APOLLO’S COMEDY AND THE ENDING OF EURIPIDES’ ION

John E. Thornburn, Jr.
Baylor University, Waco

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I contend that major characters in the Ion, especially Apollo and Creusa, behave like playwrights. Apollo attempts to produce an action with a happy ending, while the Athenians attempt to produce a 'vengeance drama', which fails thanks to a salvific bird. When the 'vengeance drama' fails, a 'suppliant drama' unexpectedly breaks out, only to be checked by the Pythia. Finally, a third drama threatens to erupt as Ion is on the verge of becoming a theomachos. Athena, however, resolves this situation. The failure or resolution of these three 'micro-dramas' is brought about by Apollo, who sends a bird, the Pythia, and Athena, to redirect the drama towards his intended happy ending. Therefore, I suggest that the ending of the Ion holds a unique place in Greek drama since it arguably has what could be construed as a triple deus.

'The Ion is one of those plays of Euripides that refuses to stay put.'1 Not only has Euripides kept modern critics guessing about the meaning of this play, but undoubtedly Euripides’ audience in the penultimate decade of the 5th century BC was kept guessing as well.2 Surely Euripides wanted to entertain and instruct his audience, but by the time of the Ion, some members of his audience thought they perceived a certain predictability in Euripides’ plays. In Aristophanes’ Acharnians of 425 BC, for example, the comic playwright notes (418-34) seven different characters whom Euripides

brought onto stage in rags. In Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* of 411 BC, produced around the same time as the *Ion*, the women decide to kill Euripides because he continually speaks ill of them (cf. *Thes.* 182). The *Ion*, however, seems to reflect a desire in the playwright to keep his audience guessing.

In this paper, I contend that one of the ways in which Euripides keeps his audience guessing about what will happen in the *Ion* is by creating a situation in which the play’s major characters, especially Apollo and Creusa, behave like playwrights. Apollo attempts to produce an action with ‘eine gute Ende’. The ultimate aims of Apollo’s drama are several: the recognition between mother and son in Athens (μητρὸς ὃς ἐλθὼν δόμους γνωσθῇ Κρεοῦσῃ, 71-72); that Creusa’s union with Apollo remain a secret (72-73); and that the child receives his due (παῖς τ’ ἔχει τὰ πρόσφορα, 73). Furthermore, Apollo will bring it about that Ion will establish the Ionian race in Asia. To Creusa and her Athenian retinue, unaware of Apollo’s intent, the actions of the god and Ion’s adoption by Xuthus seem hostile and threatening. Thus, the Athenians attempt to produce a ‘vengeance drama’, which fails thanks to a salvific bird. When the ‘vengeance drama’ fails, a ‘suppliant drama’ unexpectedly breaks out, only to be checked by the Pythia. Finally, a third drama threatens to erupt as Ion is on the verge of becoming a *theomachos*. Athena, however, resolves this situation. The failure or resolution of these three micro-dramas is effected by Apollo, who sends

---

3 This approach may be hinted at, but not explored by A.P. Burnett, ‘Human resistance and divine persuasion in Euripides’ *Ion,*’ *CPh* 57 (1962) 101, who writes that in the *Ion* ‘man-made tragedy is transformed into providential comedy.’ See also Froma Zeitlin, ‘Mysteries of identity and designs of self in Euripides’ *Ion,*’ *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 35 (1989) 164-65.


5 Compare D.J. Mastronarde, ‘Iconography and imagery in Euripides’ *Ion,*’ *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8 (1975) 165: ‘... the emotionless god is unsuccessful in his attempt to impose Olympian control upon human affairs.’

6 For Apollo’s failure to communicate with Creusa about his intent, see Karelisa Y. Hartigan, *Ambiguity and Self-Deception: The Apollo and Artemis Plays of Euripides* (Frankfurt am Main 1991) 70.


8 Compare Burnett (note 7) 119.
a bird, the Pythia, and Athena, to redirect the drama towards his intended happy ending. Therefore, I suggest that the ending of the Ion holds a unique place in Greek drama, since it arguably has what could be construed as a triple deus, an idea yet to be explored fully. Furthermore, I maintain that this tripartite ending contributes to the play’s humorous element. To be sure, the Ion is not ‘eine Kômôdie der Irrungen’ after the fashion of Midsummer-Night’s Dream, but the play’s tragic elements are intermingled with a comic element broader than usually acknowledged. This broader comic element consists of a divine director’s miscalculation and frustration at producing a happy ending in spite of human intrigue and emotions. Furthermore, part of play’s fun is that Euripides keeps his audience guessing as to what will happen next by having Apollo constantly check violence that breaks out.

