

“APOLLO KNOWS I HAVE NO CHILDREN”: MOTHERHOOD, SCHOLARSHIP, THEATER

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In spring 1996, my students and I were in the midst of rehearsing my version of Euripides' *Ion*. This play is driven by an obsession with motherhood. Some fourteen or fifteen years before the play opens, Creousa, an Athenian princess, was raped by Apollo in a cave on the Acropolis. She bore a child secretly and abandoned it. Though later married, she has borne no more children. As the play begins, she and her husband arrive at Delphi to consult Apollo's oracle. Encountering a sympathetic young slave, she tells him she has come to ask whether she will ever have children. To his question, "You've never given birth? You're barren?" she answers evasively, "The Bright One knows my childlessness." Many plot twists follow: the oracle leads Creousa's husband Xuthus to believe the temple slave is his own son, and he plans to adopt the boy without telling his wife; Creousa tries to kill the boy, now called Ion, and finally learns that he is the very child she lost long ago.

At one rehearsal, we were working the scene in which the chorus decides to tell Creousa her husband's secret plans, even though he has threatened them with death if they betray him (759–63):¹

Creousa: I know there's something wrong.
You've got to tell me.

Chorus: I will, even if I have to die twice over.
You're never going to have a baby.
Never hold your own child in your arms.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Creousa breaks into a tragic lament (789–91):

No no no no
 To me he gave
 A childless life
 Made my house a grave.

At this point Kristin, who was playing a member of the chorus, asked: “Is Creousa’s fixation on motherhood typical of ancient Greek women? How do we want the audience to feel about this need of hers? How do *you* feel about it?”

Questions like these raise significant issues about the meaning of ancient texts in later contexts. Classical scholars tend to regard ancient dramatic scripts as literary texts, and often try to reconstruct their meanings in the original context with little attention to the form in which their original audiences experienced them. Some scholars explicitly dismiss performance (see Goldhill 1986.265–86 and Taplin’s response, 1995). Others assume that the language of the text is far more important than any other element. In the case of *Ion*, for example, Zeitlin argues that an ekphrasis narrated by a messenger (1132–65) possesses symbolic value that places it “at a higher level of representation than the dramatic actions of the play . . . on a different plane of coded, even oracular, signification” (1996.317), without considering how this speech might have been staged. Loraux insists: “No text should be disengaged from its surroundings” (1993.233), but she thinks of those surroundings not as the architecture of the theater but as “non-Euclidean space composed of superpositions rather than extension” (1993.235). And personal responses to the issues raised by Athenian drama are rare. Loraux says: “There is no statement about Athens, even when cloaked in the terms of scientific neutrality, that does not nourish very contemporary passions” (1993.250), but the reader must look hard to discern the passions being nourished beneath her cloak.

Actually staging an ancient play in the late twentieth century is a very different process from analyzing its meaning and effect in the context of its first production. Yet many contemporary productions try to recreate the “original,” complete with “authentic” sets and costumes. Such attempts often resemble Peter Brook’s description of *Deadly Theatre*—performances that succeed “not despite but because of dullness. After all, one associates culture with a certain sense of duty, historical costumes and long speeches with the sensation of being bored: so, conversely, just the right degree of

boringness is a reassuring guarantee of a worthwhile event" (Brook 1983.11). Jonathan Miller has described the dangers of this "museum" approach: "The hypothetical and unachievable perfect copy would probably strike a contemporary reader as quaint rather than authentic. . . . The claim that something is authentic has already pre-empted the possibility of having an authentic experience" (1986.54). For example, a 1986 production of *Medea* by the New York Greek Drama Company was staged with masked actors speaking ancient Greek with pitch accents, and the choreography was inspired by Greek vase paintings (Steadman 1986). Yet the "authentic" aspects of the production are exactly what made it impossible for a modern audience to experience it as did the ancient audience. Should productions of ancient scripts then pay *no* attention to the form and meaning of the original script? Robert Wilson's 1986 *Alcestis*, for example, offered slow-paced, mysterious action and striking stage pictures but little connection to Euripides' text (Hartigan 1995.121–24).

