

Creusa's Monody: *Ion* 859-922

JENE LARUE

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

I

Scholarly critics of Euripides' *Ion* have long noted the importance and the beauty of Creusa's monody, which falls in the middle of the play and acts as a hinge for the rest of the action. Grube calls the piece a "masterpiece of poetic intensity."¹ Bayfield also praises the monologue: "The passage is also perhaps the finest in the play. The pathos is true and noble, and is heightened by the felicity of the language."²

It is, to be sure, true, yet at the same time superficial, to say that the pathos is "heightened by the felicity of the language." Just what are these felicities and whence does the power of her lament derive? Wilamowitz is helpful in noting that part of the power of the song is a result of its blasphemous quality. "Wie blasphemisch musste das auf die Masse der Athener wirken; aber dem Dichter ist es gerade mit dieser Blasphemie bitter ernst."³ Although Wilamowitz's point is well taken, we also see here the dangerous tendency to transfer to the poet himself ideas expressed by a character.

In the action prior to her monologue Creusa was willing to grant that Loxias could partially redeem himself (425-28), but now she has been led to believe that he has irrevocably betrayed her. Creusa's outraged cry against her seducer cannot but move the sternest heart, as religiously disposed as it might be, for there is a great deal of justice in her complaint, at least from her mortal

¹ G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London 1941) 269. Grube also notes that this passage is the turning point of the play. "The monody, occurring as it does in the middle of the play, is undoubtedly its emotional climax. The queen is the one tragic figure, and her feeling of anger and revolt against the god, which we have seen break out before (e.g., 384 ff.), here culminates in the supreme blasphemy before his temple."

² M. A. Bayfield, *The Ion of Euripides* (London 1891) footnote *ad loc.*

³ U. von Wilamowitz, *Euripides Ion* (Berlin 1926) 126.

point of view. The situation resembles closely that of an operatic aria, as Pohlenz⁴ has pointed out in an admirable summary of the monody, with the exception that we do not have the music; whether this would have done much to heighten the pathos of the scene or not is a moot question. All that remains to us now are the words and the meter, sufficient material, one might add, for an appreciation of the scene. The pathos is, of course, present in the situation; but how, we must ask, is it raised to high art? What are the particulars of the language (or "felicities," if you will) that render this passage more powerful than the pangs of an outraged woman's heart could ever have done? Few wronged heroines have been able to express their emotion as well as Creusa.

It will be the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that the power of the monody derives in part from the adaptation of the traditional hymnal style to express the affronted feelings (perhaps blasphemous) of a woman against the god who raped and deceived her.

As Herbert Meyer has convincingly demonstrated, in Greek literature gods were worshiped, praised, prayed to, and beseeched in a recognizable style, which we may, for lack of better nomenclature, call the hymnal style. This style usually contains the following elements:⁵

1. Naming of the deity with his attributes, powers, functions, etc.
2. Relative clause which elaborates the above and often mentions the home of the god.
3. Some form of imperative, e.g. *clythi*, *elthe*, asking that the deity heed the invocation.
4. Hypomnesis, which recalls the god's past favor, usually in the form of an "if" clause, or a verb in the past tense.
5. Prayer of request (in the cult hymn).

⁴ M. Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie* (Leipzig 1930) 475.

⁵ Herbert Meyer, "Hymnische Stilelemente in der frühgriechischen Dichtung" (Diss. Univ. Köln, 1933).

In Creusa's monody the complete reversal of this hymnal style from the usual praise of the god to an utter condemnation of him renders the aria a magnificent *tour de force*. The power of the passage, then, arises from the paradoxical use of language. In addition to his departure from the familiar hymnal style, Euripides also gains force by the more usual poetical means of anaphora, repetition, and ring structure. The use of these poetic devices builds to fever pitch until finally even the god's sacred birthplace, his seat of honor, is turned against him in hate. The ring structure and repetitions in the passage make the denunciation cohere more closely by constantly recalling important motifs.⁶ It is no secret that repetition, doubling, and ring composition are frequent devices in the choral odes of Euripides.⁷ One might deride these as mannerisms of Euripides, but nonetheless they can still be poetically powerful, just as one might ridicule the high-flown diction of a poet such as Dylan Thomas, yet still find it moving.

