen Tragödien," *Hermes* 69 (1934) 390–419; F. M. **Wassermann,** "Divine Violence and Providence in Euripides' *Ion*," *TAPA* 71 (1940) 587–604.

relevance of his tragi-comedies, ". . . the dramatist who has been accused of utter helplessness becomes a model of virtuosity."[2] In this play we have not merely a reversal in conjunction with a recognition scene, but a whole series of reversals, both real and ironic, to accompany a variety of "recognitions" unconscious, illusory and, ultimately, real. In the first half of the play, both the external and psychological "facts" of Ion's encounter with Creusa are reversed in his encounter with Xuthus. Between Ion and Creusa there is a natural sympathy, a kind of unconscious recognition of their real but unknown relationship; between Ion and Xuthus there is constraint on the one hand and clumsiness on the other in the false recognition which the oracle has thrust upon them. In the second half of the play the situation in which Creusa attempts to slay Ion, not knowing he is her son, is immediately reversed by the situation in which Ion attempts to slay Creusa, not knowing she is his mother. Nor are these two sets of reversals kept in their separate compartments: nowhere in Euripides are both the causal and the ironic relations more tightly drawn between the dramatic expectations set up in the first half of the play and their fulfilment in the second half. Creusa's all-important decisions to reveal her secret and to take vengeance upon Xuthus and Apollo by murdering Ion are the direct result of the first "revelation" (by the oracle) and of Xuthus' false recognition of Ion; furthermore, the second encounter between Ion and Creusa (itself the reversal of Creusa's prior attempt on Ion's life) provides an exact contrast in tone and language to the unconscious affinity so clearly expressed in their earlier exchanges. Finally, all of these misconceptions, plots, and counter-plots are resolved in the single recognition scene which is the climax of the play.[3]

The peculiar structure of the *Ion* is admirably suited to the full

[2] Kitto 312–13.

[3] On this aspect of the resolution of the *Ion*, cf. Solmsen's comparison of it with other Euripidean plays in which the recognition theme plays a part (Solmsen 390–406). In all four of these "recognition" plays (*Electra*, *I.T.*, *Helen*, *Ion*) Solmsen describes two plot complexes, *anagnôrisis* and *mêchanêma* (a crafty intrigue, usually designed for some personal end, such as escape or vengeance), as the major constituent elements. In the other three plays the two elements are kept in separate parts, the recognition-theme being worked out before the *mêchanêma* begins; in the *Ion*, on the other hand, the *mêchanêma* is a stage on the way to the eventual recognition and is subordinated to it. This is undoubtedly one of the features which contribute to the satisfying unity of the *Ion*. (Solmsen's inferences from this and similar comparisons concerning the date of the *Ion* will be considered later.)

exploitation of its ironic possibilities, for it enables the same ironic situation to be played up in a variety of different ways. Indeed, so fundamental to the theme and plot is this ironic play between the real and imagined situations that, in this drama, the irony becomes almost an end in itself and not (as in more serious drama) a means to an end, a way of heightening the tragic climax which gives final expression to its meaning.

Is this technical brilliance in plot-structure and the use of irony all that we should look for in the *Ion*? Before drawing our own conclusions about its tone and purpose, other more "serious" interpretations of its meaning must be considered. And as soon as we begin to look for anything more than theatrical meaning in the *Ion*,[4] certain puzzling contradictions begin to appear.

II

The chief paradox of the *Ion* lies in the contrasting effect of its "national-dynastic" theme and of its treatment of Apollo, the deity supposedly presiding over its fulfilment. On the one hand, if we consider the parentage and destiny of Ion, born of Apollo's union with the Athenian princess Creusa and destined to become the eponymous ancestor of all the Ionian race, we have a tale which reflects great glory on the Athenians. This, taken in conjunction with the constant references, mythological and topographical, to things Athenian, and with the (on the whole) sympathetic treatment of Creusa, championed by an Athenian chorus, has led several critics to regard the play as having a predominantly propagandic appeal glorifying the position of Athens as the natural leader of the Greeks. On the other hand, if we consider the divine source of much of this Athenian glory, we find a most inadequate god: shifty, devious and bungling, the Apollo of this play lacks even the foresight (a conspicuous lack in the god of prophecy) required to plan successfully his own solution of the Ion problem. Indeed, it is only through the unforeseen human element that the divine parentage of Ion (and with it all the *kudos* which it brings to the Athenians) becomes common knowledge at all, and Apollo (who had meant to keep his paternity a secret) is forced, in order to prevent matricidal blood-shed, to let the truth

[4] Cf. Kitto 318, "The plays [those previously described as tragi-comedies] are a constant appeal to our intellect, but in order that we may appreciate the intrigue, the wit, the irony, not in order that we may grasp a thesis."

appear. The propagandic fanfare of Athena's further dynastic prophecies does much to mitigate this effect, but even here we are reminded of the shabbier aspect of Apollo who (as Athena tells us)

> . . . has thought it best not to appear before you, lest any blame for what has passed should be made manifest. (1557–58) [5]

This simplification of the paradox of the *Ion* contains perhaps some bold statements about the play as a whole, and none of these would pass unchallenged by one or another of its commentators. Indeed, the two aspects of this paradox (which has not generally been recognized as such) have tended to divide the play's critics into two more or less opposed camps, so that one aspect has frequently been stressed to the detriment, and sometimes to the exclusion, of the other.