Fredric Jameson argues that we are called on to make a decision about any form or object from out of the past (1988.150):

If we choose to affirm the Identity of the alien object with ourselves—if we decide that it is more or less directly or intuitively accessible to us—then we have presupposed what was to have been demonstrated, and our apparent "comprehension" of these alien texts must be haunted by the nagging suspicion that we have all the while remained locked in our own present . . . that we have somehow failed to touch the strangeness and the resistance of a reality genuinely different from our own. Yet if, as a result of such hyperbolic doubt, we decide to reverse this initial stance, and to affirm the radical Difference of the alien object from ourselves, then at once the doors of comprehension begin to swing closed and we find ourselves separated by the whole density of our own culture from objects of cultures thus initially defined as Other from ourselves and thus as irremediably inaccessible.

Jameson insists, however, that a "value-free" or "scientific" historiography is not capable of freeing us from this binary opposition of Identity and Difference; instead, "we need to take into account the possibility that our

contact with the past will always pass through the imaginary and through its ideologies" (1988.152).

A number of recent studies have illuminated the ways in which the imaginary and its ideologies affect later audiences' understanding of the ancient Mediterranean world.² Staging a theatrical production of an ancient script, however, poses decisions about the Identity or Difference of the ancient script in a much more concrete and immediate way. Theatrical production involves choices both deeply philosophical and extremely personal. Theater practitioners must have a clear idea of what they want to achieve and how all the aspects of staging—translation, casting, set, costumes, blocking, choreography—affect the audience's understanding. Actors must understand what they are saying and doing in order to play their roles effectively. (Actors speak with a "personal voice" in two senses, using their own voices to say a *persona*'s words.) Moreover, actors in a theatrical production are putting themselves on the line—their voices into the words, their bodies into the movement, their emotions into the issues. Contemporary actors who employ the acting techniques of Stanislavski and his followers—the predominant method of acting training in the United States—need to believe in the "truth" of what they are performing. Stanislavski focussed on emotional truth (Stanislavski 1936.120–53), but rehearsal discussions often go deeply into the themes and ideological effects of the production. In such discussions, personal and professional voices are constantly in dialogue as the participants passionately confront the issues in a script (Gamel 1999).

Such a personal, material engagement with an ancient text goes against the scholarly tradition of insistence on complexity and ambivalence. Goldhill, for example, says of the *Oresteia*'s conclusion: "The problem of *dike* in this trilogy and its critical readings is not solved but endlessly restated" (1986.56). Such ambivalence is an option for readers of texts; it is not an option for producers. Because all the possible choices of interpretation cannot be simultaneously staged, a single performance of a particular text must make a choice among the variety of interpretive possibilities. This certainly reduces the potentially unlimited meanings of the text, but it avoids the *mise en abîme* of endlessly deferred meaning. During the rehearsal

2 See Beard and Henderson 1995. Studies of drama and film include: Winkler 1991, McDonald 1992, Colakis 1993, Hartigan 1995, Burian 1997, Macintosh 1997, Wyke 1997a and b, Foley 1999.

process, performers survey textual ambiguities, consider interpretive possibilities, and try out different performance choices to see the effects of each. No performance of a script is ever definitively the last or the best. Because of its provisional nature, a particular production may be effective or ineffective, polished or awkward, predictable or idiosyncratic; a particular choice may be “right” or “wrong” not in any absolute sense, but only for the particular circumstances.