1. Obstructing Comedy: Creusa

While Apollo’s ‘drama’ aims at a happy outcome, he is impeded by Creusa, who is continually directed by a tragic impulse, which Apollo must often check. By having Apollo continually check Creusa’s tragic impulse, Euripides prevents his audience from anticipating him. When Creusa becomes pregnant, Apollo prevents her father from becoming aware of her condition (ἀγνώς δὲ πατρὶ ... τῷ θεῷ γάρ ἤν φίλον, 14), thus thwarting the audience’s expectation that Creusa will experience the paternal persecution of earlier Euripidean mothers with divine lovers such as Alope, Antiope, or Danæ.

9 Francis M. Dunn, Tragedy’s End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama (Oxford 1996). Dunn’s dissertation, from which his book is derived, offers more comment on the ending of the Ion than his book. Like his book, though, Dunn’s dissertation does not offer a systematic study of the play’s conclusion, but only scattered remarks. See Euripidean Endings (Yale University, 1985 [Copyright 1986]). The most extensive treatment I have found of the ending of the Ion is Andreas Spira, Untersuchungen zum Deus ex machina bei Sophokles und Euripides (Frankfurt 1960). Spira, though, focuses largely on the relationship between Hermes’ prologue and Athena’s epilogue, giving passing attention to the Pythia as a substitute deus (see p. 67) and making no mention of the birds.


11 Compare Burnett (note 7) 123; Lee (note 2) 22; Webster (note 2) 94.
Creusa gives birth without anyone to help her deliver the child (948), but Athena later tells us that Apollo himself helped Creusa deliver without complications (1596). Creusa gives birth and leaves her child to die, but the child survives, thanks to the direction of Apollo (28-34), who enlists Hermes to save the child. When Hermes deposits Ion at Apollo's temple at Delphi, Apollo again averts tragedy by transforming the Pythia's attitude of savagery to one of pity (οἴκτω δ' ἄφηκεν ὀμότητα ... καὶ θεὸς | συνεργὸς ἦν τ' τοιοῦτ' μὴ ἴκτεσεῖν δόμων, 47-48).

In addition to the unhappy life and associations Creusa is given in the play's prologue, after Creusa arrives in Delphi, we learn that she comes from a long line of tragic figures. Creusa's ancestors, the Cecropids, hurled themselves from the Acropolis after violating Athena's order not to open the box with which the goddess had entrusted them (274). Creusa's father sacrificed her sisters to save Athens, but that Creusa herself avoided her sisters' fate because she was an infant at the time (277-80). We also hear that Creusa's father, Erechtheus, was swallowed up by the earth (281-82). Given her unfortunate background, it is fitting that she embrace the tragic mode.

2. Abetting Comedy: Xuthus

In contrast to Creusa, who 'bleibt eine tragische Gestalt', Apollo's intended happy outcome finds a willing participant in Ion's adoptive father Xuthus, who perfectly integrates himself into Apollo's drama by his rapid and almost unquestioning acceptance of Apollo's oracles. After emerging from Apollo's temple (517) and declaring Ion to be his son, Xuthus constructs a comic scenario by which he could have fathered Ion (Xuthus gets drunk at a Bacchanalia and has intercourse with a local Delphian girl). When

---

12 Matthiessen (note 4) 286.
13 Knox (note 10) 267 calls Xuthus 'the only character [in the Ion] who is presented in a broadly comic vein.'
14 Contrast Ion and Creusa, who both want to question Apollo at various points in the play. See Matthiessen (note 4) 282.
15 Loraux and Burian compare the plot of Menander's Epitrepontes. See N. Loraux, The Children of Athena, trans. by Caroline Levine (Princeton 1993) 185; Burian (note 1) 4. Compare also Plautus' Cistellaria (156-59) where Demipho rapes and impregnates Phanostrata at a Bacchic revelry. Years later Demipho marries Phanostrata and is also reunited with his child by Phanostrata, Selenium, who had been abandoned by Phanostrata. Selenium is recognized by the production of the cistella, which contains the trinkets left with the infant Selenium.
Xuthus leaves the stage for good (675), he appears satisfied that, once he reaches Athens, he will be able to resolve any friction that might occur between his wife and his new-found son. In formulating his plan, Xuthus matches Apollo’s intent. According to both Hermes and Athena, Apollo had intended to wait until Creusa and Ion reached Athens before revealing the truth about Ion’s paternity (μητρός ὡς ἐλθὼν δόμως | γνωσθῇ Κρεοση, 71-72; ἐμελλε δ’ αὐτά διασωπήσεις ἀναξ | ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις γνωρίειν ταύτην τε σήν, | σὲ θ’ ὡς πέφυκας τῇσδε καὶ Φοίβου ποτρός, 1566-68). Similarly, Xuthus will bring Ion to Athens and wait for the right moment (χρόνῳ δὲ καιρὸν λαμβάνων, 659) to break the news to Creusa and introduce Ion as the future king. Xuthus’ deception of his wife and his concern with timing also hint at his awareness of the drama that he constructs. Furthermore, when Xuthus says that he will bring Ion to Athens as a theatēs (656), Euripides’ word-choice hints at the ‘play’ Xuthus intends to stage in Athens. As a theatēs, Ion will become an audience to Xuthus’ intended drama.¹⁶