Critics emphasizing the political and propagandic aspects of the *Ion* find considerable support in the back-ground of the myth itself and in the particular adaptation of it which Euripides has chosen to develop. As Grégoire has remarked, Ion and Xuthus were strangers to the ancient Ionian tradition; they were "created" for specific political purposes by the genealogizing epic of the seventh century, Xuthus being inserted into the Hesiodic catalogue to mark the affinity between Ionians and Achaeans, while the function of Ion was chiefly to associate the Ionian patronym with the state of Athens.[6]

The first reference to Xuthus occurs in Hesiod[7] where he is described, along with Dorus and Aeolus, as a son of Hellen. In Herodotus the Ionians are twice said to have taken their name from "Ion, son of Xuthus," and in the second of these passages the reason is added that Ion had served as *stratarchos* for the Athenians.[8]

[5] As Owen notes, *ad loc.*, Athena "is adroit in letting it be ambiguous where the blame falls." (The Loeb translation of line 1557 is surely wrong: "Else must he chide you for things overpast." 1557 OCT is 1556 Loeb ed.)

[6] See Grégoire 155–56. (In addition to the ancient sources cited, the present summary discussion of the Ion myth makes considerable use of the introductory material in Grégoire 155–65, in Wilamowitz 1–11 and Owen ix–xvii.)

[7] Hesiod, frg. 7 (Rzach). Lines 3–5 of the same frg. name the sons of Aeolus, and it is thought (e.g., Grégoire 155, Owen x) that the sons of Xuthus, including Ion, were probably also given in the missing part of the passage.

[8] Herodotus 7.94.1, 8.44.2. Owen (x) in citing these passages also notes that the word *Xouthidai* is explained by Hesychius as *hoi Iônes*. *Iôn gar Xouthou* (cf. Herondas, *enypnion* 79), and that in Aristotle (*Resp. Ath.* 3) Ion is named as the first *polemarchos*, "summoned to the help of Athens because of the unwarlike quality of her kings."

In another Herodotean passage there is a reference to the tradition that the four Athenian tribes took their names from the sons of Ion.[9]

A full account of the relations of Ion and Xuthus with Athens is given by Pausanias.[10] According to this account Xuthus, when driven out of Thessaly by his brothers Aeolus and Dorus, fled to Athens where he married a daughter of Erechtheus and by her begat two sons, Ion and Achaeus. Xuthus was later driven out of Attica and settled in Aegialos on the north coast of the Peloponese. Later Ion (who had in the meantime become king of the "Aegialian Ionians") was called on for help by the Athenians, who made him their leader in a struggle against the Eleusinians.

There is no definite evidence that Apollo rather than Xuthus was regarded as the father of Ion before Euripides wrote his play; however, there are several considerations which render it unlikely that the divine parentage of Ion was a Euripidean invention. So fundamental an innovation was not typical of the tragic adaptations of myth, not even of those of Euripides (perhaps the boldest of his brethren in these matters)[11]; moreover, it seems probable that Sophocles' (lost) *Creusa*, also referred to in ancient times as the *Ion*, treated the story of Ion's supernatural birth.[12] Finally,

[9] Herodotus 5.66.2.

[10] Pausanias 7.1. 2–5.

[11] The more typical Euripidean adaptations of myth usually involved changes in emphasis to suit his theme or the interweaving of different mythical traditions (as in the *Andromache*) or the development of little known local legends by attaching them (as in the *Hecuba*) to myths already well established in the litery tradition.

[12] So most commentators; see, for example, F. G. Welcker, *Griechische Tragoedie* (Bonn 1839) 391 ff., A. C. Pearson, *Sophocles, Fragments* 2 (Oxford 1917) 23–24. Georges Dalmeyda, "Observations sur les prologues d'Ion et des Bacchantes," *REG* 28 (1915) 43–50, has suggested that the scene of Sophocles' play may have been Athens; but the indications which he finds in Euripides' *Ion* that the Delphic setting is an innovation in it are by no means convincing. (See also, in rebuttal to Dalmeyda's argument, Th. Colardeau, "Ion à Delphes," *REG* 29 (1916) 430–34.)

The identification of Sophocles' *Ion* with his *Creusa* is generally accepted (see, for example, Pearson, *op. cit.* 23 and frgs. 319, 320), though there has been some disagreement (see, for example, Wilamowitz 11). Apart from the fact that (as Grégoire has pointed out, 163) it would be difficult to imagine the plot of this play without the Apollo motif, some of the fragments themselves could well fit a tale of secret birth. Most suggestive in this connection is fragment 352, which refers to circumstances in which deception is pardonable, and fragment 357, *ἄπελθ', ἄπελθε, παῖ· τάδ' οὐκ ἀκουστά σοι*. The latter fragment might be referred to Xuthus' contemplated revelation of his ancient escapade (Welcker) or "equally well" (Pearson) to Creusa's distress when forced to reveal her story. However, these are matters of conjecture as indeed are Welcker's interpretations of several other fragments by analogy with Euripides' *Ion*.

the idea of "Apollo *patrôios*" seems well established among the Athenians by the time of Socrates or at least of Plato, and Wilamowitz and Grégoire are doubtless right in believing it to be of pre-tragic origin.[13]

The appearance of Apollo as father of Ion fits naturally enough into the Athenian development of the myth, the purpose of which was doubtless to associate as closely as possible the Ionian patronymic with the people of Athens and thus to strengthen her claims to Hellenic leadership. Athens had her own myth of autochthonous origins; how much more satisfactory then if the two myths could be conveniently reconciled, if by one stroke the foreign part of Ion's parentage and the human adulteration of the autochthonous Athenian stock could both be excised from the mythical tradition.