There can be little doubt that at this point in the play Creusa is ready to rail against the god; the audience is aware of this and is interested in hearing the manner in which the wronged woman will present her case. Previously in the play Creusa has scolded Apollo (384-89), but it takes the malicious prompting of the *presbys*, the knowledge that Apollo has given Xuthus a child, and the realization that she bears no child within her and that she will not fulfill the true function of her womanhood to bring her to the pitch of frenzy. Euripides shows more tact than to have Creusa plunge straightway into a violent attack upon the god. Rather, at 859-80 there is an introduction to the condemnation which builds emotional tension in the audience as it waits to hear how her complaint will be formulated.

⁶ See Grube (above note 1) 21. "The Athenians' fond alertness to words and novelty of phrasing is proverbial. Hence the dramatist could rely on similarities of phrasing, on word echoes from one scene to another, as no modern dramatist can."

I append a list of the words in Creusa's monody which I think were repeated intentionally in order to emphasize the author's meaning. *psychē* (859), *psychē* (877); *sigasō* (859), *sigōsa*, *sigōsa* (868/69); *prodōtēs* (864), *prodōtas* (880); *acharistous* (880), *charin* (896), *charin* (914); *melpōn* (881), *melpōn* (906); *audasō* (896), *audōsan* (893), *audō* (907); *audan* (911).

⁷ The *Phoenissae* in particular among the plays of Euripides offers copious examples of the repetition and doubling of words: *bathysporous gyas* (648), *bathysporous gyas* (669); *dikē* (641), *dikōn* (665), *dikōn* (668), *epipneusas* (789), *epipneusas* (794), *tetrabamosi* (794), *tetrabamosi* (808), *Eris* (798), *eris* (811). Cf. *IA* 558/59; *Hel.* 208, 214, 248, 365-66, 370, 384, 1118; *Bacch.* 76, 86, 116, 165.

II. 859–80

A. 859–69

Creusa begins with a show of uncertainty, as one might expect from a person about to berate a deity as mighty as Apollo. She has reached no solution to her unhappy state, and thus she is in what we might describe as a state of internal aporia, which she will use as a springboard to launch into her attack. This aporetic motif is by no means infrequent as the introduction to an emotional speech, and a deliberative question introduced by *pôs* is commonly used in connection with this motif. As soon as this aporia is introduced, the audience is aware that it will soon be overcome. Creusa is torn in two ways: her heart can no longer bear silence, yet she is afraid to reveal her shame. Creusa calls to her soul in much the same way as an epic poet invokes his muses. Her own soul, her innermost feeling of righteous indignation, are what inspire her to sing this monody.

This aporia is indeed quickly overcome (862–63), for (*gar*) there is now nothing to stop her. The transition here is a bit abrupt and elliptical. The *gar* (862) seems to imply a decision with an omitted *alla* (i.e. “*but* I am going to go ahead, *for* there is no longer anything to stop me”). The general question of 862 is elaborated in 863 with a question that is equivalent to a negative statement: “I have no one now with whom I might contest in virtue.” Again in 864–66 she further elaborates this statement by going into particulars: her husband has betrayed her, she is bereft of home, of children, of all hope. Note that it is her husband whom she first calls a *prodôtês*. The charge against Apollo has not yet been made. In 868–69 Creusa’s first statement is closed with the words *sigôsa*, *sigôsa*, which harken back to *pôs sigasô*. The repetition is effective and poetically justified because Creusa is making a vigorous demonstration that her silence did her no good, for her hopes are destroyed just the same; and now the grief-struck woman is on the verge of abandoning this modest silence in the most emphatic fashion.

B. 870–80

At 870 Creusa breaks off from her previous indecisiveness and takes an oath to act and relieve her heart from its burdens. Examples

of the use of *alla ou* with a preceding question to break away from an aporia and to introduce a strong asseveration are numerous.⁸ The object of Creusa's revelation is carefully postponed until after the long breatching abjuration which must have been spoken as a type of *pnigos*.

The decision to abandon her previous silence is not taken by Creusa without reason; she is forced to it by tears and her aching soul. I have mentioned above that she has not yet accused the god Apollo, although the audience is surely aware that she would; so far she has only mentioned her husband⁹ as *prodotês*, but at 877-78 she begins her transition to the god by alluding to her soul snared (*kakobouleutheis*) by men and gods. The word *athanatôn* of 878 is the first step in the skillful transition to her attack on Apollo. Then she avers that both mortal and immortal will be shown "thankless betrayers" (*prodotas acharistous*). The use of *prodotas* in 880 echoes *prodotês* of 864 and is a fine example of the expert connection of words employed by Euripides to underline his point. The repetition indicates that Apollo will be held responsible for the same crimes as Xuthus: loss of home, of children, and of hope. Linked with *prodotas* is the adjective *acharistous* which can be most simply, although incompletely, translated as "lacking *charis*." This adjective states a motif which will reoccur twice in the body of Creusa's complaint. One must accordingly note the importance of the *charis* relationship in man's dealings with the gods. It is meant to be a reciprocal relationship, just as the *xenia* relationship is, and both sides must give as well as receive or the natural order of things gets out of balance, as in the case of Creusa and Apollo, and must be rectified. *Charis*, then, in an ideal situation implies *anticharis*.

