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Author: Jan Kucharski

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Jan Kucharski
University of Silesia, Katowice

Euripides' *Ion*: the contemporary and the past

Greek tragedy, with its momentous moral issues, presented – sometimes – in the frame of genuine literary and dramatic beauty, is traditionally considered to have a universal, omnicultural significance, to bear equal and similar aesthetic and ethic values to both the Athenian polis of the fifth century and to the modern reader. This approach has been challenged long since by scholars of Greek¹; while not denying the aesthetic (and – perhaps – ethic) values that tragedy can offer to a modern, non-specialist reader (or spectator), a scholarly reading in the first place requires taking into account the ancient (to be more specific: the fifth-century Athenian) “perceptual filters”², that is to say to try to perceive the tragedy as it was perceived by its proper audience. This is, of course, an ideal, probably unattainable, however the continuously and painstakingly reconstructed context (in the widest possible meaning) of Attic drama has already given some valuable insights into the understanding of many plays and challenged their traditional readings.

The proper context of Greek tragedy, the *imaginaire grec*, involves two basic features of life in fifth-century Athens: politics (in the broad sense: all that pertains to the *polis*) and religion. This division itself is an artifact of modern approach, where those two spheres are kept separate, whereas in the Greek *poleis* political meant also religious and vice-versa. This is the basis for reading the Attic drama, in both its *mythos* and performance.

Let us now turn to *Ion*. The issue underlying this elaborate and twisted *mythos* are the closely interrelated problems of birthright, inheritance and citizenship. The

¹ Cf. E. Hall: “The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy”. In: P.E. Easterling: *Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge 1997, p. 94.

² Ch. Sourvinou-Inwood: *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*. Boston 2003, p. 15.

plot itself however, even if for the most part invented by the playwright, is still firmly embedded in the schemata of the Homeric, heroic past. The characters themselves (Xuthus, Creusa, Ion) are well known, and significant mythical figures, as are their ancestors (Erichthonios, Erechtheus); Athens is presented as kingdom (as in all other tragedies involving the Athenian polis); gods dwell amongst mortals and unite with them (even if this “union” is nothing more than sheer rape) to produce heroes as offspring, as in the case of Apollo and Creusa, whereas the god’s mortal counterpart, Xuthus, is yet another typical θεοῦ ὁμόλεκτρον κάρρα, as Amphitryon, Aigeus, Tyndareus and many others. And yet this – typical for tragedy – heroic plot is presented within the frame of the contemporary, that is: fifth-century, context³. This is not only due to the simple fact, that it was staged in that time; the very text of the tragedy frequently hints reading it through such “perceptual filters”: traditionally this is given the name of anachronism⁴.

The marriage

The crux of the tragedy is the problem of Ion’s birthright, inheritance and citizenship. Before examining this however, we must take a step backwards and take a closer look at Creusa’s and Xuthus’ marriage, which should place the whole problem within proper frames. Creusa had been betrothed to a foreigner of noble descent, for his exceptional valour, proven in war. Such marriages were quite frequent both in the world of myths and in the archaic age of historical Greece as well where the powerful aristocratic families sought to strengthen their position by creating networks of bonds that transcended their own communities⁵. Exogamy was on a daily basis among noble families of the archaic age. Thus Erechtheus, betrothing his daughter to a powerful noble (Xuthus is a descendant of Aiolos and through him

³ Cf. P. Cartledge: “‘Deep plays’: theatre as process in Greek civic life”. In: P.E. Easterling: *Cambridge Companion...*: “re-scrutiny of the traditional myth through the democratic lens”.

⁴ Cf. Ch. Sourvinou-Inwood: (*Tragedy...*) who labels such “anachronisms” as “zooming devices” which bring the world of the tragedy closer to that of the spectator (by contrast to “distancing devices” which, on the other hand, keep the sometimes risky religious, moral and political exploration at a safe distance to the audience); see also J. Vernant & P. Vidal-Naquet: *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*. Paris 1977, pp. 22–24; E. Hall: *The Sociology...*, 98 f.