It seems likely then that, in writing a play which brought the father of the Ionians so exclusively within the Athenian orbit, Euripides was developing in more definite form a legend which was already current in Attica. Wilamowitz has well expressed the probabilities of the matter:

> Thus Euripides has taken over no definite myth but rather something which was related and believed not only because it served the imperial tendency to make Athens the mother state of the other cities of the empire, but also because it fitted in with the (existence of) the oldest shrine of Apollo in a grotto of the northern rocks of the city.[14]

Apart from various details of plot and characterization, this critic rightly regards the emphasis on the new life, through Ion, for the seed of Erechtheus (see especially *Ion* 1463–67), as Euripides' most important contribution to the myth. In Athena's prophecies (1581 ff.) concerning the sons of Ion's sons, themselves to be founders of the four Athenian tribes, we find a patriotic extension of the tradition already cited from Herodotus:

> And the sons of Ion's sons shall, in the fulness of the allotted time, found island cities in the Cyclades and main-land towns

[13] See Plato, *Euthydemus* 302D; Socrates, accused of not being a true Athenian because he has denied that Zeus is his *patrôios*, replies that not Zeus but Apollo is *patrôios* for the Athenians *dia tên tou Iônos genesin*. See also Wilamowitz 2 ff., Grégoire 160.

[14] Wilamowitz 9.

> along the coast, to be a strength unto my land. The plains along the straits as well, on Asia's as on Europe's side, they are to colonize. And for this boy's name, Ionians they shall be called and win renown. (1581–88)

The other major Euripidean innovation concerns the genealogy of Xuthus: Athena in the epilogue (1589 ff.) prophesies that two sons Dorus and Achaeus will be born to Xuthus and Creusa, while according to the Hesiodic genealogy Dorus and Xuthus (as well as Aeolus) are brothers, all sons of Hellen.[15] The obvious propagandic advantage of this is that the founders of the Dorian and Achaean races now appear as Athenian born and sharing, through Creusa, in the autochthonous Athenian stock. Xuthus himself is described in the *Ion* (63–64) as "the son of Aeolus, son of Zeus." This change is presumably made in anticipation of the other more important one; for if Hellen were given as Xuthus' father, Euripides' audience might also remember that Xuthus should be Dorus' brother, and not his father by Creusa, as the dramatist's "propagandic" change requires.[16]

III

This, at least potentially, propagandic material in the *Ion* makes its date a matter of greater interest in the play's interpretation than is often the case in Euripidean drama. Scholars looking for a suitable international context for the play tend to place it between the Peace of Nicias (421) and the Sicilian expedition (415); for Athens, during the earlier part of this period particularly, was in a relatively optimistic mood concerning her imperial position and was ready to pursue a fairly vigorous policy in order to maintain and, if possible, improve it. A peculiar description of Achaea as "the coastal land near Rhium" has lead several critics to settle specifically on the year 418 as the probable date of the play's production, for they believe this emphasis on Rhium to have been prompted by Alcibiades' activities in that area in the preceding year.[17]

[15] Hesiod, frg. 7 (Rzach).

[16] Euripides himself describes Aeolus as son of Hellen in frg. 14 (*Aeolus*) and (possibly) in the *Melanippe sapiens*. See F. Nauck, *Euripidis Tragoediae* 3[2] (Leipzig 1869) 4 and 129.

[17] See Grégoire 167–68, Owen xxxix–xli, and Thucydides 5.52. Delebecque (chap. x) agrees with Grégoire's account and seeks to reinforce it by other historical

While political and historical considerations tend to place the *Ion* in the "middle period" of Euripidean drama, or at least in the latter part of it, certain arguments based on form, style, and *genre* tend to favor a somewhat later date.[18] Owen has successfully rebutted the formal and stylistic arguments advanced for a late date (such as 412 or 411) for the *Ion* and concludes that on these grounds (as well as on political grounds) the play may be regarded as "coming somewhere midway among Euripides' extant plays."[19] Arguments for the date of the play which are based on *genre* and "tone" and on the type of plot material and plot construction used in it are, though interesting in themselves, more difficult to evaluate. Judged in these terms, the *Ion* appears to have a good deal in common with the later kind of Euripidean play variously described as "romantic," "melodramatic" and "tragi-comic."[20] Here we must turn again for a moment to Solmsen's comparison of the *Ion* with the *Electra*, the *Iphigenia Taurica* and the *Helen*. There we found that the plot-structure of all of these plays had much in common in their concentration on the devices of *anagnôrisis* and *mêchanêma*, but that the *Ion* was the most successful dramatically, mainly because the "recognition-complex" and the various psychological subtleties which form a part of it were

parallels to the action and details of the play. His chief additional arguments (227–28) concern the building of the Erechtheum, which he believes to have been begun at about this time, and the renewed opportunity after the Peace of Nicias for the Athenians to visit Delphi (237–38).

A good bibliographical summary of various arguments for the date of the *Ion* is to be found in F. Solmsen 390, note 1.