LSJ define the subjective sense of *charis* as follows: "In subjective sense, grace or favour felt, whether on the part of the doer or the receiver . . ." *Charis* sometimes implies duty or obligation, and one can easily recognize the reciprocal nature of the word in, e.g. Soph. *OC* 779, Soph. *Ajax* 522, Eur. *Hel.* 1234. The

⁸ E.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 1060; *Agam.* 1116, 1364; *Prom.* 441; Eurip. *Bacch.* 780 (not a question, but does break away from previous hesitation); in Soph. *El.* 1239 *all'ou* used to break off from silence.

⁹ It is understandable that she should begin with an attack on her husband. As Grube (above, note 1) 261 observes, "Creusa married Xuthus only under the pressure of misfortune (58-64)."

Agamemnon, another play in which the idea of *charis* is turned upside down, offers some apposite examples: 581-82, 821, 785-87. Many other passages occur in which *charis* is given in return for a favor done.¹⁰

III. 881-906

A. 881-96

At 881 Creusa begins her accusation against Apollo in typical hymnal style with a direct invocation. For purposes of suspense she does not immediately mention the god's name. The suspense is not real but aural, for the audience knows what the revelation will be; they are merely tantalized by waiting for the exact words. She begins with a participle describing the god's function (*melpôn*), which is completed by the mention of an attribute: *tas heptaphthongou . . . kitharas enopan*. This phrase is further modified by the relative clause so familiar in hymnal style,¹¹ but here the relative is applied to the god's attribute, the cithara, which is described as emitting *hymnous euachêtous*. Thus far this sounds very much like the conventional opening of a hymn; the adjective *euachêtous* looks as if it might be there to propitiate the god.¹² Then suddenly in the following verse (885) Creusa shouts her passionate accusation. The use of some form of the second person pronoun, as we find it here, is very common in hymnal style,¹³ e.g. *Il.* 9.96, 10.462; *Od.* 13.228; *Soph. OT* 905. Finally she speaks (or rather screams, I would imagine) the long-awaited identification: *ô Latous pai*. The climactic name, or *cap*, is frequently withheld to the end in this fashion for purposes of suspense.¹⁴

In a normal hymn the hypomnesis is that part in which the suppliant reminds the god of a past favor he has rendered the mortal in order to establish a friendly relationship and obtain

¹⁰ See Karl Keyssner, "Gottesvorstellung und Lebensauffassung im griechischen Hymnus," *Würzberger Studien zur Altertumswissenschaft*, Zweites Heft (Stuttgart 1932), 134 and 152-53 for the use of *charis* in hymns.

¹¹ See Meyer (above, note 5) 13 for examples of participles of function, power, and of relative clauses.

¹² Cf. *Hipp.* 1272, which is also in a hymn, for the use of *euachêtous*.

¹³ This is what Keyssner refers to as the "Du-Stil."

¹⁴ The Greeks had a penchant to postpone climactic terms; cf. *Eur. Elec.* 480: *Tyndaris*, the person whose name the audience is waiting to hear. Cf. *Pind. O.* 5.4.: *Kamarina*.

the present request (cf. Sappho A.1.8.). The suppliant might also remind the god of a past favor that the mortal has done for the god, e.g. *Il.* 1.39–40. Whenever an “if” clause is used in an hypomnesis, the statement, “and, of course, I did do these things,” is always implied. But Creusa’s hypomnesis reminds the god of how he came to her as a rapist, or perhaps we should use the word seducer, as Grube recommends, for Creusa’s sarcastic description does seem to portray Apollo as a pretty boy, a golden-haired seducer. The description of her beautiful seducer is doubtlessly apropos; it also fits quite well into the hymnal style. The beautiful countenance of the god is an element frequently met in hymns.¹⁵ Epithets such as *êukomos*, *chryseochaitês*, *chrysokomas* are often associated with Apollo. Euripides renovates the standard epithet with a new phrase: *chrysoi chaitan/marmairôn*. There is, perhaps, some connotation of evil to be seen in the word *marmairôn*. In comparison we might recall that Zeus in all his glory was Semele’s undoing. *Marmairôn* is the type of word that one would expect in praise of a god: it is a word which describes the god in all his radiance, but in Creusa’s mouth it becomes a bitter condemnation. In order to stress her innocence and put the god into an even more unfavorable light Creusa mentions the fact she was picking flowers. She reminds one of the innocent Proserpina in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Apollo is no better than Pluto who raped Proserpina while she, too, was picking flowers (*Met.* 5.391–98). Like Creusa, Proserpina also calls on her mother as she is being raped.