Thus the theater is more like a laboratory in which an ancient script is tested than a museum that tries to preserve the original meaning. Some theatrical experiments with ancient drama simulate the physical format of Greek or Roman theaters, but the most sophisticated acknowledge that their results are provisional (see Beacham 1992.87). In my “laboratory,” I wanted to test various readings of *Ion*: those that see it as a theodicy demonstrating Apollo’s divine benevolence and long-range planning (Burnett 1971); or as a celebration of Athens’ excellence, especially its combination of autochthony and *philoxenia* (Zeitlin 1996); or as a melodrama or romance (“less stirring of deep emotion than in almost any other,” Grube 1961.278; “the master pattern of western comedy,” Knox 1979.268). Of course, there is a hermeneutic circle involved; the choice of script usually involves preconceptions about its meaning. *Ion* can be successfully staged in quite different ways, as a report on two quite different productions in London indicates (Padel 1996).

What drew me to this play was its focus on women’s issues. In particular, its depiction of sexual violence from the perspective of a female victim is almost unique in ancient drama (Scafuro 1990). But feminist readers, too, disagree about *Ion*’s meaning. Does it “structurally support the dominant [i.e., phallocratic] sex/gender system,” making the spectator “complicit in her own metaphoric rape” (Rabinowitz 1993.220, 192)? Or does it reveal “the inadequacy of male arrogance” and “exalt the role of both women and motherhood” (Saxonhouse 1986.271–72)?

Kristin’s questions raised exactly the issues that I found so compelling about *Ion*. I could have responded to them by trying to historicize Creousa’s yearning. I could have discussed the virtual inevitability of marriage and childbirth for a Greek woman, the rituals that prepared women to assume these roles, and the emotional and practical reasons why a woman might desire children (to earn a husband’s trust, to ensure support in her old age, to conform to societal expectations). I could have brought up examples of males passionately desiring children (such as Iphis in Euripides’ *Suppliant Women* 1087–89). I could have contrasted the lines in which the *Ion*

chorus emphasizes the crucial importance of having children (472–91) with those of the *Medea* chorus that question the value of parenthood (1090–1115), suggesting that both of these have a local structural function, highlighting issues important to the play in which they occur.

I didn't do any of these things because Kristin's questions weren't motivated primarily by intellectual curiosity but by a need to know whether she was spending her time and energy to produce something she could believe in, something that was true for her. As a Santa Cruz feminist, well-trained in the hermeneutics of suspicion, she wondered whether this text was laying out a view of gender roles as "natural," as essentially connected to biological sex (hence unchangeable) rather than constructed by social custom (hence mutable). It is certainly possible to read *Ion* as universalizing and essentialist: Peter Burian, for example, has argued that the play presents as universal both the desire for children of one's own blood and the inverse—the refusal to accept what is not one's own blood (Di Piero 1996.8). But, as a Women's Studies major, Kristin had read feminist theorists such as Allen 1984 and Gimenez 1984 who argue that patriarchal society insists on defining women in terms of their reproductive status. For her to regard motherhood as essential to female experience would constitute acquiescence to patriarchal demands. If this was *Ion*'s ideological thrust, if our production were to promulgate the position that biology is destiny, her performance would support this stance, and she wanted no part of it.

I suggested to Kristin that she look at Creousa not as an abstraction or representative of Greek views of "woman" in general, but as an individual marked by her personal history, irrevocably changed by a series of violent and traumatic experiences: rape, concealed pregnancy, secret childbirth, abandonment of her newborn, forced marriage to a stranger, years of remembrance and mourning. This suggestion assumed that the character Creousa could be considered as a fully developed individual whose history, extending beyond the bounds of the text, was capable of being analyzed psychologically. I was quite aware that this move is methodologically questionable for any dramatic character. In the case of ancient drama, it risks subsuming radically different conceptions of subjectivity into a generalized "humanism." Goldhill, for example, insists that "'human nature' is not a cross-cultural 'essential truth'" (1986.197), that humanism ignores "the cultural and historical conditions for the social, biological, and psychological categories of the person" (1990.105).