⁵ Historical examples: Kylon (the Athenian tyrant-to-be from the 7th century) married to the daughter of the tyrant of Megara, Megacles (from the Alkmaionid house) married to the daughter of Cleisthenes, the tyrant of Sicyon, Peisistratos (the tyrant) married to an Argive noble – a son borne from this union aided his father when the time came, with a significant force of a thousand Argive hoplites, cf. R. Seaford: *Reciprocity and Ritual*. Oxford 1994, pp. 16 ff, 206 f.

of Zeus himself – 43f, 559; more than once he is explicitly referred to as εὐγενής – 291, 392) from the neighbouring Euboea, fits well into this schema.

With the significant social and political changes undergone by the Athenian polis in the sixth and fifth century, marriage became gradually restricted to its members only: without any doubt after Pericles' law of 451 BC both the bride and the bridegroom were required to be Athenian citizens. Furthermore, in the fourth century it was illegal for an Athenian citizen (both men and women) to live (συν-οικεῖν) with a foreigner and beget children thus (παίδοδοποιεῖσθαι)⁶, although we don't have any proof for the existence of such regulations in the late fifth century. In any way the development of city-state seriously limited the autonomy of individual households in many respects⁷, among others – in marriage⁸.

In this light Creusa's marriage with Xuthus could have seemed illegitimate to the Athenian public of the fifth century. Despite firm historical evidence however, such attempts of getting into an "ordinary Athenian's boots" may still be running the risk of fallacy: we will never be able to know for sure, how the ancient Greeks perceived and thought of the tragedies presented to them⁹. This is where the text itself comes into our aid: having heard of Creusa's marriage Ion asks with disbelief: καὶ πῶς ξένος σ' ὦν ἔσχεν οὖσαν ἐγγενῆ (293). Xuthus' status as a foreigner (ξένος), "brought in from abroad" (ἐπακτός) is stressed more than once in the text of the tragedy (290, 592, 813). Anachronism? "Zooming device"? Most likely however, there seems more to it than simply making the tragedy more intelligible, closer to the Athenian spectator. The heroic world presented in the tragedy is deconstructed, explicitly opposed to the everyday, fifth-century life, and, furthermore, this is due not only to the discourse between the text and its context but also to the discourse within the text itself¹⁰.

This is not to say, of course, that Creusa's marriage with Xuthus, as presented in the tragedy, is illegitimate. Despite seeming thus to the Athenian, fifth-century

⁶ Dem., 59, 16 f, 110; Athenian citizens who violated this law were liable to public prosecution (γραφῆ).

⁷ E.g. J. Maitland: "Dynasty and Family in the Athenian City-State". *CQ* 1992, 42.1, p. 27 f; R. Seaford: *Reciprocity...*, pp. 206–220.

⁸ More on the marital system in classical Athens: see C.B. Patterson: *The Family in Greek History*. Cambridge 1998, pp. 108–114, H. Foley: *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. Oxford–Princeton 2001, pp. 61 f.

⁹ As J. Vernant (*Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne*, Paris 1974, p. 23) observes tragedy, even when explicitly referring to the contemporary life of 5th-century Athens, should never be read as simply reflecting it: "aucune référence à d'autres domaines de la vie sociale – religion, droit, politique, éthique – ne saurait en effet être pertinente, si l'on ne montre aussi comment, en s'assimilant l'élément emprunté pour l'intégrer à sa perspective la tragédie lui fait subir une véritable transmutation"; cf. also E. Hall: *The Sociology...*, 94 and 98 f.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Cartledge: "'Deep plays'...", p. 29 on the possible impact of Pericles' citizenship law (451 BC) on the Athenian theatre.

audience, it had been contracted, as is presented in tragedy, in full compliance with the known laws and customs of the heroic and archaic society. According to the most common pattern, known from various mythical and historical examples, it was the bride who was received in the bridegroom's household, after the customary exchange of gifts (ἔδνα) between him (the new κύριος) and the father (the former κύριος)¹¹. On several occasions, however, a different schema is presented, where it is the bridegroom, who is accepted into the bride's household without any gifts, becoming often the new κύριος of the family: such union is referred to as matrilocal¹².

