

## ION

Hermes:

Atlas holds up the massive firmament,  
The old home of the gods, his bronze back bent  
Beneath it, father of Maia, who bore me  
To Zeus. I serve that holy panoply.  
And here I have arrived in Delphi, where  
King Phoebus chants to mortals from his chair  
About the present and what is to be.  
In Greece stands Athens, whose celebrity  
Is great, for Pallas of the golden spear  
Gave her her name. And Lord Apollo here           10  
Lay with Creusa, where the rocks which face  
The north and are located at the base  
Of Athens' hill were called Macrai. She grew  
In pregnancy of which her father knew  
Nothing (thanks to Apollo). Finally  
She bore a child and brought her progeny  
To the cave where she conceived and kept it there  
To die within a cradle's hold, aware  
Of her ancestors' customs - Born of the Earth,  
Erechthonius, was given at his birth           20  
Two snakes by Pallas as his guards; then she  
Decided that Aglaurus' progeny  
Should be his nurses. Ever since that day  
They've raised their children with a gold inlay  
Of snakes. With such gewgaws the little guy  
Was laid out by Creusa there to die.

My brother Phoebus told me: "Brother, go  
To Athens, for the people there you know,  
And bring the baby to my Delphic shrine,  
Cradle and clothes and all, for he is mine                30  
And I will care for him. To gratify  
My brother in this occupation, I  
Took up the woven cradle, brought it here  
And placed the boy beside the temple, near  
Its base, while making sure that anyone  
Would see a child there. Then, just as the sun  
Arose, the priestess came, and with one glance  
She wondered at a mortal's arrogance  
That there was some young girl of Delphi who  
Has dared to cast her secret child into                40  
The house of a god. So keen to take it away,  
She nonetheless decided to give way  
To pity, with Apollos' aid, and so  
She raised the child herself. She didn't know  
Who were its parents, and the baby knew  
Nothing, of course, about its parents, too.  
When young, he played around the shrine, and he  
Was bred there. When he reached maturity  
He guarded the god's treasures, having gained  
The Delphians' trust, and there he has maintained 50  
A holy style of life. His mother wed  
Xuthus, and then a war came to a head  
Between Athens and Chalcis. Xuthus fought  
On Athens' side, and when the war was brought  
To an end and gave to Athens victory,

,  
 For his support they offered him, to be  
 His wife, Creusa, though he was not one  
 Of them but an Achaean, Zeus's son,  
 Brought up in Aeolus. They're childless, though  
 They have been married many years, and so 60  
 They're here with one strong wish for progeny.  
 Apollo still recalls his son, so he  
 Is helping them – to Xuthus he will say  
 The boy is his, so that Creusa may,  
 When she goes home, identify the child,  
 And thereby Xuthus is to be beguiled,  
 And in this way the boy will have his due,  
 Creating Asia, being known all through  
 The land of Greece as Ion. Now I'll go  
 Into this laurelled cave that I may know 70  
 Its fate. I'll be the first god to gain fame  
 By giving to the new-born babe that name. [exit Hermes] [enter Ion]  
 Ion:  
 The sun, upon his chariot, shines so bright  
 Upon the earth and into the sacred night  
 The stars flee. And Parnassus' cliffs that we  
 Can't tread shine out and for humanity  
 Receive the wheel of day; the smoke of dry  
 Myrtle flies up to Phoebus' roof on high.  
 Pythia upon her tripod's singing out  
 To all the Greeks what Loxias may shout. 80  
 Acolytes, go to Castalia, and when  
 You've bathed in her silvery whirlpools, then

Come to the temple, speaking holily  
 For those who want to hear your prophecy.  
 But I will labour at the task that's been  
 Mine since I was a boy, with branches green  
 With bay and sacred wreaths to purify  
 The entrance here; the ground is moist; and I  
 Will shoot the crowd of birds of the air that wings  
 Above and harms the holy offerings. 90  
 As I am parentless, I'm the trustee  
 Of Phoebus' temple, which has nurtured me.  
 You lovely new-grown ministering laurel-bough,  
 Who sweep Apollo's shrine, attend me now.  
 You're from the timeless gardens watering  
 The holy myrtle, ever-rippling.  
 I'll sweep the pavement of the god all day.  
 O Paeon, Paeon, child of Leto, may  
 Fortune be with you! How I honour you  
 And your prophetic shrine, a servant to 100  
 The gods! But this responsibility  
 To do their work is not a strain to me:  
 Phoebus is like a father. Now I'll fling  
 The broom aside and set to sprinkling  
 Castalia's waters from the golden urn,  
 For I am free of sin and do not burn  
 With lust. And never will I in this way  
 Cease to serve Phoebus – if I do, then may  
 I have good fortune! Ah, the birds are here!  
 Go, go! For I forbid you to come near 110  
 The walls and house of gold. I with my bow,

Herald of Zeus, will seek you out, although  
You are the strongest bird of all. Look there!  
A swan! Well, take your crimson foot elsewhere!  
Apollo's lyre, which sings its tune with you,  
Will not protect you. Change your course! Go to  
The Delian lake, for if you defy me,  
Your blood will stain your lovely melody.  
Another bird?? Have you a nest In mind  
Beneath the cornice? Well, my bow will find  
You out and kill you. Will you not obey?  
Go off and rear your offspring far away                      120  
By the Alpheus! Or the Isthmian grove, maybe?  
And yet to slaughter you would bother me,  
For you're a herald of the gods. But still  
I must be subject to Apollo's will  
In all my tasks – I'll never cease to be  
Faithful to those who always nurtured me.

Chorus:

Our holy Athens isn't the only place  
With gorgeous columns that were built to grace  
Apollo but here also, where the sun  
Shines on his double face. Look, dearest one!                      130

He's slaying the Hydra. Look on it, my dear!  
The golden sickle!

-                      Yes, another's near

The god. He's holding up a fiery brand.

I do believe I'm meant to understand

That he's the one whose history is told

To me when I am at the loom – the bold

Iolaus, Phoebus' partner as they bear

Their toil together. Yes! Look over there!

A man upon a wingèd horse, and he

Is killing a dragon-like monstrosity 140

With three bodies.

- I'm glancing everywhere.

The Battle of the Giants! Over there –

Enceladus – you see? – who's brandishing

His Gorgon shield. And Pallas! What's that thing? –

It's Zeus's two-edged thunderbolt!

- That's right!

The furious Mimas he's setting alight.

Another Giant there is being slain

With roaring Bacchus' peaceful ivy cane.

-You by the temple, is the sanctuary

Legal to enter?

Ion:

Strangers, certainly! 150

Chorus:

May we ask you if –

Ion:

What would you be told?

Chorus:

Does Phoebus' temple actually hold

Earth's centre?

Ion:

Yes indeed. It's garlanded

With wreaths and gorgons.

Chorus:

So it has been said.

Ion:

Offer a honey-cake and ask something!

Stand at the shrine! Before the offering

Of a sheep is made, do not go farther in.

Chorus:

I understand – I would not wish to sin.

What's here delights me.

Ion:

It's allowed for you

To look at everything with thorough view. 160

Chorus:

My masters let me look at it.

Ion:

And where

Do you all dwell?

Chorus:

Athena's shrine took care

Of all our kings. But what you ask of me

Is here. [enter Creusa]

Ion:

There is in you nobility.

Most men, at least, you'd know if they're well-bred

By how they look. I marvel that you shed

A tear at what you saw. Why do you grieve,

Lady? What pleases others seems to leave

You sad.

Creusa:

Why wonder, stranger, why I cry?

For when I saw Apollo's temple, I 170

Recalled an ancient memory. My mind  
Was in my house, although you clearly find  
Me here. Women, your lot is misery.  
To what may we ascribe morality  
Once Heaven has declared our mortal fate?

Ion:

What pains you, lady?

Creusa:

Nothing, for my state  
Is calm now since my arrow has been shot.  
Do not concern yourself about my lot.

Ion:

Who are you? What's the land from which you came?  
What are you called?

Creusa:

Creusa is my name. 180

My father is Erechtheus, and my land  
Is Athens.