Yet insistence on the utter Difference of ancient scripts not only makes performance impossible, it neutralizes the ethical questions they

might raise and the emotional effect they might have. This position is especially troublesome for feminists; Saxonhouse says about *Ion*, “the search for purity can be extended so far that it destroys what it seeks to protect” (1986.273), and Amy Richlin has eloquently discussed the quietistic implications of the scholarly focus on change and difference vs. continuity and similarity (1993, 1997). Moreover, it is clear that Athenian audiences did not regard the plays performed at the Great Dionysia as antiquarian documents or “classics” whose appeal was primarily aesthetic, remote from lived experience. They responded to the dramas in personal terms, with visceral emotion and strong moral judgment. I would argue, then, that attempts to draw connections with social and political issues important to twentieth-century audiences are *closer* to ancient Athenian drama’s effect on its original audiences than are productions that focus only on formal or aesthetic aspects.

My response is to propose that the contemporary theatrical performance of ancient drama is a constant dialectic between Identity and Difference, between modern performers and ancient script, between continuity and change. In creating my version of *Ion*, I emphasized connections rather than alterity, choices rather than ambiguity. I included contemporary material on themes of sexual harassment and abuse of power, such as Anita Hill’s testimony before Congress and a scene reminiscent of David Mamet’s *Oleanna*. I decided that the theme of Athenian autochthony, despite its importance in the original script, was impossible to convey to a contemporary audience, so I eliminated all references to it. Titling the play *Eye on Apollo*, I linked Delphi with other powerful, male-controlled institutions that are similarly difficult to call to accountability, such as the United States Congress, multinational corporations, media conglomerates, and my own university. Addressing the audience as a group of potential investors in the Delphic Oracle, Hermes begins the play by describing Apollo’s rape of Creousa as part of a plan to benefit Athens, and promises that the play will provide a demonstration of Apollo’s tutelary vision: “As you watch, think how wonderful it would be to be part of an institution which has so much knowledge and so much power.” Creousa’s discovery of her husband’s plan to adopt Ion and her plot to kill the boy derail Hermes’ sales pitch, and reveal the oracle’s lie and Apollo’s rape. But just when Ion is about to confront Apollo, Athena appears. A slicker company spokesman than Hermes, she keeps the situation under control by promising that Ion will not only rule Athens, but “open up new territory, extend Greek civilization right into Asia!” The ending is emotionally mixed, with Ion joyful at discovering his

parents, Creousa still deeply angry, and the chorus declaring: "I guess this shows that the gods can do just about anything they want." Despite the changes in my version, the focus on women's issues, the emotional swings, and the ironic stance towards the gods seemed true to the original script.

Because for me Creousa is the central character, the song in which she finally speaks out, revealing the rape (881–921), is crucial. In the Greek, these lines combine lyrical beauty and polemic: K. H. Lee (1997) translates: "Gripping my pale white wrists you led me, a lover-god, to lie down in a cave as I loudly cried 'O mother,' in shameless fashion doing a favour to Aphrodite." Scholars read this scene very differently. For some, gods will be gods: "A Greek god of this period has no ascetic inhibitions. A strong virility is just one aspect of his epiphany" (Wassermann 1940.590). Others hint that Creousa is hiding something, perhaps that she enjoyed the rape: "She describes their union in the most gentle terms . . . Only *anaideia* casts a shadow on their couch, and it is ambiguous as to whether it refers to his or her shamelessness" (Hartigan 1991.80). Translator David Lan makes his choice (Lan 1994.47):

Dark the cave.
A rock my bed.
You seared me!
Then so good it was
I thought I was
the god. I was.