[18] The changes of mind of U. von Wilamowitz about the date of the *Ion* underline this double aspect of the problem. Originally, Wilamowitz (*Analecta Euripidea* [Berlin 1875] 172–81) placed the *Ion* between 420 and 416. While admitting that in its external form it is like the later plays, he nevertheless grouped it with the "Attic" and historical tragedies in which (according to Wilamowitz) Euripides, like Aeschylus, used myth to counsel and advise the Athenians on current affairs. Again, in "Die beiden Elektren," *Hermes* 18 (1883) 242, note 1, Wilamowitz argued (partly on the basis of its alleged hasty construction!) that the play might be as early as 421. Later, influenced by the arguments of W. Kranz, *De forma stasimi* (Diss. Berlin 1904) 43.1, Wilamowitz placed the play between 415 and 412 (*Ion, Einleitung*, 24). He agrees with Enthoven's arguments (L. Enthoven, *De Ione Euripideo* [Diss. Bonn 1880]) against every date before 415 but does not agree with him that the play should be placed with the *Helen* in 412.

[19] Owen xxxvi–xxxix.

[20] We will return later to purely literary-critical discussions of the *Ion* as tragi-comedy; here we are concerned only with this feature insofar as it may be used in arguments concerning the date of the play.

allowed to predominate.[21] This observation leads Solmsen to the further inference that the *Ion* exhibits a more mature, and so a later, technique than that of the other plays concerned. This is, however, by no means a certain inference, since (apart from the fallacy of "the later the better") matters of plot structure must surely be largely determined by the kind of dramatic point with which the dramatist is concerned in any given play. It is clear that in the *Ion* the ultimate identification of the boy must be the point to which the whole dramatic action will lead. This obviously cannot be the case in the *Electra* where (on Solmsen's own showing) the recognition is itself a part of the means to the main end of revenge. Similarly it seems wrong to argue that the *Helen* is earlier than the other recognition plays because it lacks the varied and subtle ironies connected with the suspense of postponed recognition as well as the careful attention to probability in the recognition itself.[22] These ingredients, admirable as they are in the plays to which they belong, are not needed for the kind of dramatic point which the *Helen* seeks to make. Indeed they would be out of place there because a high degree of improbability is needed for its light-hearted and witty parody of myth.

Thus, while the plot-structure and *genre* of the *Ion* do make us think of the later Euripidean plays such as the *Helen* (412) and the *Iphigenia Taurica* (411–409?) (recognition themes aside, the *Ion* is really not a bit like the *Electra*), there is really no reason that it should not have been written at least a few years before them. The political or propagandic aspect of the play (whether serious or ironical) would certainly best suit the years following the Peace of Nicias; and while this aspect of the play may not be the most important one, it at least makes it difficult to consider a production date as late as 413 (the Sicilian disaster) or 412 (the Ionian revolt) when the idea of the Hellenic leadership of Athens could be little more than a tasteless mockery.[23] Finally, considerations of *genre*

[21] Cf. *supra*, note 3, and Solmsen 390–406, especially 400–406. For Solmsen's inferences, now to be considered, about the comparative dates of the plays concerned, see *ibid.* 406 ff.

[22] Cf. *ibid.* 392–94.

[23] Cf. again the arguments of Grégoire, Owen, and Delebecque, referred to above, note 17, and Wilamowitz, "Die beiden Elektren," *Hermes* 18 (1883) 242. The events of 418 (battle of Mantinea) and, with more point, 413 (Spartan occupation of Decelea) are also referred to by Grégoire and Owen respectively as ones which could hardly have taken place when the *Ion* was produced.

(a matter of which we are much more conscious than were the Greeks) can never serve as more than a general indication (if that) as to a play's date. If they are pressed too closely in arguments for a late date for the *Ion*, one can always counter that this play has, as a tragi-comedy, more in common with a play as early as the *Alcestis* than with a play as late as the *Bacchae*!

IV

> The aim of the play is not to prove anything at all, but to dramatize.[24]
>
> . . . the first purpose of the dramatist in writing these plays (the *Ion* and the *Iphigenia in Tauris*) was to create an effective stage-piece; to exploit the resources of his art for its own sake, not for the sake of something bigger.[25]
>
> . . . l'intérêt patriotique ne saurait motiver la composition du drame qui cherche à peindre des sentiments humaine.[26]

Any reader who has enjoyed the *Ion* must feel instinctively that these critics are right, at least in principle, in their appraisal of what is most important in the play.[27] Nevertheless, such appraisals tend to ignore, or at least to play down, certain paradoxical effects and certain contrasting elements in the plot-material which are, for better or worse, all "part of the play." After our examination of the back-ground material of the Ion myth, of Euripides' particular adaptation of it and of the historical circumstances in which, in all probability, it seems to have been produced, we must admit that there is at least one aspect of the play which is political and even nationalistic. In examining the political elements we must decide not only whether they are subordinate to the dramatic ones, but also whether they combine or conflict with them, and particularly whether they can be reconciled with the incidental theological satire which most of the more literary critics find to be one of the play's comic effects.

[24] Grube 279.

[25] Kitto 217.

[26] Rivier 124, note 3.

[27] ". . . in principle," i.e., in their insistence on dramatic, as opposed to political and propagandic, interests. "Dramatic" interests may be said to include such matters as plot-structure, characterization and treatment of *individual* feelings and fortunes; within this broad area there is still room for different emphases. Thus one finds that Rivier emphasizes the theme of mother-love, Kitto the virtuosity of plot-technique, almost to the exclusion of other elements in the play.