Ion:

Noble lady, here I stand  
Astonished that in great Athens you dwell  
And have a noble parentage as well.

Creusa:

Stranger, my fortune runs no further, though,  
Than that.

Ion:

But, lady, I would like to know –

Creusa:



lon:

190

lon:

lon:

lon:

200

A rumour –

Creusa:

I'm at leisure. Ask away.

What would you know?

Ion:

Well did Erechtheus slay

Your sisters?

Creusa:

As a sacrifice for their land.

Ion:

And you alone, am I to understand,

Were saved?

Creusa;

I was a babe.

Ion:

And is it true

Your father was secreted then by you

Within the earth?

Creusa:

The ruler of the sea

Destroyed him.

Ion:

Is there a locality

Called Macrai?

Creusa:

You remind me of something

I had forgotten with that questioning.

210

Ion:

Phoebus reveres it.

Creusa:

Would I'd never seen

That place!

Ion:

What's that? A place that's always been

Dear to the god??

Creusa:

No reason. But there came

Into my mind a deed of dreadful shame

In a cave.

Ion:

To what Athenian are you wed?

Creusa:

He is a foreigner.

Ion:

What's that you said?

He must be noble, though.

Creusa:

He's called Xuthus,

The progeny of Zeus and Aeolus.

Ion:

But how can you be married to a man

Who's from abroad, while you're Athenian? 220

Creusa:

Near Athens stands Euboea –

Ion:

Separated

From her by water, as I've heard it stated.

Creusa:

He razed it fighting for us.

Ion:

Marrying

You as a friend of Athens?

Creusa:

Capturing

Me as a spoil of war, won by the spear.

Ion:

With him or on your own have you come here?

Creusa:

I came with him. He turned aside to see

Trophonius's shrine.

Ion:

For prophecy

Or just to view it?

Creusa:

Just one word he burns

To hear from it.

Ion:

Then say if your concerns 230

Are crops or children.

Creusa:

Although we've been married

For a long time, yet I have never carried

A child, as Phoebus knows.

Ion:

In everything

But this you're lucky. What a bitter thing

You're forced to suffer!

Creusa:

Ah, but who are you?

Your mother must be glad – more than her due

Has she received.

Ion:

I'm called the god's slaveling,

Lady.

Creusa:

Are you a city's offering

Or did your master sell you?

Ion:

This I know

And only this. I'm called Loxias, though. 240

Creusa:

*You have my pity.*

Ion:

Since I'm unaware

Of my background.

Creusa:

And are you living there

In the temple, or within a house, maybe?

Ion:

Apollo's home is mine entirely,

Wherever I may sleep.

Creusa:

When you first came,

Were you a child? A youth?

Ion:

Well, those who claim

To know say I was but a babe.

Creusa:

And who

Among the Delphic women nurtured you

With milk?

Ion:

No-one. My nurse –

Creusa:

Yes, who was she,

Poor man? Now I have found a malady 250

Like mine.

Ion:

Apollo's priestess, whom I thought

Of as my mother.

Creusa:

Once you had been brought

To manhood, who were they who succoured you?

Ion:

The altars fed me. Any stranger who

Passed by did, too.

Creusa:

Your mother – who was she?

She was unhappy, it would seem to me.

Ion:

An unwed girl, perhaps.

Creusa:

But you possess

A livelihood – it's clear from how you dress.

Ion:

My god has clothed me thus.

Creusa:

Have you not, though,  
Been keen to search your roots?

Ion:

Lady, I know                      260

No proof of them.

Creusa:

That woman suffered, too,  
As has your wretched mother.

Ion:

Yes, but who  
Is she? For she would give me great delight  
If she could give me succour in my plight.

Creusa:

I seek a word from him whom you attend.

Ion:

Whatever it is, dear lady, I will lend  
A hand if I am able.

Creusa:

Hear my tale –  
Ah, Shame prevents me, though.

Ion:

Then you will fail,  
For Shame is lazy.

Creusa:

One of my friends told me  
That she lay with Apollo.

Ion:

Honestly?

270

Don't say that!

Creusa:

And to him she bore a child,

Unknown to her father.

Ion:

Ah, she was beguiled

By a man and felt ashamed about the act.

Creusa:

Well, the poor woman said it is a fact,

And she has suffered.

Ion:

How is that if she

Lay with the god?

Creusa:

To put it succinctly,

She left the child outdoors to die.

Ion:

But where?

Does it still live?

Creusa:

There's no-one who's aware.

That's why I'm here.

Ion:

How did he die?

Creusa:

She thought

That maybe some wild animal had caught

280

And killed it.



Ion:

Was there proof of any trace

At all?

Creusa:

Well, when she went back to the place

Where she had left the child, it was not there.

Ion:

And did she find blood there or anywhere

Upon the road?

Creusa:

She didn't, no, although

She had a good look.

Ion:

Was it long ago

That he was killed?

Creusa:

Were he alive today

You two would be the same height, I would say.

Ion:

The god has wronged him, causing much distress

To his mother.

Creusa:

She did not achieve success 290

In bearing another child.

Ion:

What if, maybe,

Apollo brought the child up secretly?

Creusa:

He would do wrong to take a sole delight

Thereby.

Ion:

This corresponds with my own plight!

Creusa:

A tearful mother longs for you as well,

I think.

Ion:

Do not remind me!

Creusa:

I won't. Tell

Me what I'm asking, though.

Ion:

Well, do you know

What part of what you're asking irks me so?

Creusa:

Poor woman!

Ion:

How can Phoebus, though, declare

What he wants secret?

Creusa:

But he's sitting there. 300

He will.

Ion:

But he's ashamed of what he's done,

And therefore don't convict him!

Creusa:

But the one

Who suffered this misfortune is in pain.

Ion:

There's no-one here from whom you may obtain

The truth. If Phoebus were found evil here

He would quite rightly do harm to your seer.

Lady, leave it! Anything contrary

To him is not allowable. If we

Should try to get the gods to say what they,

Despite our efforts, are averse to say, 310

Either through sacrifice or through the flight

Of birds, it would be folly. What we fight

To gain against their will becomes no gain

At all for us, for we have to obtain

It from them willingly.

Chorus:

Calamities

For men exist in multiplicities,

For of good fortune there's a paucity,

With scarce one piece in all humanity.

Creusa:

Phoebus, you do her wrong in every way;

Her words are here though she is far away. 320

You did not save your child, although you ought

To have, and, though a seer, you have not thought

To let her mother know that, if he's dead,

He may be buried, but, if he instead

Yet lives... Enough! For I'm prevented by

The god you serve from finding out what I

Would learn. I see my husband drawing near.

He's left Trophonius' tomb. Ah, he is here.

Don't tell him of our talk lest he find out

The hidden things that we have talked about. 330

We bicker with our husbands, and we're hated,

Both good and bad - thus women were we created

Wretched. [enter Xuthus]

Xuthus:

Apollo, greetings! And you, too,

Dear wife! Has my being tardy worried you?

Creusa:

Oh no, though I was just about to be

Concerned. What news, then, have you brought to me?

May we have children?"

Xuthus:

To anticipate

The answer of the god he does not rate

As proper. He indeed said one thing, though,

To please us – neither one of us will go 340

Home childless.

Creusa:

O may we auspiciously

Have come here, reverent divinity,

Mother of Phoebus, if it could be thus!

And may your son be reconciled to us!

Xuthus:

Amen to that! And who speaks for your son,

Lady Leto?

Ion:

My friend, I am the one

To do so, or at least the one to say

The words aloud, but for the ones that stay  
Inside there are some others who sit here  
Beside the tripod, and they have no peer, 950  
And they by lot are chosen.

Xuthus:

I'm content.

I've everything I need. It's time I went  
Inside. The sacrifice was made, I've heard,  
For strangers. I would hear Apollo's word  
Today – for it's a most auspicious day.  
Adorn the shrine with laurel boughs and pray  
For me, dear wife, that Phoebus will reply  
That we may hope for children.

Creusa:

That will I.