And I made mine, consciously discarding lyricism in favor of directness and passion, using four-beat rhyming couplets, the meter of contemporary rap poetry:

I'll never forget that awful hour
I was only fourteen I was picking flowers
You appeared with your golden hair
I was scared to death but you didn't care
You grabbed my arms You were so brave
You dragged me back into that cave
I screamed for help but you threw me down
You raped me right there on the ground
You took off after you had your fun
I thought it was over it had just begun

Found out I was pregnant I couldn't stop crying
 Couldn't tell my mother so I kept lying
 I went back to the scene of the crime
 Started screaming for the second time
 The baby came out and started to cry
 Your child and mine I wanted to die
 I left him there and went away
 The animals seized their little prey
 But you kept strumming your beautiful lyre
 Hymns to yourself you beautiful liar
 Yes, Apollo, I'm talking to you
 Your prophecies are supposed to be true
 You sit up there on your golden throne
 You tell the priestess what to intone
 You're the god of truth and art
 You're so expert but you have no heart
 What makes you worthy of our belief?
 You cruel rapist, you heartless thief
 What's my husband ever done for you?
 You gave him a son out of the blue
 Our son was abandoned, wrapped in rags
 For birds to pick at among the crags
 You wrecked my life Now what can I do?
 I'll tell the world what I think of you
 Everyone thinks you're such a star
 But I know what you really are
 I'll never stop repeating my cry
 That all your justice is just a lie!

I encouraged Kristin to consider Creousa's experience in personal terms. I suggested that she compare that experience to contemporary accounts of the effects of childhood sexual and emotional abuse, such as Bass and Davis 1988. Creousa's behavior—her combination of shame and anger, of desire to reveal and to conceal her experience—resembles the experiences of victims as described in these accounts. I also argued that Creousa doesn't simply long to have *a* child: she wants the child she had, or at least to know what happened to it. This is her true motive for coming to Delphi and for reaching the temple ahead of her husband in order to ask Apollo a private question (346–48). She expresses desire for other children only rarely and

usually as recompense for the past crime, e.g., 410–12, 425–28. At the end of the play, when Athena says she and her husband will have other children, she gives no sign of joy: she is grateful for the return of the particular child she has thought about so long (1609–13).

The play sets Creousa's situation in a larger context of women deceived, disregarded, manipulated, exploited, violated: the death of Cecrops's daughters (274), Erechtheus's sacrifice of his daughters (justified by Creousa as a patriotic act, 278), Creousa's being married to Xuthus as a reward for his military support of Athens (293–98), Xuthus's breezy unconcern about the identity of his child's mother (574–75), his intention to deceive Creousa about the identity of Ion (655–60), the Pythia as agent of Apollo's intentions (47–48, 91–93, 1347–49, 1357–60), even the idea that Xuthus has used a slave woman to father a child (819–21). Creousa treats an old family slave as a friend and confidant (730–32), with the respect due a father despite his slave status (733–34). But when she tells him about the rape and the baby, he pays little attention to her suffering in his eagerness to hear about the royal heir ("The child! Where is it? You're not barren, then!" 950). At first, he can't believe she really exposed the baby (954–59); when he finally accepts the truth he weeps not for her but for her father (966–69):

OM: A cold winter has frozen your family's hopes.

Cr: Why are you hiding your head, old man, and weeping?

OM: If your father heard this news . . . I'm glad he's gone.

Cr: That's how life is. Nothing good lasts long.

In our show, the actor playing Creousa, hurt and angered by his lack of sympathy, delivered the maxim cynically, as a throwaway line.

Creousa's sudden decision to kill Ion is often regarded as exaggerated and inexplicable: "The dramatist at this point has chosen melodrama . . . a far cry from the pathetic and, despite the improbable plot, potentially tragic characterization hitherto presented" (Conacher 1967.282–83). But if Creousa is regarded as a character with a personal history, it makes sense that her bitterness and rage, once set free, seize on an object—however inappropriate. Creousa wants to murder Ion not because she cannot accept a child not of her blood or because she wants to avoid an outsider's claim to the throne of Athens; these issues are important to the Old Man (808–29, 836–42), not to her. No, she strikes out at Ion to punish the treachery of her

husband and his ally Apollo (912–15), a move that echoes Medea’s turn to infanticide because of her abuse by Jason and Creon.