The words that Creusa uses (887–88) are undoubtedly in the traditional genre of the hymn as we can see by comparing Sappho A.1.8–13, where it is recalled that Aphrodite previously appeared in all her splendor to the love-sick Sappho. This passage, as is fitting in hymnal style, also mentions the *dynamis* or *aretê* of the god,¹⁶ but in a very reproachful manner. In a sense the entire description of the rape is an aberration from the usual part of a hymn in which the god’s *kratos*, *menos*, or *dynamis* is mentioned. But here the bitter implication is that Apollo has used his sacred *dynamis* to rape her.

Creusa continues her reversal of a hypomnesis to 896. We have observed that the purpose of the hypomnesis was to recall

¹⁵ Keyssner (above, note 10) 127.

¹⁶ Keyssner (above, note 10) 48.

the past favor of the god, his previous *charis*, in order to gain present satisfaction. But at 896 we discover that Apollo did not give Creusa *charis*; rather he gave *charis* to Cypris (*Kupridi charin prassôn*), that is, to his own lust. This, of course, is *charis* in the sense of *dulcedo amoris*.¹⁷ No doubt in his haste and his lust he paid attention only to his own self-centred sexual satisfaction. There was certainly no *eucharis Aphrodita* for Creusa, and she wins the audience's sympathy by portraying herself as a weak and helpless maiden: *O mater m' audôsan* (893).

B. 897–904

Now Creusa continues to bring the specific charge against Apollo; she introduces the paternity charge. As would any Athenian in a law court, she portrays herself in a wretched fashion (*ha dystanos* 897 and the repetition *tan dystanon* 901). In 906 the first half of her accusation is concluded with the same word with which she began (*melpôn*), and now we understand the previous formulaic reference to the god's singing: it is simply that he is indifferent to her. While she suffers, he callously goes on playing his cithara. The shining god's traditional epithet has been cleverly turned against him, and what is normally a beautiful function of Apollo has become simply a proof of his indifference. One understands now that Creusa was bitterly cynical when she stated that Apollo plays *hymnous euachêtous*; they can be no such thing for Creusa. The address *ô Latous pai* has taken on a completely different tone since Ion's first happy use of the phrase (127, 143). Ion began the play with singing and dancing in honor of Apollo, the song and dance with which Creusa is now completely disgusted. In Ion's mouth at the beginning of the play these words were joyful and full of praise; in Creusa's mouth they have become bitter and harsh because she is incensed at the god's traditional ability to sing and dance when she is now so miserable.

Besides the specific verbal echo of *melpôn* it is easy to see that 905–6 repeat the idea of 881–82. The *sy de* contrasts sharply with *tiktô* of 897. We find an instructive parallel to this type of construction at *Il.* 9.96 ff. which is an address in hymnal style to a

¹⁷ *Charis* in the sense of *dulcedo amoris* is quite common; e.g., Aesch. *A.* 1206 and Eur. *Hipp.* 526–27.

mortal; at 109 the same *sy de* is used to afford a sharp contrast ("I'm doing this . . . but you go right on without paying any attention to me.").¹⁸ As I have pointed out above, the last line of the strophe completes the circle and returns to the first line of the strophe by specifically repeating a word which has been used previously (*melpôn*). This type of construction of an ode in ring form is a favorite device of Euripides (cf. *Phoen.* 1019, 1042). Euripides also likes to echo words in anaphora at the beginning of strophe and antistrophe, e.g., *Phoen.* 1018, 1043.

iv. 907-22

After a cry of grief, Creusa again continues her hymnal invocation of the god: *ton Latous audô* <σ'>. I suggest that this invocation is very similar to a familiar hymnic praise of the sort: *clythi meu argyrotōxa*. This element shows what we might call the appeal to one's own *phônê*.¹⁹ Vellacott seems to have instinctively found the right phrase with his translation, "Listen to me, Apollo" (Penguin edition). Next follows (908-10) the ever-present relative clause of hymnal style which gives the god's function and his seat. The epithet *chrysios* (909) is, as we have already seen, one that is frequently associated with Apollo.²⁰ When we compare 907-10 with an easily recognizable hymn at *Il.* 1.37-38, we see how closely the two coincide. There can be no doubt but that Euripides is toying with this style:

Il. 1.37-38:

κλυθί μεν ἀργυρότοξ' ὃς Χρύσην ἀμφιβέβηκας
Κίλλαν τε ζαθέην Τενέδοιό τε ἱφι ἀνάσσεις.