If even now Phoebus would make amends  
For his past wrong, though we may not be friends, 950  
I'll take him at his word. [exit]

Ion:

Wherefore does she

Abuse Apollo so ambiguously?  
Love for her friend who needs Apollo's word?  
Or is there something that must not be heard  
And she is hiding from us? What is she  
To me? No reason for anxiety!  
I'll pour the water from the urns of gold  
Into the sacred cups. I must unfold  
Advice to Phoebus. Does the god mislead  
Young virgins? Does he secretly sow his seed 370

And leave his breed to die? Apollo, no!  
You have the power and therefore do not so!  
Seek virtue! You punish mortality  
For sin and yet you have no such decree  
For gods. I tell you now that if you pay  
For raping mortals, the heavenly array  
Will bleed its temples dry – Poseidon, Zeus  
And you! And therefore don't play fast and loose  
With mortals! You should never vilify  
The race of mortals, since we always try                    380  
To echo you in morals. Rather you  
Should vilify yourselves who taught us to  
Do bad things.

Chorus:

                    Queen Athena, born without  
The suffering of childbirth, coming out  
Of Zeus's head, I beg you, o goddess  
Of Victory, come hither now and bless  
This Pythian home from Heaven up on high!  
Come from her golden chambers and then fly  
To Phoebus' hearth right at Earth's nucleus,  
Where he fulfils his oracles for us,                    390  
Observed with dances! Queen Athena, pray,  
With Artemis, that patent oracles may  
Predict a birth for Erechtheus' progeny.  
We mortals have immense felicity  
In sturdy children, who'll acquire the store  
Of all their fathers' wealth by having more  
Children. They are a cure for all distress

And, through good fortune, bring great happiness,  
And they defend their native land. For me  
Their nurture far outweighs all property, 400  
All palaces. The childless life I hate,  
And anyone who think it good I rate  
As shameful. Bless me, then, with progeny  
And give me moderate security!  
Hail, seats of Pan and rocks that lie close by  
The hollows of that place we call Macrai,  
Where the three Aglaurides may be seen  
Near Pallas' temples dancing on the green  
To wailing pipes and songs. Pan, where you play  
Your Pan-pipes, hidden from the light of day, 410  
A wretched maiden, having been beguiled  
By Lord Apollo, gave birth to a child  
And then exposed the boy to be a feast  
For any wingèd bird or any beast,  
The outrage of that rape. I've never heard,  
While at the loom or from some spoken word,  
That mortal children born of gods can be  
Able to claim a decent destiny. [enter Ion]  
Ion:  
Women, who keep your station round about  
The incense-breathing temple and watch out 420  
For your Athena, has Xuthus now gone  
Or is he at the shrine, lingering on  
To hear the oracle?  
Chorus:

He's still about.

He's in the passage. Ah, he's coming out. [enter Xuthus]

Xuthus:

Be joyful, son!

Ion:

I am so, certainly.

And we will get along just splendidly,

For you are wise.

Xuthus:

Give me your hand, my boy!

Let me embrace you, Ion, in my joy!

Ion:

Are you alright, sir, or have you been sent

Out of your mind?

Xuthus:

Because it's my intent 430

That, having found the dearest thing I know

In all my life, never to let him go?

Ion:

Don't break my garland!

Xuthus:

I want nothing more

Than to embrace you. Him whom I adore

I've found.

Ion:

Get back, or I will shoot you through

Your chest.

Xuthus:

Why, since you've found the one you, too,

Adore?



Ion:

You're mad! Must I teach the insane?

Xuthus:

Kill me! Inter me! But if I am slain,

You'll be a parricide.

Ion:

A parricide?

Is this a joke?

Xuthus:

Of course it's not. Abide 440

A while and I will make it clear to you.

Ion:

How?

Xuthus:

I'm your father, you're my son.

Ion:

And who

Says this?

Xuthus:

The god who nurtured you, although  
I fathered you.

Ion:

Nobody else?

Xuthus:

Not so.

Ion:

You're wrong!

Xuthus:

My hearing's faulty, then.

Ion:

And yet

What were his words exactly?

Xuthus:

He I met –

Ion:

When?

Xuthus:

As I left –

Ion:

Well, what about the one

Whom you would meet?

Xuthus:

That man would be my son.

Ion:

A gift from someone else?

Xuthus:

A gift indeed,

A gift that was engendered by my seed.

Ion:

That man was I?

Xuthus:

Yes.

Ion:

How?

Xuthus:

The two of us

Both wonder at a thing so marvellous.

Ion:

But who's my mother?

Xuthus:

That I cannot say.

Ion:

He didn't tell you?

Xuthus:

No. I went away,

So pleased with what I'd heard.

Ion:

Mother Earth, maybe?

Xuthus:

No, for she bears no human progeny.

Ion:

Then how could I be yours?

Xuthus:

I do not know –

Ask Phoebus!

Ion:

Let's move forward, then, and go

To other things.

Xuthus:

Let's not, my child.

Ion;

Have you

Had lawless sex?

Xuthus:

As youths are apt to do, 460

I have.

Ion:

Before you wed?

Xuthus:

Yes, certainly –

Never since then.

Ion:

So did you father me

Before that time?

Xuthus:

The years concur.

Ion:

But how

Did I arrive here after that?

Xuthus:

I vow

I cannot tell you.

Ion:

From so far away

As well!

Xuthus:

I know – I have no words to say.

Ion:

Were you at Pythia's Rock before?

Xuthus:

Yes, there

To see the Bacchanals.

Ion:

And tell me where

You stayed while you were there.

Xuthus:

With someone who –

Well, with the slave girls...

Ion:

What? You mean while you 470

Were dancing they were having sex?

Xuthus:

Well, they

Were Maenads!

Ion:

Were you drunk?

Xuthus:

My child, I lay

In Bacchic joy!

Ion:

And thus was I created!

Xuthus:

My son, your being born was clearly fated.

Ion:

How am I at the temple, then?

Xuthus:

Maybe

The girl exposed you.

Ion:

So from slavery

I have escaped.

Xuthus:

Embrace me!

Ion:

It is wise

To trust the god.

Xuthus:

Ah, now I realize

You've found your reason.

Ion:

I just wish to be...

Xuthus:

Now that you're seeing what you ought to see... 480

Ion:

...the son of Zeus.

Xuthus:

Voilà!

Ion:

And you're the man

Who gave me birth?

Xuthus:

Indeed yes, if you can

Trust in the god.

Ion:

Hail, father!

Xuthus:

Ah, a sound

So sweet to hear!

Ion:

This present day –

Xuthus:

Has found

Me happy.

Ion:

Mother, how I long to see

You, too, but when is that destined to be?

Chorus:

With you we share the house's happiness,

And yet I wish the gods above would bless

My mistress with issue.

Ion:

How properly

Apollo has shown your discovery, 490

Son, and united us. Now, as you do,

I yearn to find your mother, who gave you

To me. Let's trust in Time and hope that we

Can find her. Now, my son, attend to me -

Give up your duties in the temple here

And come with me to Athens where great cheer

Awaits – both wealth and power. And no-one

Will call you poor or bastard. What, my son?

Why are you mute? Why are your eyes cast down

Towards the ground? I see that by your frown 500

You're thinking deeply and it frightens me.

Ion:

Matters seen from afar don't seem to be

The same as seen close up. I feel such cheer

At finding you're my father. And yet hear

What I am thinking! For it has been said

That the famed men of Athens have been bred

In Athens, not abroad. So they'll be faced

With someone who has doubly been disgraced –

The bastard of a foreigner! They'll call me

A nobody, and if I soon shall be 510  
Important in the city, I'll be hated  
By weak men, who are always irritated  
By those above them. On the other hand,  
The good and wise who do not wish to stand  
For office will be sure to laugh at me  
Because I have renounced tranquillity  
In timid Athens, but if I achieve  
A noted reputation, I'll receive  
The enmity of others. That's the way  
The world works, father, for those who hold sway 520  
Envy their rivals. There's a woman who  
Is in your house and childless, with whom you  
Once shared her pain – now she must undergo  
That pain alone. She'll hate me – rightly so –  
A foreigner full of felicity,  
While, childless, she'll look at me bitterly.  
You must, then, leave me, vexed about your spouse,  
Or keep me at your side and throw the house  
Into turmoil. So many men have died 530  
From women's poisons causing homicide.  
I grieve, then, for your wife, for there won't be  
Children to soothe her seniority –  
And she so noble! Monarchy, beside  
All that, is overrated, glorified  
Unjustly. Though it has a lovely face,  
Its heart is dark and turbulent and base.  
Who's happy if he lives his life in dread  
With sidelong glances? I would choose instead



To be a citizen, for kings possess  
Bad friends, detesting people's righteousness 540

Through fear of death. However, you might say  
That stacks of gold over such things hold sway.