In any case the marriage was a legitimate union of a man and woman, by contrast to other relationships (with concubines, slaves etc.) which were not sanctioned with a formal act. It is not to say however, that the bridegroom, when received into the bride's household, had nothing to offer. Most often he was accepted due to his excellence and, most of all, military prowess, having proved to be a reliable protector of his new household. Thus we come back to Xuthus, who to whom Creusa had been betrothed due to his military exploits, as an ally to his (future) father-in-law.

The heiress

It is a truism to state that the social status of Athenian women in the fifth century was dramatically inferior to that of men. In most respects they were not even independent subjects with all their interests taken care of by male guardians (κύριος). The κύριος of a married woman was, of course, her husband, whereas that of an unmarried – her father¹³. Marriage, in fact, meant entrusting the woman by her father to the authority of her husband as she moved from the natal to the marital family. Because it was the husband who received her into his household it was the duty of the father to provide her with a dowry. This condition had to be met in order that the marriage was regarded as legitimate. If the father died it was her oldest brother who became her κύριος, and, consequently, was obliged to give her in marriage and to provide her with a dowry.

¹¹ E.g. *Il.* 16.190, 22.471f, *Od.* 6.159, 19.528 f with a further discussion in W.K. Lacey: "Homeric ἔδνα and Penelope's κύριος", *JHS* 1966, Vol. 86, 55 f; cf. also H. Foley: *Female...*, 63 f.

¹² For further discussion see W.K. Lacey: *Homeric...*, pp. 59–61.

¹³ It has been noted (E. Hall: *The Sociology...*, pp. 106 ff) that all female tragic characters lack the supervision of their *kyrios*.

The status of women is a key to understanding the peculiar institution of “heirress” – ἐπίκληρος – in classical Athens. If a man had legitimate (v. i.) male offspring they were automatically regarded as heirs to him, whereas he himself was not allowed to dispose of his estate by will (i.e. to appoint other heirs than his own legitimate sons). He could do so however, and usually did, in the absence of legitimate children. On the other hand, if a man without offspring died intestate an heir to his estate was adjudicated (ἐπιδικασία) from the circle of close kin to the deceased called ἀγχιστεία¹⁴. This ensured that the estate remained within the family. Not uncommon however, were cases where the deceased had only female (legitimate) offspring. In legal terms such daughter was referred to as ἐπίκληρος which is quite inaccurately translated as “heirress”. Actually, she had no formal control over the estate which she “inherited”, being rather “attached” to than in possession of it. As in case where the deceased died intestate, the estate along with the ἐπίκληρος attached to it, were adjudicated to the closest relative within the ἀγχιστεία. There was however, one condition: he was obliged to marry the ἐπίκληρος¹⁵. Thus we witness a peculiar situation where the woman’s natal κύριος (with her father dead and in the absence of brothers her legal representative was closest relative within the ἀγχιστεία) becomes also her marital. The husband to the ἐπίκληρος was entitled to exercise control over the estate “inherited” by his wife, there were however certain limits to his sovereignty. Most importantly he was not allowed to dispose freely of the estate¹⁶, to be more specific, there could be no other heirs to it than the legal offspring from his union with the ἐπίκληρος¹⁷. If the marriage proved to be barren the “heirress” was entitled to divorce her husband and subsequently be adjudicated, along with “her” estate to the next relative within the ἀγχιστεία.

Although the situation where the only legitimate offspring were daughters was not uncommon, they usually were already married at the moment of their father’s death¹⁸. If this union gave offspring, then it was these children (i.e. grandchildren to the deceased) who were considered lawful heirs (after reaching adulthood, of

¹⁴ The ἀγχιστεία consisted of (according to the sequence of claim): 1) the brother to the deceased, and his male offspring; 2) male offspring of the sister to the deceased; 3) paternal uncle (and his male offspring); 4) male offspring of paternal aunt; 5) brother by the same mother (and male offspring); 6) male offspring of the sister by the same mother; 7) maternal uncle (and male offspring); 8) male offspring of maternal aunt; cf. C. B. P a t t e r s o n: *The Family*..., p. 95 (with diagram).