3. Obstructing Comedy/constructing Tragedy: Creusa and the Athenians

Xuthus’ ready embrace of Apollo’s intent allows him to enter and exit the play with little complication. Xuthus’ intended comedy, however, as does Apollo’s, fails to anticipate correctly the Athenian women’s reaction. When Xuthus leaves, he threatens Creusa’s maidservants with death if they reveal his plans to Creusa. The Athenian women, of course, embrace the tragic mode by informing their mistress.¹⁷ After Creusa learns that Xuthus intends to adopt Ion, Creusa fears that she will be deposed as queen of Athens. Given Creusa’s fears, she and her father’s pedagogue plan a vengeance drama whose aim is Ion’s death. Like actual playwrights of Euripides’ day, who sometimes gave their work to others to produce (for example, Aristophanes with Kallistratos or Philonides), the planning and execution of this vengeance drama are largely handled by her pedagogue.

Initially, Creusa rejects other plots suggested by the pedagogue as too violent, namely setting fire to Apollo’s temple (974-75) or killing her

---

¹⁶ Contrast Knox (note 10) 263, who translates θεατήν as ‘sightseer’.
¹⁷ Compare Zeitlin (note 3) 164.
husband (976-77). Eventually, Creusa settles on a role commonly found in
Greek tragedy (the jealous step-mother; cf. Ino, Medea in Euripides’
_Aegeus_). Furthermore, Creusa demonstrates a conscious awareness of the
role she will play in this tragedy. When the pedagogue states that even though
he commits the murder, Creusa will come under suspicion, Creusa responds,
‘You’re right. They say step-mothers are jealous of their children’ (ὅρθος
φθονεῖν γὰρ τοιαὶ μητριμᾶς τέκνοις, 1025). The ‘they’ to whom
Creusa refers surely includes tragic poets. While Creusa knows the
implications her role as the jealous step-mother will have, in the Chorus’
subsequent stasimon (1090-98), the Athenian women also offer a
metatheatric aside as they directly address poets who slander women as
immoral sexual beings (ὑράθο δοι δυσκελάδοι; σεν κατά μουσαν
ιόντες αείδειν όµνοις | ἀµέτερα λέγεα καὶ γάµους | Κύπριος
ἀθέμιττος ἄνοσίους, 1090-93). The Athenian women boast that they
surpass men in piety (1094), and urge that man’s infidelity be proclaimed in
song (παλίμφωμοι θεοί | καὶ μούσ’ εἰς ἄνδρας ἱτω | δυσκέλαδος
ἀμφι λέκτρων, 1096-98). Such sentiment from these Athenian women
may either anticipate or acknowledge the misogynistic feelings against
Euripides himself that Aristophanes’ parodies in _Thesmophoriazusae_, staged
about the same time as the _Ion_.

While the Athenians prepare their vengeance drama, Ion unwittingly
sets the stage for them when he erects the _skênê_ (806, 982, 1129) in which
his adoption will be celebrated. The word for tent, _skênê_ (806, 982, 1129),
is also the word for the structure from and into which Euripides’ actors
would exit and enter. Indeed, Ion’s _skênê_ ‘is constructed as a Dionysiac
space which threatens to turn from a convivial scene into a human tragedy
or misrecognition, and would have turned from a consecrated moment into
a drama of perverted sacrifice.’

The ominous build-up to the murder and the intense solemnity of
Ion’s observance of the occasion are diffused, though, by the aged
pedagogue. When the aged pedagogue arrives at Delphi, he is cast in a
comic light, as Euripides spends several lines describing the old man’s glacier-
like movement up Parnassus (738-46). Even when ‘der Clown des
Stückes’ is called upon to commit murder, Euripides inserts a pun into the

---

16 Zeitlin (note 3) 164.
19 Matthiessen (note 4) 285.
pedagogue's mouth. Like the elderly Iolaus in the *Heracleidae*, the rejuvenated old man calls upon his aged foot (*ὁ γεραῖος παῦτος*, 1041) to stir itself to an action that no law will impede (*ἐμποδίων*, 1047). Added to this pedestrian pun, after entering the tent, the pedagogue bustles about with unexpected vigour (1171-73). In the plot that the pedagogue and Creusa have devised to kill Ion, the pedagogue embraces comedy, making people laugh as he bustles about the tent (*γέλων δ' ἔθηκε συνδείπνους πολύν*, 1172-73), to conceal his tragic purpose. Apollo, though, determined to achieve a happy resolution, will contrive three intercessions by which he prevents both Creusa and Ion from involving themselves in tragedy.