The noisy crowd I do not long to hear  
While I am trying to guard my wealth in fear.

No, I have more respect for moderation  
And being completely free of tribulation.

Father, I have been blessed with liberty,  
The greatest asset to humanity,  
And little trouble; nobody has tried  
To irk me; I've not had to step aside, 550

To scum confronted. When to the gods I pray  
And speak to men, I serve those who are gay  
And not morose. Some I would tell to go  
While other folk would be my guests, and so  
I ever was a pleasant novelty

When every new arrival came to me.  
What men should wish for, even though they could  
Be disinclined, is following what's good,  
As I do. Therefore, father, let me say

That I'd prefer to live my life that way 560  
Than have the life that you now offer me,  
For living on one's own and modestly  
Matches a life of grandeur.

Xuthus:

Ah, my boy,

I pray, no more of this! Learn to enjoy  
Success. Where I found you, I will prepare



Chorus:

Ah, tears with mournful cries and groans are seen  
When news Xuthus is blessed with a child the queen  
Has heard while childless. Ah, what prophecy  
Have you declared, prophet and progeny  
Of Leto? Whence came this boy, who was fed  
By you, Apollo? By whom was he bred?  
This means betrayal, and I am afeared  
Of what is yet to come. It's very weird. 600

The boy's a foreigner, it's clear to me.  
We must inform our mistress, obviously.  
In everything she was her husband's friend,  
Her hopes all pinned on him, but in the end  
He was disloyal. Now she's in despair  
While he is happy. But he does not care  
For his own friends. Into senility  
She's fallen, while he in great prosperity  
Came to her home from somewhere far away  
But did not share his wealth. O may he pay 610

The price for that omission! May he find  
The gods unfriendly! Well, he'll know my mind  
Towards my queen. The feast is ready now.  
O Parnassus's ridge, o Heaven's brow,  
With Bacchus' flaming torches burning bright  
And his Bacchantes wandering by night,  
Don't let the boy come near! For we don't need  
An alien invasion – no indeed!

Creusa:

My father's ancient tutor, come to me

On Phoebus' seat! Share my felicity! 620

He'll give an oracle about my need

For children. O how sweet it is indeed

To share good news attended by a friend,

For if things should go badly in the end,

It's gratifying to look in the face

Of someone kind. Although it is the case

That I'm your mistress, I still care for you

Just as a father, as you used to do

For mine.

Tutor:

Daughter, you're worthy of the fame

Of your ancestors, and you do not shame 630

Their ancient line that's native to your land!

Then draw me there, taking me by the hand!

The shrine is very deep, so succour me

In my old age!

Creusa;

Come, then! Step carefully!

Tutor:

I do so, for although my feet are slow,

My mind is quick.

Creusa:

And yet, as on you go,

Apply your staff!

Tutor:

Both staff and I are blind.

Creusa:

That's true, but still be circumspect, and mind

You do not tire.

Tutor:

That's what I'd rather do

But I possess no power.

Creusa:

Women, who

Attend to both my shuttle and my loom, 640

What was the news about my barren womb

That Xuthus has received? If good, tell me,

Thus aiding masters with integrity.

Chorus:

Fortune!

Tutor:

A sorry start!

Chorus:

Sorry indeed!

Tutor:

I shudder at the thought.

Chorus:

What do we need

To do? This could result in death.

Creusa:

Tell me,

My friends, what is this stream of oratory?

What do you fear?

Chorus:

Should we speak out or stay

Silent?

Creusa:

Speak out, for there is some dismay 650

You have to tell me.

Chorus:

Then I will speak out,

Were I to die twice over. There's no doubt

That you will not hold children to your breast.

Creusa:

Then all I crave now is eternal rest

Beneath the earth.

Tutor:

O daughter!

Creusa:

Ah, my friends,

See how my sorrowful existence ends!

Tutor:

I do.

Creusa:

This wretched sadness grieves me so!

Tutor:

Be strong, my girl!

Creusa:

How can I not feel woe?

Tutor:

Let's wait until we learn...

Creusa:

What more can we

Expect to hear?

Tutor:

We'll have to wait and see 660

If Xuthus has the same ill luck that fell  
Upon you.

Chorus:

Well, old man I have to tell  
You that Apollo gave to him a boy,  
For which he's celebrating in his joy.

Creusa:

The height of grief for me!

Tutor:

Will he be bred  
By someone else or has Apollo said  
That he already lives?

Chorus:

He's a young man –  
I saw him.

Creusa:

What is that you say? How can  
Your words be true?

Tutor:

It wholly baffles me.  
How will it be fulfilled? And who is he? 670

Chorus:

The son he gave him was to be the one  
He'd first encounter when he, at a run,  
Left Phoebus.

Creusa:

Has he yelled out everywhere  
My childless life? I'll live in my despair,  
Alone.

Tutor:

What was proclaimed, then? Whom did he  
Encounter? How was that? Where did he see  
The man?

Chorus:

Mistress, I think you are aware  
Of that young man who swept the temple there –  
That's he!

Creusa:

If only I could leave and fly  
Up to the western stars! The pain that I 680  
Have suffered, friends!

Tutor:

What did he name the man?  
Does it remain unratified or can  
I know it?

Chorus:

Since he was the first to see  
His father, he's called Ion.

Tutor:

Who was she  
Who brought him up?

Chorus:

Ah, that I cannot say.  
I'll say, though, that Xuthus has gone away  
To the holy tents to make an offering  
To celebrate the boy's birth, honouring  
Their love. He went alone, and they will be  
At the same table, joviality 690



Abounding.

Tutor:

We're betrayed, my lady, by  
Your husband's guile and outrage. Oh, how I  
Perceive your pain! He'll try to throw us out  
And ban us from his halls. It's not about  
My hatred of him, but I love you more.  
He married you when he arrived in your  
City, a stranger, and your legacy  
Became his. Now it seems he secretly  
Bred children by another. Once he knew  
That you had none, the fate afflicting you        700  
He could not bear, and so he took to bed  
A slave in secret and this child he bred.  
He gave him to some Delphian to rear  
Abroad, who educated him right here  
Within this temple, carefully concealed  
From others' eyes. Then once it was revealed  
The child had now matured to adulthood,  
He urged you to come here because you could  
Not bear a child. It was not Phoebus, though,  
Who cheated you – your husband long ago        710  
Did that, rearing his son! Such trickery!  
When he proved to be guilty, maybe he  
Would blame the god. He wanted to proclaim  
Him ruler of your country. His new name  
He fashioned at his leisure.

Chorus:

How I hate

All wicked men, for they elaborate  
Their plans of evil. I would rather choose  
A friend who's good and simple than one who's  
A wicked, clever one.

Tutor:

                    Last sin of all –

To take an infant, born of one in thrall,                      720  
Who's motherless and trifling, to be  
The master of the house! More easily  
The burden would be carried if the mother  
Was noble and he said that by another  
Woman it was conceived merely since she  
Was barren. Therefore you would then agree  
With him, or if not so, he could have gone  
To Aeolia, then to decide upon  
Another wife. You must accordingly,  
With sword or poison or some trickery,                      730  
Kill both of them because, if you refrain,  
Then you yourself will possibly be slain  
By them. Your life is lost if you forgo  
The struggle. For if someone meets a foe,  
One or the other has to fail. I will  
Help in the undertaking – I will kill  
The boy where they will dine. And then will I  
Pay back my masters whether I live or die.  
Because there is just one thing that brings shame  
To any slave – acquiring a bad name.                      740  
A good slave is no worse than one who's free.