¹⁵ In fact it was the ἐπίκληρος “attached” to the estate that was adjudicated to the closest among the ἀγχιστεία, cf. Dem., 49.22, further discussion in C. B. P a t t e r s o n: *The Family*..., pp. 94 f.

¹⁶ Cf. Is., 10.12: κατὰ τὸν νόμον ὃς οὐκ ἐκ τῶν τῆς ἐπικλήρου κύριον εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ἢ τοὺς παῖδας ἐπὶ διετες ἠβήσαντας κρατεῖν τῶν χρημάτων.

¹⁷ A son borne from such union after reaching adulthood (at the age of twenty) became himself the κύριος of both the estate and his mother as well! Cf. Dem., 49.20, Is., 10.12.

¹⁸ If given in marriage by their father (i.e. κύριος) their husbands were not required to be from the ἀγχιστεία.

course). If however, the marriage was barren the ἐπίκληρος was required to divorce and afterwards marry a man from her father's ἀγχιστεία¹⁹.

The matrilocal marriage pattern presented in the Homeric epics appears more simple. The bridegroom received into his wife's household is usually a foreigner, without any relations with the bride's family. He usually became heir to his father-in-law, this time however his control over the inherited estate seems not limited by any regulations. The most instructive example in this particular case is given in the *Odyssey*, with Menelaus' kingdom in Sparta. His union with Helen did not produce any male offspring, their only child is Hermione, who is just about to be given in marriage to Neoptolemus. It is explicitly stated that the girl is to move away, to the bridegroom's household (4.5–9). Menelaus however, does have a son, Megapenthes, borne from a slave, ἐκ δούλης (4.12). Nevertheless Megapenthes, just like Hermione, is said to be his father's beloved child τηλύγετος (4.11), and after marrying an Lacedaemonian noble – he too, as his half-sister, is preparing for the wedding (4.4) – he is intended to remain in Sparta, most likely as heir to Menelaus²⁰. Although it is never explicitly given in the *Odyssey*, we do remember that Menelaus himself came to be ruler of Sparta by marrying Helen, as a son-in-law to the former king, Tyndareus. Hence it may seem a bit odd that as a foreigner, unrelated (by blood) to the ruling household of Lacedaemon, he is about to institute his own son, borne from a slave, as the future king. There is not a single hint however, that Menelaus' conduct in this particular case is in any way transgressive. Although Helen, being the “heiress” (i.e. her Homeric counterpart), might appear as more independent than other women (e.g. Penelope, Andromache) it is clear that, unlike in fifth-century Athens, here it is the κύριος who is in charge of the entire estate and his authority is not limited by any regulations or customs.

If such interpretation of the facts presented in the *Odyssey* is correct, then Xuthus' conduct in the *Ion* is, in fact, an exact mirroring that of Menelaus. He too is a foreigner, a king imported from abroad. Yet, as Menelaus, he is attempting to institute his own son borne from an unknown mother, as heir to the house of Erechtheus (576–579):

come now, leave the land of the god leave your homeless life behind, and, unanimous with your father, make haste to Athens where the prosperous throne of your father and great wealth await you (...)

The wealth and the throne which Xuthus offers to his son once belonged to Erechtheus. In the world of Homer there would be nothing wrong with this exhorta-

¹⁹ Cf. Is., 3.64, discussion: H. Foley: *Female...*, pp. 68 f.

²⁰ C. B. Patterson: “Those Athenian Bastards”. *CA* 1990, 9, pp. 47 f; for a further discussion about legitimate / illegitimate sons v. i.

tion. Xuthus had earned his rights to the throne of Athens and to Erechtheus' estate proving himself worthy as its defender, and being the κύριος he has every right to administer it the way he pleases.

The heroic aspects of the *mythos*, which itself is said to be the poet's invention for the most part, are rendered with care and precision. Hence we cannot say that the old myth is presented within the frame of contemporary, fifth-century reality simply because the poet(s) knew no other. It is more likely that the heroic reality with all its significant elements stressed with care and diligence is deliberately opposed to the contemporary forms of thought²¹.