4. Attempts to end the *Ion*

Before we more closely consider the conclusion of the *Ion*, a few guidelines should be set forth to note and define a play's 'closing gestures'. At the conclusion of at least half of Euripides' extant plays (greater than half if we include the *Rhesus*), a 'divine appearance' occurs (*Hipp., Andr., Hik., El., IT, Heli., Ion, and Ba.*). For Dunn, such a divinity is one 'who issues a command, explains what has happened or resolves an impasse, and foretells the future.' Most recently, Cropp writes that such epiphanies 'forbid the continuation of violence', 'avert divine affliction', 'redirect an ill-judged human action', or 'try to explain or console.'

In addition to these conventional epiphanies, Dunn shows that a few Euripidean characters perform functions analogous to a *deus*, such as the mortal Medea's appearance in Helios' chariot. Dunn also includes 'demonic epiphanies' such as the defeated Eurystheus at the end of the *Heracleidae*, or *Hecabe*, where the blinded Polymestor predicts the deaths of Hecabe, Cassandra, and Agamemnon. Usually, though, whether Euripides heralds a play's conclusion by appearance of a divinity, divine proxy, or demonic mortal, a single 'epiphany' occurs. A notable exception is the *Orestes* (which post-dates the *Ion*), where Dunn argues that this play's

---

20 Cropp (note 2) 260. Cropp also includes *IA*, 'where [Euripides'] ending is lost, and notes that a 'divine appearance' in the fragmentary plays *Antiope, Erechtheus*, and *Hypsipyle*.
21 Dunn (note 9, 1996) 28; Cropp (note 2) 260 has a similar view.
22 Cropp (note 2) 260.
23 Dunn (note 9, 1996) 28.
conclusion is unique because, among other things, the *Orestes* has a ‘double deus’, whereby Apollo’s appearance at play’s end nullifies Orestes’ Medea-like ‘epiphany’ on the roof of the palace.25

The ‘unique’ ending of the *Orestes* appears less remarkable, though, when we compare the earlier *Ion*. Like Apollo’s appearance at the end of the *Orestes*, Athena’s epiphany in our play’s conclusion is a ‘typical’ divine epiphany. Also, as in the *Orestes*, Athena’s appearance has a nullifying effect as she prevents Ion from questioning Apollo about his paternity. Athena’s epiphany, though, is preceded by the Pythia’s arrival, which also has a nullifying effect.26 Just as Apollo prevents Orestes from killing the woman who, unbeknownst to him, will eventually become his wife, the Pythia prevents Ion from killing the woman who, unbeknownst to him, is his mother.

A third nullification, however, precedes the Pythia. In the *skéné* where Ion celebrates his adoption, an ill-omened word from a servant during the initial libation compels Ion to pour out the poisoned wine. When a bird swoops down, drinks the spilled wine, and perishes, Ion uncovers the plot against his life. While it is not stated explicitly that Apollo prompted the servant’s ill-omened word or the bird’s appearance, later in the play Athena’s explanation to Ion and Creusa that Apollo, through his *mēchanai* (μηχαναίς ἐρρόσιτο, 1565), prevented them from killing each other suggests that Apollo effected his son’s rescue.27 If we add the bird’s intervention, one of Apollo’s *mechanai*, to the true *deus ex machina* and the substitute *deus*, then the *Ion* arguably ends with what could be construed as a triple *deus*, unparalleled at the conclusion of a Greek drama.28

While the bird could be considered a substitute *deus*, it might more

---

25 Dunn (note 9, 1996) 159-61.
26 For the idea of the Pythia as a substitute *deus ex machina*, see Michael R. Halleran, *Stagecraft in Euripides* (Totowa, New Jersey 1985) 108; Hartigan (note 6) 84; Wilhelm Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, part 3 (Munich 1940) 554; H. Strohm, *Euripides: Interpretationen zur dramatischen Form* (Munich 1957) 30. None of these authors extensively explores this idea, though.
27 Compare Burnett (note 7) 118; Spira (note 9) 73; Zeitlin (note 3) 165.
28 Lee (note 2) 298 also finds ‘three stages of divine interference,’ but regards Creusa’s asylum at Apollo’s altar the first stage. Burnett (note 7) 100 also writes of a ‘tripartite last act,’ which consists of the messenger speech, the altar scene, and Athena’s appearance. For the bird as a substitute *deus*, compare T.S. Duncan, ‘The *deus ex machina* in Greek tragedy,’ *PQ* 14 (1935) 127-28. Halleran (note 26) 110 finds that three proxies for Apollo appear in the *Ion*, but considers Hermes the first, and excludes the bird.
fittingly be called a ‘mock deus’. Indeed, I would contend that Euripides, by sending Ion this avian saviour, has a bit of fun with his own conventional method of bringing tragedies to their resolution. Like the deus ex machina, the bird arrives from above. Additionally, like Athena with Thoas in the Iphigenia Taurica, the Dioscoroi with Theoclymenus in the Helen, Apollo with Orestes in the Orestes, or even the Pythia in the Ion, the bird prevents violence from being carried out. Earlier in the Ion, Euripides employed birds to humorous effect as Ion was ashamed to shoot the birds that defecate on Apollo’s temple. Ion’s encounter with the birds at Apollo’s temple is surely meant to bring at least a smile. Coupled with the comic pedagogue, whose aged legs are rejuvenated, and who makes those present at the banquet laugh, Euripides may also have intended Ion’s feathered saviour to prompt a smile, despite the violent context in which the bird appears.