Chorus:

That's true, my lady. With integrity

I yearn to live and die.

Creusa:

How can I stay

Mute? How can I bring to the light of day

That secret rape? Who is restraining me?

Who is my rival in integrity?

Xuthus betrayed me. I possess no place

To dwell, no children. Now I have to face

Despair – despite my efforts, hope is gone,

For I kept mum about their union 750

And the lamented birth. But I profess,

By Zeus's starry throne and the goddess

Above my rocks and Triton's dizzy height,

That I will now bring everything to light,

That I may cast this burden from my breast

And be at ease. I weep! I am distressed!

Deceived by man and gods, I now will show

The world those rapists. O son of Leto,

Who make your horn-made lyre truly sing,

It's you who, most of all, I'm censuring. 760

With shiny golden hair, you came when I

Was gathering saffron flowers to beautify

My breasts to match my golden gowns. You took

My white arms, dragging me to the cavern's nook,

While you were paying homage shamelessly

To Aphrodite, listening to me

Cry to my mother. I bore you a son:

Fearing my mother, I, unhappy one,

Left it right there upon the very spot  
Where you had raped me – yes, the very cot        770  
I lay upon with him unhappily.  
And now our son is gone – oh, misery!  
He's torn apart, a feast for birds of prey,  
While making hymnal music, there you stay.  
You prophesy upon your golden seat  
While in your ear my groans I will repeat.  
The vultures took our son, and here am I,  
Holding his baby clothes, left high and dry.  
All Delos hates you, and the laurel, too,  
Beside the palm with delicate leaves, where you    780  
Were born.

Chorus:

              So many ills are now displayed!  
Daughter, I see your face and I'm dismayed:  
One wave of ills extracted from my heart,  
At once I see another trouble start,  
For you've set forth along another road  
Of misery, and so what does that bode  
For Phoebus? And what son is he you say  
You bore? Where in the city did you lay  
His body, prey to beasts? Tell me once more!

Creusa:

Old man, although it shames me to the core,        790  
I'll speak.

Tutor:

              I can with friends mourn generously.

Creusa:

Then do you know the rocky cavity,  
North of Cecrops's rocks, that's called Macrai?

Tutor:

I do, yes – there's a shrine to Pan nearby.

Creusa:

That's right. Well, there I had a dreadful fight.

Tutor:

What do you mean? You make tears blind my sight.

Creusa:

There Phoebus raped me.

Tutor:

Was this what I've heard?

Creusa:

I do not know, but if you speak the word  
Of truth, I'll tell you.

Tutor:

Were you secretly

In mourning for a hidden malady? 800

Creusa:

This was the grief I'm speaking of.

Tutor:

But how

Did you conceal the rape?

Creusa:

Just listen now –

I then gave birth.

Tutor:

But where did this take place?

Was there a midwife there? Or did you face  
It all alone?

Creusa:

Yes, all alone, right there,  
Where I was raped by Phoebus.

Tutor:

Yes, but where  
Is he, the child you bore?

Creusa:

He's dead, the prey  
Of beasts, old man.

Tutor:

But what is that you say?  
Did cowardly Phoebus not defend him?

Creusa:

No,  
He did not: so the boy is left to grow                      810  
Up in the halls of Hades.

Tutor:

Ah, but who  
Exposed the child? Surely it wasn't you?

Creusa:

It was – I did it in the dead of night,  
And I made sure to wrap the infant tight  
In robes.

Tutor:

And no-one knew?

Creusa:

Just Secrecy

And Mishap shared the awful deed with me.

Tutor:

How did you have the pluck to leave him there?

Creusa:

By using words of grieving and despair.

Tutor:

How cruel! But the god was cruel, too,

And, in the balance, crueller than you. 820

Creusa:

He stretched his little arms out.

Tutor:

Ah, was he

Anxious for milk or the security

Of his own mother's arms?

Creusa:

The infant sought

The latter, but I made him more distraught!

Tutor:

Why did you leave the infant?

Creusa:

Honestly,

I thought the god would save his progeny.

Tutor:

This house by tempests has been buffeted.

Creusa:

Old man, why do you weep and beat your head?

Tutor:

Your father and yourself I sadly see

Are wretched.

Creusa:

Such is all humanity!

830

Nothing stands firm.

Tutor:

Let us not hold on to

Our sorrow, daughter.

Creusa:

But what should I do?

One can't escape misfortune.

Tutor:

First, repay

The god who wronged you.

Creusa:

How can I outweigh

A strong god, being mortal?

Tutor:

Set alight

His oracles!

Creusa:

That fills me full of fright –

I've ills enough!

Tutor:

Do what you can, but kill

Your husband!

Creusa:

I revere our marriage still,

And he was faithful once.



Tutor:

Then kill your son!

Creusa:

I would I could, but it cannot be done. 840

Tutor:

Arm all your servants!

Creusa:

Yes, to this I'll bow,

But where...?

Tutor:

The holy tents, where even now

He feasts his friends.

Creusa:

It will be obvious

To all: the servants, too, are powerless.

Tutor:

Be brave! Work out a plan!

Creusa:

Well, certainly

I have one, and it smacks of treachery

And it could work.

Tutor:

I'll help you.

Creusa:

Have you thought

About the Giants' war?

Tutor:

Yes, it was fought

Against the gods in Phlegra.

Creusa:

There the earth

Produced a dreadful beast and gave it birth - 850

The Gorgon.

Tutor:

Thus to aid her progeny

And irritate the gods?

Creusa:

Yes, certainly.

Athena slew it.

Tutor:

What form did it take?

Creusa:

A breastplate armed around a coiling snake.

Tutor:

I've heard the tale before, I must confess,

A long time past.

Creusa:

That's right – that the goddess

Wore it upon her breast.

Tutor:

Ah, yes, that's right –

They call it "aegis".

Creusa:

Since she went to fight

The gods, it's thus been called.

Tutor:

How can your foe

Be harmed by it, however?

Creusa:

Do you know 860

Of Erichonius? Of course you do,

Old man.

Tutor:

Was he the very first man who  
Was generated from his Mother Earth?

Creusa:

Athena gave the child after its birth –

Tutor:

What? Tell me! Quickly!

Creusa:

Two drops of blood which came  
From the Gorgon.

Tutor:

And what power do you claim  
They exercised on men?

Creusa:

One's nocuous  
To every mortal, one's salubrious.

Tutor:

What held them?

Creusa:

Golden chains, which he gave to  
My father.

Tutor:

When he died, they came to you? 870

Creusa:

They did – I wear them on my wrist.

Tutor:

Tell me –

How does this double gift effectively

Function?

Creusa:

The blood dripped from the hollow vein...

Tutor:

What use has it? What strength does it contain

Tutor:

?

Creusa:

It nurtures life and wards off all disease.

Tutor:

The other one – what's its abilities?

Creusa:

It kills, containing poison.

Tutor:

Are they blent

Or separate?

Creusa:

Separate, for good's not meant

To mix with ill.

Tutor:

Child, you have all you need.

Creusa:

The boy shall die, then, and you'll do the deed. 880

Tutor:

What? How?

Creusa:

In Athens, when he comes to me.

Tutor:

I don't like this, and you have equally

Found fault with me.

Creusa:

How? Do you think I fear

To kill him?

Tutor:

It's not that, but you'll appear

To kill him even though you shun the act.

Creusa:

That's right, for people say that it's a fact

Stepmothers hate their husbands' children.

Tutor:

Kill

Him here and then deny it.

Creusa:

Such a thrill

Of joy this gives me even now!

Tutor:

Conceal

From Xuthus what he won't himself reveal 890

To you.

Creusa:

Take this gold bracelet from my hand –

The ancient treasure of Athena – and

Go where Xuthus is planning secretly

To sacrifice in all solemnity.

When dinner's over and they are about

To pour libations to the gods, take out  
The bracelet from the robe that you will wear  
And put it in his cup. But take great care  
That it's for him alone, the one who's meant  
To be my house's master. Once it's sent 900  
Straight down his throat, he will immediately  
Expire, remaining here, and never see  
Famed Athens.