Critics who favor a political approach to the interpretation of Euripides treat the *Ion* mainly as a piece of nationalistic propaganda. Thus Grégoire, who dwells at length on the various "pro-Athenian" passages of the kind which we have mentioned, extends this preoccupation to features of the plot as well. Creusa's scheming against the life of Ion, and indeed the whole intrigue concerning the false and true identification of his parents, are all explained in political rather than in dramatic terms: the necessity of insisting on, and defending *à l'outrance*, the autochthonous seed of Erechtheus against a (supposed) threat of foreign contamination.[28] In a similar vein, Delebecque (whose chapter on the *Ion* reinforces and exaggerates the political emphasis of Grégoire's study) describes the poet of the *Ion* as "l'interprête d'une veritable doctrine du racisme ionien" and the purpose of the play, like that of building the Erechtheum, as the consecration of successful imperialistic policy.[29] Thus to an even greater degree Delebecque emphasizes those features of the plot which seem to him to have political significance, and in so doing he distracts attention from various dramatic and structural excellences of the piece.

Questions concerning the ultimate purpose of any given play are always difficult to determine since identical passages interpreted in accordance with the *parti pris* of the individual critic are often used to "prove" opposite conclusions.[30] Once we admit the political aspect of the *Ion*, its interpretation largely revolves around the question of the relative importance of this aspect. Now we have already suggested that there is one element in the play—the treatment of Apollo—which gives the impression of conflicting with, or even detracting from, the allegedly propagandic element. If this suggestion is found to be sound and if, moreover, the treatment of Apollo should be found congenial with the purely dramatic aspects of the play, then we will have at least

[28] See Grégoire 170–74, esp. 172–73. The political bias of Grégoire's approach reappears later in his analysis, *ibid.* 176: ". . . le sentiment patriotique est la principale excuse d'une péripetie qu'Euripide n'aurait pas osée dans une pure tragi-comédie d'intrigue."

[29] See Delebecque 231 and 238 respectively and the general tenor of his comments throughout chap. x.

[30] Contrast, for example, Grégoire's view of the political motivation of the peripety (above, note 28) with that of Rivier (124), who strenuously denies the political motivation of Creusa's attempt on Ion's life.

an indication of the relative importance of the "propagandic" element. In this connection it is interesting to note that the "political" critics strenuously resist any idea of a satirical or unflattering picture of Apollo in the *Ion*. In Grégoire's study all thought of possible criticism of Apollo or of Delphi is swept aside because of the play's satisfactory conclusion from the point of view of patriotic Athenian feeling.[31] Likewise Delebecque, after summarizing various passages both "for" and "against" Apollo and Delphi, concludes that Apollo, despite a certain initial irresponsibility, is finally absolved since he has repaired his faults.[32]

At the other extreme from this approach are the views of the "rationalists" such as Verrall, Murray, and Norwood, who regard the play as a satire on such myths of divine descent and on the kind of gods which such mythology can countenance.[33] The thoroughgoing rationalism of Verrall's view has already been refuted at various points by different scholars[34]; the most convincing argument against it is that it spoils almost every dramatic effect in the play. If (to take one of Owen's best examples) Ion is not the son of Apollo and Creusa but, as Verrall argues, the product of some pre-marital amour of Xuthus, then all the ironic play on the mother–son relationship throughout the piece is ruined. Similarly the whole point of Apollo's plan miscarrying is lost if there is no plan of Apollo. As Grube has remarked, Verrall creates rather than disposes of difficulties by seeking to dispense with the divine element in the *Ion*. The less extreme view of Murray, who regards the play as an attack on the gods of traditional mythology without finding it necessary to expel them from the action, provides a more reasonable corrective to the defenses of Apollo found among the political commentators on the play. Norwood, too, though he approves of Verrall's rationalistic account of the birth

[31] Grégoire 178: "Jamais la critique des dieux n'a été moins dangereuse que dans cette pièce . . . les dieux mènent à bien, fort habilement [!] une affaire dont la complication dépasse l'intelligence humaine."

[32] See Delebecque 234–36.

[33] See Verrall (above, note 1) xi–xlv (cf. also Verrall, *Euripides the Rationalist* [Cambridge 1895] 129–65, esp. 138 ff.); Murray 118–24; Norwood 238–40. (Contrast Murray's comment, "The *Ion* is, of all the extant plays, the most definitely blasphemous against the traditional gods," with the view already quoted from Grégoire [above, note 31].)

[34] See, for example, Wilamowitz 18–19; Grube 278, note 3; Owen xxxii–xxxvi and notes to verses 1424–36.

of Ion, at least shows more awareness of the spiritual quality of Ion's belief and disillusionment:

> The god who gives oracles to Greece is a trickster and no celestial consolations or Athenian throne can compensate the youth Ion for the loss of what has filled his heart only this morning.[35]

Several other views of the meaning of the *Ion* fall between these two extremes while still revolving around the two poles, the "nationalistic" and the "anti-Apollo" themes, which we have already indicated. A few critics give clear statements of both themes while ignoring or minimizing the element of contradiction involved in their combination. Thus Wilamowitz regards the whole of this version of the Ion legend, including Euripides' original contribution to it, as having a distinctly imperialistic tendency and purpose; on the other hand he is equally emphatic that the play has a polemic purpose against Apollo and his oracle.[36] Owen, too, finds both Athenian propaganda and some criticism of Apollo in this play; the latter, however, he plays down as quite secondary to the play's main object as he describes it: " . . . to give reasons for the Athenian empire to hold together . . ."[37] However, Owen's attempts to mitigate the anti-Apollo impression conveyed by certain passages in the play are not entirely satisfactory.[38]

Of the various "political" critics of the *Ion* Wassermann has perhaps posed the "Apollo problem" most bluntly. Describing recognition of Apollo as Ion's father as the main political purpose of the play, he asks:

> Would it not be a strange procedure if Euripides had presented this divine father as a doubtful character, descent from whom

[35] Norwood 238.