Euripides cleverly invests his feathered divine agent with some rather human traits. The salvific bird arrives in a kómos (1197). The poisoned wine convulses the bird like a Bacchant (ἐσεισε καβάκχευσεν, 1204). Furthermore, while earlier in the play Ion calls birds messengers of the gods to mortals, this bird gives out a squawk that could not be interpreted (ἀξίωνετον, 1205), except by Ion, of course, who suddenly becomes an augur and demands ‘Who was going to kill me?’ (Τίς μ’ ἔμελλεν ἀνθρώπων κτρεῖν; 1210). In the first part of the play’s triple-deus ending, not only does this feathered deus prevent Creusa from killing Ion; it also signals Apollo’s attempt to redirect the play towards a comic resolution.

Ion’s salvation by the bird points toward the drama’s themes of purity and piety, the vicissitudes of fortune, the fallibility of human interpretation, and the frustration of human expectations. Ion considered killing the birds earlier in the play, but his piety checks the violent course of action. The piety Ion exhibits during his monody is echoed later in the play as an ominous word during the initial libation prompts Ion to pour out the poisoned wine, which is then consumed by the bird. Thanks to Ion’s piety

29 In Euripides’ Alcmene, Zeus may have rescued Alcmene from being burned from an altar by sending a rain shower to put out the flames. See Webster (note 12) 93.
31 The same epithet (ἀξίωνετος) describes the riddle of the Sphinx, which Oedipus boasts having solved at Pho. 1731.
32 Compare Hartigan (note 6) 76, 77.
earlier in the play, the birds have survived to prevent Ion from being killed by his mother. We should also note that this is not the first time birds have been connected with Ion’s survival. Four times it is mentioned, thrice by Creusa, that birds are thought to have killed Ion as an infant (504, 902-04, 917, 1494). Creusa thought her exposure of the infant Ion would result in his destruction by birds and wild beasts. Creusa’s expectation of the sequence of events, though, is not fulfilled. Apparently, the birds allow Creusa’s offspring to survive, just as Ion allows the offspring of the birds to continue building their nests under the eaves of Apollo’s temple (171-72).

Indeed, the bird’s intervention marks a role reversal for both Creusa and Ion. When Apollo’s avian mechenē prevents Creusa’s violence against Ion, Creusa’s role in the vengeance drama is concluded. Creusa’s murder attempt, though, so rouses Ion’s emotions that he now embraces the tragic mode. In Ion’s first appearance in the play, ‘Der Tenor ist die freudige Verehrung.’ When Ion entered the skene in which he would celebrate his adoption, he was to engage in festive activities. Creusa’s murder attempt, though, has shattered the sympotic decorum, and when Ion emerges from the imaginary space of this skene and enters the orchestra, he leaves behind his acquiescence to Xuthus’ comedy and impedes Apollo’s comic intent. Ion, finding himself the target of Creusa’s violence, now threatens to kill Creusa, and thus begins to play ‘the villain’s role’ in a rapidly unfolding supplicant drama, while the Athenian women prompt Creusa to assume the role of siege victim when they direct her to take refuge at Apollo’s altar (Kp. ποτ φύγω δήτ’; 1253; Xo. ποτ δ’ ἄν ἀλλοσ’ ἥ τι βομόν; 1255).

When Creusa’s plot is uncovered, Ion suggests that she be hurled from Parnassus (1266-68). Creusa, however, will not bound down the rocky crags like her tragic Athenian counterparts the Cecropids (τοῦγχρονούσα αι σκόπελον ἡμαξαν πέτρας, 274). Earlier in the play, Ion’s piety prevented him from killing the birds that defiled Apollo’s temple with their excrement. When Creusa takes refuge at Apollo’s altar, Ion views her as a source of defilement. Ion accuses Creusa of impiety (οὐκ εὐσεβείς, 1289), and laments that only the just, not the wicked, should touch divine

33 Compare Mastronarde (note 5) 166: ‘He is mild when ensconced in a pocket of Olympian calm, but when pulled into the turmoil of the human world of the Athenian royal family Ion shows signs of the underlying passions of his primitive human nature.’