Ion 907-10:

τὸν Λατοῦς αὐδῶ <σ'>
ὅστ' ὀμφὰν κληροῖς
πρὸς χρυσεύς θάκους
καὶ γαίης μεσσήρεις ἔδρας.

¹⁸ One might argue that this passage is not parallel, since at *Il.* 9.96 ff. a sincere address is being directed to someone, whereas Creusa's monody is pure vituperation. We must keep in mind, however, that Creusa's lament surely implies that she wants the god to do something about her plight.

¹⁹ See E. B. Holtzmark, *Some Aspects of Style and Theme in the Persae of Aeschylus* (University of Calif. Diss., 1963) 151, "The suppliant is concerned with the effect that his voice or words may have on the deity."

²⁰ Cf. 887 and Callim. *Hymn 4, To Delos* 260-63.

This invocation ends in 911 with the word *audan*, a subtle connection which echoes the verb *audô* of 907 and binds the invocation together.

At this point in a normal hymn we would perhaps expect the prayer directed to the god, as in *Il.* 1.41–42. Instead of a prayer we find what closely resembles a curse in 912–22: *iô kakos eunatôr ktl.* In hymnal style it is extremely important to mention the god's correct name for the occasion in order to bind him.²¹ The final name, then, that Creusa comes up with for Apollo is *kakos eunatôr*. With this appellation it should become obvious that she is making a mockery of the regular hymnal form. After this bitter accusation she continues to distort the hymnal style by again introducing the customary relative clause (*hos* 913). The relative clause, however, contrary to customary usage is not employed to state the god's power or function; this has already been done a few lines above (908–10). Rather the relative introduces a type of hypomnesis, which restates the theme of *charis* previously mentioned in 880 and 896. But there is no favor here recalled which has been previously tended the god (cf. *Il.* 1.39) nor does it recall any favor graciously offered by the god (cf. Sappho A.1.8–9). Strangely enough it recalls a *charis* not received, *charin ou prolabôn*. Creusa is here calling attention to the utter disparity in the reciprocity of *charis*. She reminds Apollo that he is giving favor to her husband in the form of a child, although he has received no favor from Xuthus. This phrase cannot help but recall to the listener's ear line 896. Let it not be said that this repetition is casual or coincidental; the device of repetition is too frequent in all poetry.²² The force of this repetition lies in the strong contrast: Apollo did not get *charis* from Xuthus; Creusa, on the other hand, did offer *charis* to Apollo, or to his lust, albeit unwillingly. The outraged woman is simply pointing out how illogical and unjust the whole situation is.

²¹ Keyssner (above, note 10) 48 ff. mentions the importance of specifically naming the powers of the deity.

²² A fine example of the force that can be gained in modern poetry by the use of repetition is seen in Stephen Spender's poem, "Song," in which he stresses a lover's attempt at self-justification by repetition ("is justified, is justified, was justified, was justified; self-justifying knife; were justified, were justified.")

Hugh Parry, *The Choral Odes of Euripides: Problems of Structure and Dramatic Relevance* (Univ. of Calif. Diss. 1963) 137, notes the significance of repetition and resposion of words in the choral odes of the *Phoenissae*.

The monody ends on the high, fevered note of a curse (912-22); the very birthplace of the god, his holiest precinct, is turned against him (919): *misei s' ha Dalos* . . . The holiness of Delos further strengthens the curse. It is a strongly contorted figure, a type of violent hypallage in which Creusa transfers her own hatred to the god's island, and to his sacred laurel tree. This final curse is a malevolent reversal of the pathetic fallacy in which nature reacts in sympathy with the god or hero. It is a vivid personification, meant to strike the god to the quick. Normally in a hymn the mention of the god's birthplace would be an integral part of the god's praise. Callimachus, indeed, devoted an entire hymn to the praise of Apollo's island, Delos.²³ But Creusa has perverted this to the direct opposite.

²³ *Hymn 4, To Delos.*