[36] See Wilamowitz 1–9 (particularly 9) and 13–14 respectively. Wilamowitz' view of the attack on Apollo differs radically from the rationalistic approach of Verrall. He stresses particularly the faults of Apollo, and among these it is the god's inability to carry through his original plan that he regards (rightly) as being the most injurious to his reputation.

[37] Owen xxi–xxii; cf. also xi–xii where Owen dwells on the patriotic Athenian purpose behind this version of the myth, and xxxiii–xxxiv where he suggests that the view of the play held by Verrall and H.B.L. (who emphasize the mythological satire) "underlines the rationalism of Euripides at the expense of his patriotism and his ability as a play-wright."

[38] There is, for example, little point in saying that Euripides "is less bitter against Delphi here than in the *Electra*" (*ibid.* xxxiv), or that the oracle has "come off better (here) than either in the *Electra* . . . or in the *Iphigenia* [*Taurica*]" (*ibid.* xxi) when the plot-material of the plays concerned is so different.

> would be much more of a disgrace than descent from a brave human hero?[39]

Wassermann's attempt at "a more positive evaluation" depends mainly on the arguments that Apollo is not actually guilty of the worst crimes of which he is suspected, and that the glorious political end to which his activities are directed justifies whatever may, when judged by human standards, appear harsh and violent in the process:

> The god, representing the permanent forces of a far-sighted providence, while not concerned with temporary human sufferings and doubts (cf. 1615) has only his final objective in mind, the future political mission of Ion and his race.[40]

These arguments, which cannot be disproved, provide the most obvious line of the defense of Apollo; it is in effect the "official defense" which Athena gives in the epilogue, for Euripides knew that his tragi-comedy, particularly in view of the patriotic motif just discussed, could not be brought to a successful conclusion without it. Of course the Apollo of this play is "defended," and the most critical attacks on the god (such as Creusa's, for the abandonment of herself and her child) ultimately answered. Nevertheless, shadowing the golden Apollo of Creusa's glorious "mythological" picture and the (politically) all-provident one of Athena's epilogue is the back-ground impression of a rather furtive, shabby and inefficient god, which leaves its mark even when the official defense has rested.

It was Apollo's wish (so Hermes tells us in the prologue) that Creusa suffer her birth-travail in secret from her father (*ἀγνὼς δὲ πατρί—τῷ θεῷ γὰρ ἦν φίλον*, 14); so, too, the devious method of Ion's return to Athens is planned so that Apollo's mating may still be kept hidden (72–73). Apollo's secrecy is, of course, necessary for the plot, but since there are no really valid "political" reasons for it, it gives the impression of his having something discreditable to hide—an impression which is sustained to the end by Athena's ambiguous excuse for his non-appearance in the epilogue (*μὴ τῶν*

[39] Wassermann 588; for the rest of the argument here summarized, see *ibid.* 587–604.

[40] *Ibid.* 590. Cf. Grube 277, whose arguments on this point closely parallel those of Wassermann save that, just as Grube has not overemphasized the patriotic theme of the *Ion*, his defense of the Apollo of this play (277, cf. 264–65) does not need to be so heavy-handed and unqualified.

πάροιθε μέμψις ἐς μέσον μόλῃ, 1558). This furtive quality in Apollo accords ill with the dashing "Homeric" deity of Wassermann's description, who gives no thought to the conventions of human behavior, whether those of heroic or of classical times. The pious Ion, too, with his half-incredulous astonishment that a god could act as Apollo has,[41] unconsciously abets this insidious process of divine discrediting. Finally, there is of course that most disastrous shaft against the god of prophecy's repute: the discrepancy between his own plans for Ion and the actual course of events. No amount of insistence by the critics on the "far-sighted providence" of the god or by Athena on the glorious future he has planned for Ion and his descendants[42] can ever quite erase the irony of this effect. Once again it is the poet's interest in the *plot* which, at the expense of the "patriotic theme," makes this satire possible and even necessary; for had Apollo's plan gone smoothly, the dramatic thrill of the *Ion's* "close-calls," ironies and theatrical reversals would have been lost forever.

This reconsideration of the position (and sometimes the plight!) of Apollo in the *Ion* helps us then to put the political or "propagandic" theme in its true perspective. This theme, which may have been only a sort of political trimming to the play, requires for its happy conclusion a relatively respectable Apollo as father of the Athenian father of the Ionians. This much the playwright grants it; as we have seen, the formal defense which critics have urged in Apollo's favor is (as far as it goes) impregnable. However, the fact that in the interests of plot (as well as for the sake of

[41] In this connection Ion's comments (in which shocked disbelief vies with reproach against the god) concern not only Apollo's supposed abandonment of Creusa and her child but also the adulterous rape itself (339, 341, 437 ff., 1523–27) and finally the question of the god's veracity (1537–38). Wassermann (590) excuses Apollo's violence thus: "A Greek god of this period has no ascetic inhibitions. A strong virility is just one aspect of his epiphany. Like all divine characters in Euripidean tragedy he combines primitive and advanced characters." True enough, but it was just this anthropomorphic aspect of the Homeric gods to which Euripides most violently objected (see, for example, *Hipp.* 120,, *Bacch.* 1348, *I.T.* 389–91, *H.F.* 1341–46); and in order to attack it he presents his gods in much cruder forms than do Aeschylus and Sophocles. In this case Ion's rather than Wassermann's reactions strike us as a sound indication of Euripides' views as to what the gods should be like.