34 Spira (note 9) 45.
altars (1314-18). As Ion ventures into the realm of tragedy, Apollo again attempts to regain control of the play’s genre by sending a second divine agent, the Pythia, to prevent Ion from becoming tainted with his mother’s blood.

That the Pythia’s arrival is ‘totally unprepared for’ hints at Apollo’s swift efforts to regain control of his play, as well as Euripides’ efforts to keep the audience guessing. As Dunn points out, the opening lines of deus often contain a command from the deus for a person to cease from a certain action, usually a threatening one. Thus, the Pythia’s initial prohibition to Ion, ἐπισχές, ὁ παῖ (‘stop, my child’) is appropriate to a deus ex machina scene. Compare Medea’s command that Jason stop trying to smash his way into the house (παῦσαι τὸν τοῦδ’, Med. 1319); Athena’s injunction to Thoas that he stop his pursuit of Orestes (παῦσωι διώκων ῥεμά τ’ ἔξομῶν στρατοῦ, IT 1437); the Dioscoroi’s order that Theoclymenus end his anger (ἐπισχές ὑγός, Hel. 1642); or Apollo’s command that Menelaus end his hostilities with Orestes (Μενέλαος, παῦσωι άπ’ ἔχων τεθημένον, Or. 1625).

While the Pythia’s initial command to Ion is typical of an epiphany scene, Euripides has introduced some subtleties that particularly suit the Ion. In three other extant plays (Iphigenia Taurica, Helen, and Orestes), Euripides sends a deus (Athena, the Dioscoroi, and Apollo) to prevent violence. The Ion, though, differs in that a governing divinity, Apollo, sends out all the play’s divine agents. In Euripides’ extant plays, only in the Ion, Heracles and the aforementioned Orestes do divine agents (Lyssa, Apollo) appear at the request of another divinity (Hera: Her. 831 ff.; Zeus: Or. 1634-35). Additionally, in both the Orestes and the Ion, the divine agent acting on behalf of the governing divinity rescues a child of the governing divinity. Furthermore, the Pythia’s statement that Apollo prompted her not only to save Ion’s cradle and the other tokens (ἐνθομῖν μοι τότε τίθησι

---

35 Oliver Taplin, The Stagelcraft of Aeschylus (Oxford 1977) 11. See also Halleran (note 26) 108, who writes that ‘At this juncture we might expect a deus ex machina to break the deadlock ... If we anticipate this, we are frustrated in our expectations.’

36 For more on the ‘divine command’ in deus ex machina scenes, see Dunn (note 9, 1996) 32-34; 119, 138, 159-60; (note 9, 1986) 148-58.

37 For a discussion of this imperative in Euripides’ plays in general, see Lee (note 2) 298. See also Halleran (note 26) 108.

38 See also the conclusion of the fragmentary Antiope, where violence against Lycus is prevented.
Aol;iac;, 1347), but also to reveal the tokens to Ion (ἐπεὶ γ’ ὁ δειμων βούλεται: πάρουε δ’ οὖ, 1353) also points towards Apollo's efforts to end the suppliant drama that is now unfolding.

Also noteworthy is the Pythia's address of Ion as ὁ παῖ. The Ion deals with perspective and appearance, literal and figurative. From Ion's perspective, the Pythia is his mother, as Ion himself has told Creusa at 321, and which he again repeats at 1324, a statement which the Pythia corrects in her response at 1325. The Pythia's correction of Ion's belief that she is his mother begins to turn Ion towards a truer understanding of his identity, as well as the sort of 'drama' he should embrace. While earlier in the play Ion has demonstrated an acute knowledge of Athenian legends and social customs, the young man grows up without knowledge of himself.

As is typical of deus scenes, the divinity or person substituting for the divinity also points out the error of a character's actions or prevents the character from making a mistake. In the Alcestis, Heracles tells Admetus he is making a mistake (ὑμωρήση, 1099) by not accepting the mysterious woman; in Hippolytus, Artemis reveals to Theseus the error that Aphrodite has caused him to make (ἐξυμωρτάνειν, 1434); in the Suppliant Women, Theseus thanks Athena for not letting him go astray (ἐξυμωρτάνειν, 1228); in the Orestes, Apollo also points out how Orestes failed (ἐμπρετές, 1630) in his attempt to kill Helen and anger Menelaus.39 Similarly, in the Ion, Pythia tells Ion that his murderous intent is wrong, it is savage (σὺ δ’ ὁμός ὄν ὑμωρτάνεις, 1327).40

Again, the Pythia's words are more than just typical Euripidean deus-scene rhetoric. The word ὁμός is particularly significant for the Pythia since, as Hermes has told us in the prologue, instead of removing the infant Ion from Apollo's altar as the Pythia initially intended, pity drove away this savage (ὁμότητα, 47) notion.41 Thus, in Euripides' attempt to reconstitute the female role in the process of life and death, the Pythia's movement away from savagery not only contributes to the preservation of Ion's own life, but also the life of Creusa, Ion's real mother.