Creousa’s murderous intent also demonstrates that the connection between mother and child is not a “natural” bond but a relationship that is constructed over time. The scene with the Pythia is another example: in a moment of high tension, Creousa takes refuge on Apollo’s altar after her attempt to poison Ion has been discovered. Ion is about to drag her off, violating sacred law, when his foster-mother the Pythia bursts in and stops him, and the tension dissolves into a wonderful domestic interchange (1320–36):

- Priestess: Stop! My son! I’ve left my holy seat,
abandoning my duties as a priestess
and come out here just in the nick of time.
- Ion: Why, Mother! [*chorus looks mystified*]
Yes, that’s what I call the priestess.
She’s as dear to me as my birth mother is.
- Priestess: Son, I love it when you call me Mother.
- Ion: Did you hear this woman tried to poison me?
- Priestess: Yes. But you’re wrong too in acting so wild.
- Ion: I’m trying to kill a killer. What’s wrong with that?
- Priestess: Stepmothers always dislike their stepchildren.
- Ion: And vice versa, when we’re badly treated.
- Priestess: That’s enough now. You must leave this place.
- Ion: You’re right, Mother. I’ll listen to your advice.
- Priestess: Start your new life in Athens with clean hands.
- Ion: Someone who kills an enemy isn’t dirty.
- Priestess: Stop it! Be quiet and listen to me right now!
- Ion: All right, so talk. Just don’t yell at me.

As these characters argue, combining abstract concerns with emotional appeals, their mother-child relationship is clearly delineated. In the original Athenian production, the actor playing the Pythia had to leave after this scene in order to return as Athena, but our production didn’t have to obey the three-actor rule, so the Pythia remained on stage witnessing and reacting to the reunion. After Ion and Creousa went off to Athens, she stood looking sadly after the boy. Creousa’s gain was another mother’s loss.

In *Ion*, fatherhood, too, is constructed rather than transcendent. Ion's biological father and his adoptive father resemble each other in their lack of emotional connection to their son. Once Ion's adoption is settled, Xuthus turns quickly to questions of wealth and power; he can't understand Ion's hesitation at abandoning his life in Delphi (576–81) and quickly brushes it aside (650–65). At the conclusion, the stage is set for a divine epiphany and a reunion between the god and his son that could have rivaled the final scene of *Hippolytus* in its emotional power. But Apollo apparently cares less about his son than about avoiding blame (1558). Ion gets neither truth nor love from either of his fathers; from Creousa he gets both. What makes the happy ending possible is not Creousa's and Ion's biological connection, but the relationship they begin to construct by telling the truth to each other and accepting responsibility for their actions (1491–1509).

This is not to say that the play cannot be understood or performed in quite different ways by those making different choices. Burnett, for example, argues that Apollo is working behind the scenes to ensure the happy ending; for example, in the bird that eats the poison intended for Ion and dies, "the spectator recognizes the agent of Apollo" (Burnett 1971.118). Perhaps, Athena suggests as much (1565). But the goddess has her own reasons for saying so, just as Hermes claims that the Pythia's sudden pity for the abandoned baby was Apollo's doing (47–48). The Pythia contradicts herself when telling Ion why she kept the basket in which she found him; "he wanted me, uncommanded, to keep these things" (1359). Such textual ambiguities allow directors, actors, and spectators to make their own choices. Because Apollo never appears onstage, however, his influence is not expressed theatrically. A contemporary director following Burnett's interpretation would need to find ways to stage Apollo's effect on the plot, perhaps by having him participate in the action unseen by the human characters.

In a famous essay, L. C. Knights uses the question "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?" as an example of questions unanswerable on the basis of a literary text and hence irrelevant to serious scholarship. Behind Knights's choice of this example, I suggest, lies the assumption that motherhood is obvious, paternity problematic and interesting. Compare Freud's description of that momentous step forward in civilization that occurred with the development of language: "The new realm of intellectuality was opened up, in which ideas, memories and inferences became decisive in contrast to the lower psychical activity which had direct perceptions by the sense-organs as its content. . . . Turning from the mother to the father points to a victory of intellectuality over the senses—that is to say, a step forward in

culture, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a hypothesis" (1964.113–14). Only when maternity is used as a metaphor by a male author can claims be made for its "intellectuality": "Now some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely are those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative" (Plato *Symposium* 208–09).