[42] See Wassermann 590, 601 and Athena's speech at *Ion* 1560–1605. The curious discrepancy between Hermes' statement (72–73) that Apollo intends to keep his paternity a secret even after Ion's return to Athens and Athena's statement (1566–67) that he had intended eventually to publish it, must be regarded as just one more of those ambiguous touches with which Euripides surrounds the Apollo of this play.

incidental satire) the dramatist was willing to weaken his "respectable" Apollo in the ways which we have mentioned surely indicates that the *Ion* is not, as the political critics would have it, primarily a nationalistic, propagandic play.

V

At the other extreme to taking the *Ion* too seriously we find Kitto's discussion of the play within his general description of Euripidean tragi-comedy.[43] We must indicate a few salient features of this description in order to assess its application to our play. Kitto begins by distinguishing the conventions proper to tragi-comedy:

> One important difference is that the plot of tragedy must appear real, but the plot of tragi-comedy may be, and normally is, entirely artificial.[44]

It is this essential difference which, according to Kitto, changes the form, tone, and effect of the tragi-comedies. Once the serious basis of Greek tragedy, its contact with "real life," has been cut away, the primary purpose of the dramatist becomes simply to create an effective stage piece: "theatrical reality takes the place of universal reality." Formally this results in plays of deft and elegant construction; but since the doings and sufferings of the characters in them are fundamentally "unreal," a part of an impossible situation, they never seriously engage our emotions. The "thought-content" or meaning of the play (Aristotle's *dianoia*) is similarly affected: Kitto says of the *Ion*, for example, "Intellectual profundity is as alien to this tragi-comedy as is moral profundity."[45]

The principal results of this general "typing" of the *Ion* for Kitto's interpretation of its meaning should now be clear. We are to look for little serious meaning beyond our pleasure in its ironies and in the intricacies of its lively and adventurous plot. Consider the effect of this view on our attitude to Creusa's attempted murder of Ion: since events are no longer to be used to reveal tragic character, this event, like all the others, is to be treated

[43] Kitto chap. xi, 312–31.
[44] *Ibid.* 314.
[45] *Ibid.* 317.

purely from the point of view of its interest and theatrical excitement. Similarly since the *Ion* by Kitto's definition of the tragi-comedies can sustain no serious theme, the treatment of Apollo is dismissed as incidental satire ("an intellectual stiffening in a play which is essentially one of incident and romantic color"[46]) and the "patriotic" theme is almost completely ignored.

Kitto's general description of the *êthos* of tragi-comedy accords well with the tone of the *Ion* and on the whole provides an excellent direction for the frame of mind in which we should approach the play. This description is, however, too consistently worked out for the material which it concerns: one feels that Kitto understands the tragi-comic *genre* more thoroughly than does Euripides, a fact which, when one considers the matter historically, is not surprising. Thus while we find that much of the *Ion* conforms with Kitto's general description, there are moments in this play (as in others) when we find Euripides breaking Kitto's rules.

Kitto's treatment of Creusa's murder-plot exemplifies both the merits and the short-comings of his approach. His dismissal, as irrelevant, of any moral justification of the deed comes as rather a relief after certain heavy-handed discussions along these lines by other critics.[47] Such considerations are obviously uncalled for since the dramatist himself wastes little time on them but (in accordance with Kitto's general description of his procedure) concentrates all his energies and our own on the exciting details of the plot itself. Nevertheless, the critics' worries about Creusa's moral attitudes are not entirely without justification. From what we have seen of her so far, sensitive and tactful in her dealings with Ion, full of *aidôs* in her reticence and needing the most extreme provocation (as she tells us so feelingly herself) to discard it,[48] we would *expect* Creusa to indulge in considerable self-debate before she commits herself to murder. That, instead, she is allowed simply to get on with it clearly shows us that the dramatist at this

[46] *Ibid.* 319.

[47] *Ibid.* 325. Contrast with Kitto's treatment here Grégoire's (allegedly Euripidean) justification (171, cf. *ibid.* 176) of Creusa's deed as "un acte de légitime défense patriotique" and Rivier's explanation (124) of it in terms of outraged and frustrated mother-love.

[48] Creusa's *aidôs* with regard to her encounter with Apollo is one of the means whereby the recognition scene is in the most natural way postponed. Cf. Solmsen's comment (397–98) on this and other examples of Euripides' psychological subtlety in the deployment of his recognition themes.

point has chosen melodrama, though he makes some attempt to disguise the change in the characterization of Creusa by means of the chorus and of Creusa's old tutor.[49] Indeed there often seems to be a point in the so-called tragi-comedies when the play could, as it were, go either way. Up to and including her lyric revelation of the secret, the characterization of Creusa has been at least potentially tragic, though one would agree that the plot indications (particularly after the "recognition hints" in Hermes' prologue) hardly suggest tragedy. In the *Alcestis*, to take another so-called tragi-comedy, the tragic potentialities are still more prominent. Despite the basis of an "impossible" situation which doubtless indicates the *ultimate* direction of the play, the near-tragic theme attaching to Admetus' late discoveries about himself (the *arti manthanô* theme as Miss Dale has so aptly described it[50]) is quite thoroughly developed in the latter portions of the play until Heracles' miraculous restoration of Alcestis finally destroys it. Kitto's description of the tone of the *Ion* provides a valuable corrective to those who have over-worked its political or else its theological implications: clearly a play such as he has described exists more for the sake of its own dramatic (Kitto would say theatrical) effects than for the sake of such larger themes. Nevertheless, here again one wonders whether Kitto does not apply his own definitions too rigorously, whether in this instance the dramatist was being quite as relentlessly funny as this critic requires