Tutor:

Go, then, to your hosts, while I  
Will do what I've been told to do. Be spry,  
Old feet, and go against your enemy  
And help me kill him, everlastingly  
Removing him. Those who've achieved success  
Are right to venerate devotedness,  
But when harming one's foes is one's intent,  
Why, then the law holds no impediment. [exeunt] 910

Chorus:

O wayside goddess, Queen Persephone,  
Who govern all assaults perpetually,  
Conduct this cup of death, which had its birth  
From the blood the Gorgon, progeny of the earth,  
Shed when her throat was cut, and be its guide  
To him who hankers ever to abide  
In Erechtheus' house. For may dominion  
In Athens not be held by anyone  
But of Erechtheus' race! But should they be  
Unlucky with no opportunity 920  
For daring and no hope, she will be slain

Or hanged by a god, and pain will thus halt pain.

For to another world will she descend.

Strangers to rule her house?? Heaven forbend!

I shame to see the watcher of the night,

Lord Bacchus, with his torches burning bright,

Upon the ritual's twentieth day, close by

The fountains when Lord Zeus's starry sky

Joins in the dances, and the moon as well

And Nereus' daughters in the ocean swell 930

And swirling rivers as they celebrate

The maid with the golden crown and venerate

Her mother where Apollo's rolling stone

Has hopes to sit securely on his throne,

Disturbing others' toils. You who sing out

With your discordant melodies about

Illicit loves, observe how I'd abide

Those loves. Now I disdain them far and wide.

Phoebus is thankless, for he does not raise

Progeny for the house but showers praise 940

Upon another love goddess. [enter Attendant]

Attendant:

I pray,

You women who in Athens live, where may

I now track down our mistress, progeny

Of old Erechtheus? I have thoroughly

Scoured Athens, but in vain.

Chorus:

Co-underling,

Why such dispatch? What tidings do you bring?

Attendant:

We're being stalked – the rulers of this land  
Are seeking her, and you must understand  
She may be stoned to death.

Chorus:

But surely we  
Have kept from others' ears the strategy  
We've formed to kill the boy?

Attendant:

No, that's not true,  
And therefore punishment will come to you  
Quickly.

Chorus:

How were the plans we thought we hid  
From other men discovered?

Attendant:

Phoebus did  
Not wish to be infected by the stain  
Of blood-pollution, and so he made plain  
The wrong that's weaker than the right.

Chorus:

Tell me  
The tale, though, for we die more pleasantly  
With knowledge.

Attendant:

Well, when Xuthus left the shrine  
Of Phoebus, he took his new son to dine                      960  
And to the sacrifice he would prepare  
In honour of the god. Then he went where



The flame of Bacchus leaps, that blood might spew  
Upon both rocks: thus would he offer due  
Thanks for his son. He said, "Child, raise a tent  
While you stay here, a skilled accomplishment  
Of many carpenters. If I should stay  
A long time with the sacrifice, I pray,  
Set up the banquet for your friends." Then he  
Led off the calves. The young man reverently        970  
Raised up a tent on pillars, taking care  
That the sun's rays were not directed square  
Upon the middle part or, equally,  
Upon both sides. Its full capacity  
Came to ten thousand feet (thus, at the least,  
He could invite all Delphi to the feast).  
Shadowed above it, from the treasures  
He had displayed the sacred tapestries –  
A wonder to behold! First, overhead  
He dedicated wings of cloth, outspread,        980  
To Phoebus, which Heracles long past had brought  
From the Amazons as spoils. In it were wrought  
The stars of Heaven circling up on high,  
The Sun driving his steeds in the fading sky,  
While Evening let fall her declining light,  
Just as the chariot of dark-robed Night  
Appeared, the stars about her, and there flew  
A Pleiad and the armed Orion, too;  
The Bear around the golden pole was sliding  
Her tail; the brilliant Moon, as well, dividing        990  
The months in two, shone bright; the Hyades,

A clear sign to all travellers on the seas,  
And Dawn, with all her stars now gone astray.  
There were some others, brought from far away -  
Some well-stocked ships against the Greeks, and creatures  
Having both bestial and human features;  
Deer hunts and lion hunts; the opening  
Showed Cecrops with his coils meandering;  
His daughters, also, standing at his side.  
A man from Athens had it sanctified                      1000  
And given to Apollo. Ion brought out  
Gold mixing-bowls. The herald, with a shout  
And on tiptoe, called all those whose intent  
Was joining them to do so. Then the tent  
Was filled with invitees, all garlanded  
With wreaths who on the rich refreshment fed.  
An old man came and raised great laughs amid  
The guests through all the frantic things he did –  
He brought in urns of water so that they  
Might wash their hands, burned incense and held sway 1010  
Over the golden cups. The old man stated  
To all the guests, when it was promulgated  
That it was time to hear some minstrelsy,  
Indulging in communal drinking, “We  
Must bring in bigger jars and take away  
The smaller ones in order that we may  
Get drunk more quickly.” There was much ado  
In bringing many cups – as if to do  
A favour to Xuthus, he gave him one  
(A poison, though, with which to kill his son                      1020

Had been put in the goblet secretly.  
His mistress gave it him, supposedly).  
While Ion held the cup, something was heard –  
A servant spoke a sacrilegious word.  
Ion, brought up with expert prophets, thought  
It was an omen and instantly sought  
Another goblet to be filled once more  
While emptying the first one on the floor,  
Instructing everyone to do the same  
As he had done. And then upon us came                    1030  
A silence, while we slaves were occupied  
With pouring water and Byblian wine inside  
The sacred bowls. And then into the tent  
A troop of doves, which lived there, quite content,  
Swarmed in: seeing the poured-out wine they dipped  
Their thirsty beaks upon the ground and sipped  
At it. It was not toxic anywhere  
Except where Ion poured it out, for there  
The dove that drank it shook and whirled around  
And cried out with an incoherent sound.                    1040  
All were amazed at the bird's agony;  
She struggled for a while, then finally  
She died, her legs stretched out. Then the new son  
Held out his arms and shouted, "Who's the one  
Who tried to murder me? This I demand  
To know, old man! I took it from *your* hand."  
He seized the old man's arm and tried to see  
If he still had the poison – certainly  
They'd seen him with it. Tortured, he averred

His mistress was the culprit. When he heard 1050

This, Ion grabbed the guests and rushed outside.

"O holy Earth, Erechtheus' daughter tried

To murder me," he said to the company

Of Pythian chiefs. And then unanimously

She was condemned to death and would be sent

Down from the rock, for she'd had the intent

To kill an acolyte. Now everywhere

The city's seeking her. Wishing to bear

Children, she'd gone to Phoebus. This has cost

Her very dearly, for at once she's lost 1060

Her children and her life.

Chorus:

There is no way

For me, or anyone, to dodge our day

Of death. That's evident from the libation

Of Bacchus and the venomous potation

Dripped from the viper, and the sacrifice

To the gods below will patently suffice

To prove it. I am full of misery,

My mistress doomed to die. What's left for me?

Should I now fly away? Or should I seek

The caverns of the earth, gloomy and bleak? 1070

Shunning a stoning death, am I to flee

Upon a chariot? Or go to sea?

It is not possible to hide from sight

If Heaven does not pity us in our plight.

Unhappy mistress, what's left for you, too?

Shall we, who planned a sin, receive our due

Of punishment? [enter Creusa]

Creusa:

Ah, they're pursuing me

To death! The council's sent out its decree.

Chorus:

Your fate, unhappy lady, we all know.

Creusa:

And therefore where am I allowed to go? 1080

I scarce escaped death when I left. Now here

I've come with stealthy flight in abject fear

Of all my foes.

Chorus:

The altar, obviously.

Creusa:

But how will that afford me remedy?

Chorus:

To kill a suppliant is never just.

Creusa:

But legal regulations say I must

Perish.

Chorus:

If you are caught.

Creusa:

My bitter foes

Are here with their drawn weapons and oppose

My steps.

Chorus:

Sit at the shrine – if you should die

On sacred ground, your very blood will cry 1090

For vengeance.