Kristin's third question—how did *I* feel about Creousa's longing for motherhood—was by far the most difficult to answer. Women scholars are trained to minimize differences between ourselves and male colleagues. Zeitlin and Loraux, though concerned with women's issues, focus on *Ion*'s political and civic dimensions (in particular its depiction of autochthony)—its public, intellectual, "masculine" aspects rather than its private, emotional, "feminine" effects—and only guardedly does Loraux acknowledge that her study has feminist implications (1993.234–50). Both scholarly and creative writing conflict with motherhood on practical and ideological planes, as Suleiman 1985 has discussed. Women scholars or poets who choose to become mothers must try to balance these consuming activities; those who do not may wonder what they have lost. Those bold enough to choose maternity as a topic of discourse or metaphor face being seen as narrow, limited, personal. Yet an actor playing the role of Lady Macbeth would certainly ask about her claim to have "given suck" (II.1.54–59), and if we insist on asking "How many children had Creousa?" the answer is neither irrelevant nor obvious. Like other plays of Euripides such as *Electra*, *Medea*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, *Ion* explicitly revises the *Oresteia*'s privileging of paternity and the public world of citizen males over the *oikos* and the mother-child bond.

H.D., a female poet and scholar deeply engaged in the ancient Greek world, spoke "in a personal voice about contemporary situations" (Moyer 1997.103) and used pregnancy and childbirth as metaphors for creation throughout her career (Hollenberg 1991). A project that brought all these themes together was a version of *Ion* on which she worked for over twenty years. During this time she was pregnant three times—resulting in one stillbirth, one living child, and one abortion. In her version, she intersperses comments on the play's events into the dialogue. In the prologue, for

example, Hermes suavely describes how he whisked Creousa's baby away to Delphi. At the words "and Loxias arranges this," comes this interjection: "Still, we ask ourselves what can this all signify; is this a worthy theme for great religious drama, the betrayal and desertion, by one of its most luminous figures, of a woman and her first child? But before the thought actually has time to crystallize, the silver rhythms of this subtle defendant, God's messenger, silence us." Hermes then "replies" (1937.6):

Not meaningless,
as you might think,
are the god's plans . . .

When she first arrives at Delphi, Creousa suddenly interrupts her conversation with the slave boy with a passionate outburst (252–54 in the Greek Text):

Wrongs done to women!
Crimes of powerful gods!
How can we get justice, if
the powerful are criminals?

H.D. renders this:

you are doomed,
race of women,
O, woman
and women,
and lost; why hope
and of whom can you hope,
whom the Daemons betray—

and then inserts: "A woman is about to break out of an abstraction and the effect is terrible. We wish she would go back to our preconceived ideas of what classic characterization should be" (1937.29–30).

H.D.'s credentials—as a Greek scholar, as a translator, as a mother—may easily be impugned. She thinks, for example, that the play's title has a double meaning—"violet (ἴων) and "one, or first" (ἰός), though neither of these words is related to Ἰών. Her daughter Perdita described her mother as "intensely maternal—on an esoteric plane. She venerated the concept of