[49] It is the chorus and the tutor who first express hatred of foreign intrusion and who so work upon Creusa's pent-up emotions that she takes the course she does. But although it is the tutor who first suggests to Creusa the idea of murdering Ion, their roles are soon reversed and the old man finds himself, his own clumsy murder-plan rejected, accepting the instructions of a much more deadly minister of vengeance. (The function of the chorus and the tutor in this passage is not of course limited to their usefulness in distracting attention from Creusa's sudden savagery. In their strongly partisan reactions to the "revelations" of the oracle, we begin to see the full force of the numerous allusions to the legend of autochthonous Athenian origins. "Athens for the Erechthids!" is their theme; every speech of the old tutor rings with family feeling, and the ultimate hymn of vengeance by the chorus (1048–1105) is faintly suggestive of the terrifying lyrics in the *Bacchae* which prepare for the *sparagmos* of King Pentheus.)

Owen (xxvii) has compared the "unbalanced" Creusa of the second half of the play with Medea; however, there is no change such as we have noted in the case of Creusa in the *manner* in which Medea is characterized. Moreover, as both Solmsen (397–98) and Rivier (126) have indicated in their different ways, there is such a world of difference between the dramatic stature and the tragic potentialities of the two characters that any comparisons between them must be of a rather superficial kind.

[50] See A. M. Dale's edition of the *Alcestis* (Oxford 1954) intro. xxii.

him to be. Of the whole mythological apparatus (which, Kitto rightly tells us, must be accepted, not "rationalized," for the sake of the play) we read:

> . . . the wit of the whole piece lies in the conspiracy which Euripides makes with the audience; the conviction that these things are false was held so widely in Athens that there is no point in pretending that they are false but great amusement in pretending that they are true.[51]

This view would reduce Euripides' purpose in treating the Ion myth to the level of a "superior" joke, rather in the spirit of those frightfully clever "modern" resurrections of Victorian melodrama where "the wit of the whole piece" lies in pretending to hiss the villain and to weep with the innocent heroine. Furthermore, if the wit of the whole piece depends on this large conspiracy, then the pronouncements of Athena at the end of the play must be received with at least inward laughter. Now much as Euripides enjoyed satirizing the more pompous claims and the more ludicrous beliefs of his fellow-citizens, would he at any stage in the war have subjected to the cruelest ridicule the Athenian claim, here appearing in mythological terms, to leadership of the Ionians? Surely, rather, Euripides has selected and developed the Ion myth for the peculiar advantages which it provides for the ironies, the excitements and reversals of a tragi-comic plot, and also for whatever incidental capital he can make out of theological satire on the one hand and out of national propaganda on the other. Kitto regards the allusions to Delphic and Attic legends alike as all a part of the same sly humor; if this were really his chief intention in such allusions, then in his numerous references to the autochthonous legend alone Euripides would indeed have been running his joke into the ground. On the contrary, however, the constant references to things Athenian are most ingeniously worked into the fabric of the story; and the legend of the earth-born Erichthonius has, as we have seen, an important bearing on the xenophobic attitude of the Athenians (of Creusa and, more particularly, of the tutor and the chorus) which is so essential to the action of the play.[52] Both in his treatment of these matters

[51] Kitto 320.

[52] Cf. above, note 49. (The *Ion* provides one of the few instances in later Greek tragedy where the chorus, by revealing the situation to Creusa, is allowed drastically to effect the action.)

and in his own development of the patriotic Athenian version of Ion's story, Euripides' adaptation of his mythological material has been too calculated for us to dismiss it as simply a humorous side-effect. It would be difficult without some such mythological celebration as this to do honor to contemporary Athens within the convention of fifth century tragedy though sometimes, it may be admitted, Euripides seems to be caught between two fires in his appreciation of the symbolic uses of myth and his satirical crusade against its literal acceptance. Thus just as in one passage in the *Hercules Furens* Heracles is made to doubt the whole mythological convention on which his story in the play is based, so too in one passage in the *Ion* the dramatist pokes fun at the legend of autochthonous Athenian stock.[53]

If to his tragi-comedy Euripides has chosen to add this propagandic superstructure, there is surely no need for us either to reject it or to let it affect our enjoyment of the play. Possibly the minor propagandic strain is a little more than the stuff of the play can bear; but usually when it conflicts with the dramatist's own sense of satire or with his concern for plot and theatrical effect, it is not the play which suffers. Provided that we do not read the *Ion* too solemnly with the political critics or too "aesthetically" with the formal purists, these minor inconsistencies in tone and (rarely) in substance need not greatly bother us. The Greeks mingled serious issues with their lighter entertainments more casually than we do. Should we not then regard this play in the way that perhaps the Athenians did, as a brilliantly constructed *jeu d'espirt*, alternately moving and amusing and rendered no less pleasing by a mildly ironic measure of Athenian self-flattery?

[53] Cf. *H.F.* 1341–46 and *Ion* 542. The *Ion* passage concerned is not one of those ostensibly connected with the myth of Erichthonius: Ion, exasperated at his "father's" inability to tell him who his mother was, finally remarks sarcastically, "No doubt I was born of Mother Earth!"; and Xuthus (not thinking) replies, "Land bears not children."