Ion:

Bull-faced Cephisus, who bred

A serpent that can render humans dead

With angry flame, all-daring, you possess

A power that is certainly no less

Than Gorgon's blood, the very thing that she

Determined to employ to murder me,

Seize her in order that Parnassus' height,

Whence she is to be hurled in headlong flight,

May shred her splendid hair. Before I came

To Athens, I escaped from that stepdame. 1100

Among allies I measured her intent,

Discovering thereby how virulent

She was to me. [enter Creusa] At home you utterly

Would then have sentenced me to purgatory.

Phoebus won't rescue you. Commiserate

With me and her who bore me – though her fate

Was death, her name exists. How wickedly

She blended treachery with treachery!

She cowers by the shrine, as if she thought

That she'll not pay the penalty we've sought. 1110

Creusa:

I won't allow you, boy, to murder me,

For I stand in Apollo's sanctuary.

Ion:

And what is he to you?

Creusa:

To him I plead

As suppliant.

Ion:

But then a sinful deed

You tried to do – you hoped to poison me,

The man with the responsibility

Of serving him.

Creusa:

You served your father, though,

No longer being Phoebus' servant.

Ion:

No, 1120

Apollo was my father spiritually..

Creusa:

And now I give to him my fealty.

Ion:

Not as I do!

Creusa:

I yearned to kill my foe.

Ion:

I've not arrived here armed with weapons, though.

Creusa:

You did. You tried to burn our halls.

Ion:

What do

You mean? What brands? What torches?

Creusa:

You

Wanted to come into my house and take

It forcefully.

Ion:

My father plans to make

This land, which he possesses, mine.

Creusa:

What? He,

The son of Aiolus, own property

In Athens??

Ion:

With arms, not words, he won the land.

Creusa:

Our allies do not exercise command

In Athens.

Ion;

You'd kill me, afraid to face

What might occur tomorrow?

Creusa:

Yes, in case

You kill me first.

Ion:

You feel an envious hate

Towards Xuthus due to your childless state.

Creusa:

And you'll ransack a childless house?

Ion:

I'll see

No share, then, of my father's property?

Creusa:

It all consists of but his shield and spear.

Ion:



Quit Phoebus' shrine and get away from here! 1140

Creusa:

Order your absent mother!

Ion:

You had planned

To kill me, yet Phoebus will understand

And save you, do you think?

Creusa:

Yes, if you dare

To kill me here.

Ion:

Would you be happy there

To die among Phoebus's wreaths?

Creusa:

Oh, yes,

For I'll distress those who caused *me* distress.

Ion:

The laws the god gave to humanity

Have not been well thought out, it seems to me,

Because the shrine is not the proper place

For those who've sinned. Indeed, it's a disgrace 1150

For them to touch the god. It is the good,

Who've been discredited, who truly should

Sit there. The good and bad should never be

In the same place and treated equally. [enter Priestess]

Priestess:

I've left the tripod, child, and come outside,

And so hold back! I have been specified

To keep the ancient laws.

Ion:

Priestess, good-day,

To me a blessed mother!

Priestess:

Well, then, may

I thus be called!

Ion:

This woman – were you told? –

Has tried to kill me.

Priestess:

Yes, but you're too bold                      1160

In your outrage.

Ion:

But shouldn't I requite

Such evil?

Priestess:

Wives will always feel great spite

For former offspring.

Ion:

But there is much woe

That stepmothers force us to undergo.

Priestess:

But do not feel this misery! When you

Go to your land –

Ion:

What would you have me do?

Priestess:

I'd have you go to Athens purified.

Ion:

One's purified when one has nullified

One's enemies.

Priestess:

Not you. Listen to me!

Ion:

Your words have always been exemplary. 1170

Say on!

Priestess:

You see this basket that I hold?

Ion:

I see a basket certainly – it's old

And tied with bands of wool.

Priestess:

I found a new-

Born baby in it – you!

Ion:

What's that? But you

Never told me that.

Priestess:

I kept it quiet.

Ion:

How, though,

Did you hide it, since it was long ago?

Priestess:

The god wanted a servant here.

Ion:

But now

He doesn't want one anymore? But how

May I be sure of that?

Priestess:

Phoebus made clear

Who was your father, sending you from here. 1180

Did you withhold it, then, at his decree,

Or what?

Priestess:

It was Phoebus who ordered me –

Ion:

To do what?

Priestess:

Keep these findings well concealed.

Ion:

So, then, what good or ill will be revealed

To me now?

Priestess:

All the swaddling-clothes you wore

When I discovered you are here.

Ion:

Therefore

I'll find my mother with these clothes?

Priestess:

That's true,

For Phoebus wants it so. Of course, though, you

Could not before.

Ion:

These signs I see today

Are wonderful.

Priestess:

Go, then! Be on your way 1190

And find your mother!

Ion:

I will comb straight through

The world.

Priestess:

Child, it was I who nurtured you

By Phoebus' will. He gave these clothes to me

To keep, and now they're yours. I do not see

Why he did that. No mortal is aware

That they were being kept by me or where

I'd hidden them. Kiss me as if I were

Your mother, and then go in search of her.

Find out if she's from Delphi or elsewhere!

That's all that I and Phoebus, who took care 1200

Of you, can tell you. [exit Priestess]

Ion:

Ah, alas, my eyes

Are filled with weeping as I realize

That, after giving birth in secrecy

To me, my mother never suckled me

But sold me nameless. At Apollo's shrine

I have remained – a vassal's life was mine.

Gods' gifts are good, but fortune is austere.

For when I should have wallowed in the cheer

Of a mother's arms and had some happiness

In life, I lacked that mother's tenderness. 1210

Loss of a child is such a dreadful fate.

I'll take this cradle now and dedicate

It to Apollo and beseech that he

Will hold back anything to trouble me.  
For if she is a slave, I'd rather know  
No more about her. O Phoebus, I go  
To carry to your temple... No, no, wait!  
This is against his will! I dedicate  
Back to him all the signs he's given me  
Of her existence. No, I have to see 1220  
My fate inside this cradle. Garlands, here  
You've kept so long concealed these things so dear  
To me. The cradle's covering has stayed  
Unaltered and the weave is not decayed  
Through all these years.

Creusa:

What unexpected sight

Do I observe?

Ion:

Be silent – you've said quite

Enough already.

Creusa:

I can't, for I see

The cradle in which, in your infancy,

I left you, son, in Cecrops' caves nearby

Macrai. I leave, even though I have to die. 1230

Ion:

Seize her – the woman's mad! She's jumped away.

Bind up her arms!

Creusa:

Then kill me if you may!

To you and to this vase I now lay claim,

These hidden tokens, too.

Ion:

You show such shame

In thus beguiling me!

Creusa:

No, you've been found

To be my own.

Ion:

Your own? Yet you were bound

To kill me secretly?

Creusa:

You're my dear child.

Ion:

Leave off these tactics. I won't be beguiled.

Creusa:

Listen to me, son!

Ion:

Is there anything

Inside the cradle?

Creusa:

Yes, the swaddling- 1240

Clothes that you wore then.

Ion:

Name them, then, to me

Before you see them!

Creusa:

I for surety,

If I don't name them, am content to die.

Ion:

Speak, then, for in your bravery I spy

Something that's odd.

Creusa:

There is the cloth I knit

When I was very young.

Ion:

And what does it

Look like? Young girls knit many cloths.

Creusa:

Well, mine

Remains unfinished.

Ion:

What is its design?

You can't trick me that way.

Creusa:

Well, you can see

A gorgon at its heart.

Ion:

What destiny

1250

Is hounding me?

Creusa:

And snakes are bordering

The shield.

Ion:

That's it! I found my swaddling-

Clothes!

Creusa:

Yes, that's right.

Ion:



Is there yet more to see?

Creusa:

Yes, there is something from antiquity.  
They're serpents from Athena, cast in gold.  
For it is by that goddess we've been told  
To bring up children, as Erechtheus did.

Ion:

And this gold pattern – what it is I bid  
You tell me.

Creusa:

Well, the new-born child would wear  
It as a necklace.

Ion:

Ah, yes, it is there. 1260

And this?