39 Compare also the Heracles, where Theseus, whom Dunn (note 9, 1996) 117 describes as an 'uncertain' deus, manages to prevent Heracles from committing suicide.
30 Apollo describes Thanatos' behaviour as ὁμός at Alc. 64. See also Hipp. 1264; Eï. 1260 (ὁμόφρον Ἀρης).
41 Lee (note 2) 299 makes the same comparison.
Thus, taking Apollo’s cue, the prop-laden Pythia emerges from the temple with the antipex and its tokens. With the Pythia’s help, Apollo ends Ion’s involvement in the supplicant drama and redirects the play towards a happy ending. The Pythia will prevent Ion from adopting the tragic role of matricide and thus becoming a second Orestes. When Orestes killed his mother, the Furies tormented him. Apollo does not want Ion to suffer in this way. When the Pythia shows Ion the vessel in which she found him as an infant, Ion’s response points towards Apollo’s efforts to redirect the play’s genre. At line 1340, Ion marvels at the Pythia’s revelation, ‘What are you saying? A new story has been introduced’ (τι φης; ὁ μυθος εἰσανενεκταν νέος). Indeed, Apollo must contrive a neos muthos to achieve his happy ending.

Ion’s initial response to the Pythia’s new information is positive - he says he will search Asia and Europe for his mother (1356). By line 1380, though, Ion has changed his mind, saying he will dedicate the antipex to the god so that ‘I may not discover anything that I don’t want.’ Unlike Sophocles’ Oedipus, who pursues the truth about his identity, even if he should prove of base origin, Ion claims that to find out he was a slave’s child would be worse than not knowing his mother’s identity. Failure to act, though, would direct Ion away from Apollo’s intended happy ending. Ion himself realizes that not investigating the antipex would make him a theomachos (του θεου προβουτίων πολέμω, 1385-86). Ion’s piety and curiosity about this new stage property will prevent this, though, and redirect him towards Apollo’s intended happy ending.42

Soon Creusa will correctly identify and interpret the tokens within the antipex. Her earlier perceptions of Apollo’s and Xuthus’ intentions led her to participate in a vengeance drama. Once the Athenian queen takes Apollo’s direction, though, she finds herself cast in a completely different role. Creusa’s and Ion’s recognition of one another as mother and son parallels the earlier recognition scene between Xuthus and Ion. When Xuthus and Ion left the stage together, any hope of immediately resolving the play was shattered by the Athenian women’s ‘vengeance drama’.

After Creusa and Ion recognize one another, they also appear ready

42 Compare Mastronarde (note 5) 170: ‘The last stage of the quelling of Ion’s “battling against the god” is effected by the appearance of Athena ex machina.’
to leave the stage. Creusa’s words at 1507-09 sound like the language of exit: ‘... the winds are reversing course. Let things be; the evils of the past are sufficient; but now let there come a fair wind after troubles, my son’ (μεθίσταται δὲ πνεύματα. | μενέτω τὰ πάροιθεν ἄλλες κακὰ· νῦν δὲ | γένοιτό τις οὖρος ἐκ κακῶν, ὁ παῖ.). The Chorus leader’s subsequent comment also seems to hint at exodos (1510-11): ‘From what has happened now, let no mortal ever consider anything unexpected.’ Ion, however, is not yet satisfied. Whereas earlier Ion was tempted to avoid taking on the role of Oedipus and pursuing his paternity to the bitter end, now, at line 1512, Ion launches into an apostrophe on Tuchê, which is followed by a renewed interrogation of Creusa about her alleged affair with Apollo.

Creusa, who now appears to be decoding Apollo’s comic intent, tries to assure Ion that Apollo is giving him to Xuthus for Ion’s benefit (δ’ ὁφελῶν σε προστήσο’ ἄλλῳ πατρί, 1545). Ion, unconvinced, declares that he will ask Apollo whether he has a mortal or divine father (1546-48). This declaration brings swift intervention from Apollo, who causes Athena to appear as the play’s third deus.43 Just as Apollo sent the bird and the Pythia to block tragic events, Apollo has sent Athena to prevent Ion from directly interrogating him about his paternity.