motherhood, but was unprepared for its interruptions. . . . We had a staff, almost a bodyguard. I could always be removed. ‘Madame est nerveuse; viens ma petite!’ . . . So, fair enough, that’s the way it was. A mother was someone who wrote poetry and was very nervous. And who walked alone and sat alone. And was capable of overwhelming affection, but on her own time and terms, preferably out of doors” (Hollenberg 1991.32). In her version, the original text’s wit, humor, and irony are consistently suppressed in favor of nobility and pathos. At the end, all suffering is assuaged; Athena is not a stand-in for a cowardly Apollo but the “most beautiful abstraction of antiquity and of all time” and the final comment is ecstatic rather than critical: “That name shall live, the power of that goddess shall not have passed, the beauty and the cruelty of her brother shall not be relegated as sheer daemonism or paganism . . . while one Ionic column lives to tell of the greatest aesthetic miracle of all-time, welding of beauty and strength, the absolute achievement of physical perfection by the spirit of man . . . this goddess lives” (1937.127–28). Most of Athena’s speech, 1553–1605, is then omitted. This choice can be read as protofeminism or sublimation. Freud, who had been H.D.’s analyst, approved: when she sent him a copy of her version he wrote back, “Deeply moved by the play . . . and no less by your comments, especially those referring to the end, where you extol the victory of reason over passions” (Robinson 1982.378). The demands of her three careers were so disparate that it is no surprise that H.D. is perceived as failing to reconcile them or to succeed at any one of them.

As rehearsals continued, Kristin’s question stayed on my mind. If motherhood is as important as this play suggests, had I, a childless woman like Creousa, been deprived of a crucial life experience? I began to think of Creousa’s story as an allegory of my career as a female classicist. In this allegory, Apollo is the ancient world as an object of study as it first appeared to me—overwhelming, beautiful, elusive. Of course I chose to be an academic; though rapt, I was not raped. But this career had consequences that no advisor ever mentioned, including, for many women like myself, the postponement of children until too late. The academic establishment is like Delphi, an institution in which women are expected to act roles written by males. To some of them, like Athena, those roles are quite satisfactory even if they don’t include children (“Apollo has arranged everything perfectly,” *Ion* 1595). But Creousa speaks both for childless women (“what would that baby I didn’t bear have been like?”) and for mothers (“what kind of mothering would my children have gotten if I hadn’t had this career?”). In this light, Creousa’s attempt to kill Ion reflects women’s rage at their exploitation by phallocratic society:

“Anger at a child. How shall I learn to absorb the violence and make explicit only the caring? Victory of will, too dearly bought! . . . There are times when I feel only death will free us from one another” (Rich 1976.21–22). Ion’s longing for his lost mother recalls the children named in the prefaces to so many tomes (“during all those years when I should have been cuddled in my mother’s arms I was deprived of that sweet nurturing,” *Ion* 1375–77). Perhaps we female academics are lucky because we can turn our desire to nurture towards our students, those foster children whom we choose and whom we can abandon without guilt if they displease us.

In what form could I put these thoughts? Tragedy? (“By my own choice, I lost my chance for the greatest experience of a woman’s life”) Romance? (“Divided attention would have made me a bad parent anyway, so things turned out for the best”) Polemic? (“Why doesn’t this country have decent child care, so women wouldn’t be forced to make this choice?”) Or should I, like Creousa, keep silent, afraid that revealing emotional involvement with this issue would damage my cloak of “scientific neutrality”? Was my emotional involvement in this issue not a mode of resistance at all, but the result of my uncritical acceptance of pronatalist ideology? In Euripides’ *Electra*, after a series of abstract questions like the above, Orestes concludes: *kratiston eikêi taut’ ean apheimena* (379), “The best thing is to let these things go, at random” or “It’s better to forget abstract questions and consider each case separately.” Perhaps it is best to accept that, like staging choices, any position on the complex question of scholarship and motherhood must be personal—contingent and contextualized—rather than abstract and universal.

I finally found my own answer to Kristin’s question in the processes of translating and staging. These “maternal” activities are much less valued by the academy than the “paternal” act of producing scholarship that can be abstracted from the time and place of its creation. Both translation and theatrical production are hybrid activities that bring together very different entities for a specific period of time. In both, authorship is multiple, non-linear, and their products (script and production) are ephemeral. Translations and performances, like children, stick around only for a short time, but while they do they require complete personal involvement, and they bring immense joy. In the process of creating theatrical productions over the last fifteen years, I have belonged to many non-biological, temporary, but intensely bonded families. I dedicate this essay to each of those families, with my love.

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