Creusa:

I put an olive crown about  
Your body from the tree that was brought out  
Of the rock by Queen Athena. I suppose,  
If it's still there, it flourishes and grows,  
And it should flourish everlastingly,  
Born, as it was, from an eternal tree.

Ion:

O mother, such delight!

Creusa:

My dearest one,  
A light much dearer than the blessed sun! –  
May the god forgive me! Swiftly you've been found,  
And so I may now put my arms around 1270

Your neck. I thought you with Persephone  
Was lying.

On:

In your arms I seem to be  
Both dead and living, mother.

Creusa:

O bright sky,  
What am I now to say, what shall I cry?  
Whence this unlooked-for joy?

Ion:

The only thing  
I've thought about is your discovering  
Of your own son.

Creusa:

I tremble still with fear.

Ion:

Thinking I'm still not yours although I'm here  
Within your arms?

Creusa:

Indeed, for I had thrown  
These hopes away. Whence did you take my own, 1280  
Lady, into your arms? What person brought  
Him to this shrine?

Ion:

It was divinely wrought.  
But may we evermore find happiness  
Upon the heels of our bygone distress!

Creusa:

You were brought forth in tears, son, snatched away

In sadness, but beside your cheeks today  
I breathe. Oh, I am blest with wondrous joy!  
You speak my very words!

Creusa:

I am, my boy,  
No longer childless. We are widening  
Our house and now our region has a king, 1290  
And old Erechtheus is no longer old.

Ion:

Mother, my father, too, we must enfold  
Within our joy.

Creusa:

What's that you say? Ah, I  
Will be exposed and mortified!

Ion:

But why?

Creusa:

Your father's not what you think him to be.

Ion:

Were you not wed when you gave birth to me?

Creusa:

When you were born there was no revelry.

Ion:

So am I from a humble family?

Creusa:

The Gorgon-slayer, as Athena knows –

Ion:

What do you mean by that? What words are those 1300  
You speak?

Creusa:

O you who sit upon the hill

Of olives, by the cliffs –

Ion:

You're speaking ill,

But I don't understand.

Creusa:

Apollo, where

The nightingales sing –

Ion:

But why do you care

To mention Phoebus?

Creusa:

He lay secretly

With me.

Ion:

Speak on! A joyful destiny

Is imminent.

Creusa:

Then I gave birth to you.

Phoebus begot you, though nobody knew.

Ion:

Sweet words if they are true!

Creusa:

These clothes that I

Once made, as I observed the shuttle fly 1310

Upon the loom, when my maturity

Was still ahead (I did it secretly –

My mother didn't ever know of it),  
I placed on you. Alas, your mother's tit  
You never tasted. You were cast away,  
Unwashed, to that deserted cave, a prey  
To birds and death.

Ion:

O mother, you have done  
Appalling things!

Creusa:

But out of fear, my son!  
Unwillingly I killed you.

Ion:

While I, too,  
Was just about to kill somebody – you! 1320

Creusa:

Dread deeds! Dread, in those days, my destiny!  
Once driven here and there to misery,  
I'm driven back to joy. O let this blast  
Of wind remain! – the evils of the past  
Are quite enough, so let there be a breeze,  
My son, that finally may give us ease!

Chorus:

From what has happened now, let none believe  
That something unexpected won't relieve  
Their lives!

Ion:

Fortune, who've taken countless men  
From woe and back to happiness again, 1330  
See how I've suffered so, ready to slay

My mother! Can I learn this in one day  
While the bright sun encircles the whole earth?  
Mother, how dear you are to me! My birth  
Gives me no shame. For all the rest, let me  
Take you aside and tell you secretly  
Some things that must be covered by a screen  
Of silence. Could it be that, having been  
Seduced like many maidens, you now blame  
The god, attempting to avoid the shame                    1340  
By saying that I am Apollo's son  
But actually my father is someone  
Who's mortal?

Creusa:

                    By Athena, who once fought  
The Giants with Lord Zeus, the one who brought  
You up was Phoebus, not a mortal.

Ion:

                                    Why,  
Then, did he give me up and say that I  
Was Xuthus's son?

Creusa:

                            Not naturally, though –  
He gave me as a gift to him, for so  
A friend might give somebody else his son  
To be the one to hold dominion                                1350  
Over his house.

Ion:

                            The prophecy's in vain  
If Phoebus' words are false. This gives me pain,

And with good reason.

Creusa:

Listen now to me:

Phoebus established you through charity

Within a noble house. If people knew

That you're the product of his loins, then you

Would not be rich or have your father's name,

Since I concealed our union out of shame

And then I tried to kill you secretly.

But he, out of his cordiality, 1360

Gave you another father.

Ion:

With much heed

I've gone into my search, and now I need

To go to Phoebus' house and ask if he

Begot me or a mortal. [enter Athena] Ah, but see

Some god above, as bright as any sun,

Breathing incense! Come, mother, let us shun

That god – this is no opportunity

For us to cast eyes on divinity.

Athena:

Don't try to leave! I am no enemy –

Here and in Athens I show charity 1370

To you. I'm Pallas, coming from the land

Named after me, at Phoebus's command,

Who does not wish to be beneath your roof

In case his deed should cause him some reproof.

But he sends me to tell to you that she

And he are your true parents naturally,

And he has made a gift of his own son  
To one who may give him dominion  
Over a noble house. And once this thing  
Were known, in fear Creusa's wangling                      1380  
Would cause your death and hers, he cunningly  
Rescued you. Keeping it in secrecy,  
He planned to tell in Athens what is true –  
That Phoebus is your father and that you  
Had been born of Creusa. As I end  
My speech, it is my will that you attend  
The oracles you came here to receive -  
That's why I'm here. Creusa, you must leave  
With Ion. Go to Athens! Set him there  
Upon the throne, for he's Erechtheus' heir!                      1390  
He has the right to rule in his own land  
And see his fame throughout all Greece expand.  
He'll have four sons, all of a single stock,  
Who'll give their names to the four tribes on the Rock –  
First Geleon; the second and the third of these  
Will pass their names on to the Hopletes,  
Argades, Aegicores. Progeny  
Beyond will build a multiplicity  
Of cities in the Cyclades and along  
The mainland shores and make my city strong.                      1400  
Asia and Europe you will populate  
And Ion's name you then will imitate –  
You'll be Ionians! Xuthus and you  
Will have children together – Dorus, who  
Will be much celebrated in the land



Of Pelops; Achaeus will hold command  
Upon the shore near Rhion. A whole nation  
Will after him receive the appellation  
'Achaean'. Phoebus managed excellently  
All this – he saw that you would painlessly        1410  
Give birth to Ion so none of your kin  
Would know; and when you wrapped the infant in  
His clothes, you told Hermes to bring him hither  
And nurture him so that he wouldn't wither  
And die. Tell no-one he's your progeny –  
Thus Xuthus will enjoy him happily.  
Farewell and blessings! Now from all your grief  
Your prosperous fortune brings you great relief.  
Ion:

Pallas, all-powerful Zeus's progeny,  
I'm now convinced Apollo fathered me.        1420  
Creusa is my mother – *that* I knew  
For sure already.

Creusa:

Listen to me, too!

Phoebus receives my praise now, although he,  
I thought, had earlier been my enemy.  
He gives me back my child whom he once slighted.  
The gates are lively now and I'm delighted  
To hear the oracles, which previously  
Were hostile. Now I'm clinging happily  
To the gates while I address them.

Athena:

I am glad

That you now praise Apollo, having had 1440

A change of mind. The gifts of Heaven are slow

But, in the end, not weak.

Creusa:

Son, let us go

Home.

Athena:

Go, I will escort you.

Creusa:

Worthily,

I'm certain.

Athena:

You'll be our security

In Athens.

Creusa:

Goddess, take your rightful place

Upon your ancient throne!

Ion:

Ah, with what grace

You will protect us!

Chorus:

O son of Leto

And Zeus, farewell! A house that's full of woe

Must brave its fate and offer its respect

To the gods, for, in the end, the good collect 1450

What they have merited: contrarily

The base by nature suffer dreadfully.