The next word from Ion’s lips is ἔα, an exclamation prompted by the sudden sight of Athena in the mechane. While the exclamation ἔα is also heard from Hippolytus at the appearance of Artemis (Hipp. 1391), as well as the Chorus in the Rhesus upon the Muse’s epiphany (885), Creusa and Ion’s apparent indication that they will flee from the divinity is unusual.44 Athena’s initial command to Creusa and Ion that they not run away from her (μὴ φεύγετε· οὐ γὰρ πολεμᾶν με φεύγετε, 1553) is without parallel in other Euripidean deus ex machina scenes. The repetition of the verb φεύγω, though, accords well with the vocabulary of pursuit found elsewhere in the Ion. Earlier in the play, Ion tries to fend off Xuthus from what Ion perceives to be a violation of his person. Xuthus, though, is determined not to allow his loved one to escape (τὰ φίλαταθ’ εὕρων οὐ φυγεῖν

43 Compare Halleran (note 26) 110: ‘... the seasoned theatre-goes might expect Apollo ex machina, but again the spectator is thwarted in his expectations.’
44 Compare also the reaction of Menelaus to seeing Orestes on the roof of his house (Or. 1573). For more on such exclamations, see Dunn (note 9, 1996) 104.
andr, 521) and wonders why Ion tries to escape him (ὡς τί δὴ 
φεύγεις με; 525). Later in the drama, Ion goes from pursued to pursuer
as Creusa wonders where she can go to escape her pursuers (ποτι φύγω
δή'; ἐκ γὰρ οίκων προῦλαβον μόγις πόδα | μὴ θανεῖν, κλοπὴ 
δ' ἀφύγμαι διαφυγόοισα πολεμίους, 1253-54).

While Xuthus’ ‘pursuit’ of Ion earlier in the play was comic, Ion’s
pursuit of Creusa belonged to the tragic genre. Athena’s appearance,
therefore, and her command that Ion and Creusa not flee brings these
characters back into line with Apollo’s happy ending. Earlier Creusa’s
perception that Ion was her enemy (πολεμίους, 1254; πολέμιον, 1291)
and Ion’s belief that Creusa was his enemy was resolved when Apollo
prompted the Pythia to produce the tokens. Now that the play’s most
prominent mortals have been reconciled to one another, the divinities involved
in the play must become reconciled to the mortals. Athena has not come as
an enemy (πολεμίουν, 1553), but as a friend (οὔσον εὐμενὴ, 1554).

More importantly, Athena will reconcile Ion and Creusa to Apollo
and prevent a tragedy from spoiling Apollo’s happy ending. First, Athena
explains to Ion and Creusa how Apollo, through his 

mechanai (μηχανοῖς 

ἐφύσατο, 1565), prevented them from killing each other. Next, Athena
predicts the glorious descendants of Ion and Creusa. The goddess concludes
her predictions with the opinion that ‘Apollo has done all things well’ (καλὸς 

δ’ Ἀπόλλων τῶντ’ ἐπροῖξε, 1595). Athena’s statement has a ring of
literary criticism to it. The theos, like the poiētes, causes things to be done.

If Apollo’s plans for Athens’ future are to succeed, though, one
additional drama must be undertaken – Xuthus’ deception.45 Now that
Apollo (through his agents) has prevented Ion and Creusa from becoming
entangled in a tragic action, Apollo directs them to his happy ending. For
Apollo’s comedy to succeed, Ion and Creusa must keep the god’s secret
so that ‘the illusion may hold Xuthus pleasantly’ (νῦν οὖν σιωπᾶ, παῖς 

δ’ ὡς πέρυκε σός, | ἰνα ἡ δόκησις Σωτῆον ἡδέως ἔχη, 1601-02).
If either Ion or Creusa fail to take Apollo’s direction, then they may again
be plunged into a tragic situation. Xuthus, however, has moulded himself to
Apollo’s comedy thus far, and Athena’s promise of future Athenian glory
indicates that Apollo’s happy ending will be achieved.

45 Compare Dunn (note 9, 1996) 69; (note 9, 1986) 155; Burnett (note 7) 106.
Apollo’s deception of Xuthus has prompted indignation from critics that Apollo has openly lied.\(^46\) If, however, we understand Apollo as behaving like the poet, then Apollo is doing nothing more than any other poet does— he is creating lies that resemble the truth. Ion, by accepting his role in Apollo’s comedy, will establish the Ionian race and the four Athenian tribes. Creusa, by ending her association with the tragic genre, will become the matriarch of the Ionians, Dorians, and Achaeans. If the purpose of Euripides’ Ion is the glorification of Athens, as some scholars have suggested, then the Athenians, to perpetuate their race, must discontinue their participation in tragic actions.\(^47\) Thus, if we understand Apollo as representing a poet struggling to produce a happy ending, this may explain why Apollo’s behaviour in the Ion appears so incongruous with divinity, why his management of affairs seems so clumsy, and why he manipulates mortals and even his fellow gods in such a forceful or awkward manner.\(^48\)

\(^{46}\) Compare Hartigan (note 6) 69.

\(^{47}\) Compare A.P. Burnett, Ion by Euripides (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1970) 1; Hartigan (note 6) 69.

\(^{48}\) I wish to thank the anonymous referees of Acta Classica for reading an earlier draft of this paper and offering a number of helpful suggestions. Any remaining faults are entirely my own.
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/acta_classica.htm