Let us now try to read the *Ion* through the perceptual filters which include these forms of thought. From this point of view Creusa is to be considered as ἐπίκληρος to her father's estate²². According to the myth, presented in the tragedy, Erechtheus had only female offspring, and sacrificed his older daughters, which left him with Creusa as the only child. Since he himself (as κύριος) gave her in marriage, the husband could have been chosen from outside the family (but not a foreigner! – v. s.), yet after Erechtheus' death, seeing that the union was barren, she would have been expected to divorce the present husband and marry someone from among her ἀγχιστεία. Instead, as we are told (64f, 304), they have lived a childless life for many years, and furthermore, Xuthus is attempting to place his son (as he is told), who is not Creusa's child (Ion's status as a bastard will be discussed later), as heir to the estate of Erechtheus – another transgression of the contemporary laws and customs.

Yet again we have to ask the same question: to what extent are we entitled to project the contemporary world of fifth-century Athens on the world of tragedy? Since we will never be able to fully reconstruct the “perceptual filters” of the Athenian audience, a safe answer would be: as long as the text itself allows (or rather encourages) it. In this particular case there can be no doubt: it is Xuthus' plan of introducing Ion to the throne of Erechtheus that is the source of conflict. Ion's reluctance to follow his “father's” bidding is founded on grounds which refer us to the contemporary, fifth-century reality (592, 607 f). The military prowess of the son-in-law, in the world of Homer legitimizing the claim of a hero to the estate of his father-in-law, is here explicitly put into question (1295–1299, 1303 ff). No longer is Xuthus entitled to freely dispose of the property he thus acquired (cf. 813 ff). No longer is Ion being, like Megapenthes, ἄλλων τραφεὶς ἐξ αἰμάτων (693), considered as perpetuating the household of Erechtheus: ὀρφανοὺς δόμους οἰκῆσω (790), laments Creusa, while Xuthus' attempt to introduce his son as heir is explicitly given as a plot to deprive Creusa and the family of Erechtheus of their household στέρομαι δ' οἰκῶν (865) ὑβριζόμεσθα δωμάτων τ' Ἐρεχθέως

²¹ Cf. J. Vernant: *Mythe...*, p. 36.

²² Creusa as ἐπίκληρος has been examined by N. Loraux “Creusa the autochthon”. In: J. Winkler & F. Zeitlin: *Nothing to Do with Dionysos*. Princeton 1990, pp. 186–190.

| ἐκβαλλόμεσθα (810 f). Yet again we witness a tension between the past and the present in the world of tragedy²³.

The bastard

Begetting children meant providing heirs and descendants, and thus preserving and perpetuating the family or household (οἶκος). The situation where the οἶκος of the deceased had to be taken over by his next-of-kin (ἀγχιστεία), although not infrequent, was consequently shunned. As Isaeus puts it “All who are seeing that their life is coming to an end take care that they do not leave their own household bereft of heirs, but that there will be someone who will offer sacrifices to them [after their death] and perform all the customary rites. That is why even if they die childless, nevertheless adopted heirs are left behind” (7.30).

Adoption as means of perpetuating the household was probably introduced by Solon. Up until then only the natural descendants or – if a man died without offspring – the next-of-kin were entitled to inherit the estate, whereas the will of the deceased was of no significance²⁴. This does not necessarily mean that in the pre-Solonian Athens prevailed the non-linear inheritance pattern, where the next-of-kin take over the estate. Like in the Homeric world (and among many other primitive societies) in the early archaic period the problem of childless marriage was resolved with the husband (given, of course, that it was not him who was sterile) taking another woman, sometimes a slave, for the production of children. Her status was, of course, significantly lower than that of the legitimate, however barren wife²⁵. Thus illegitimate, bastard children, when recognized by the father, the κύριος, could have become legitimate heirs. Such pattern was employed not only in childless families, but also in those lacking male descendants.

This is the case of Megapenthes, Menalaus’ son, borne from a slave. Despite his rather poor birth condition it is him who, most likely, is presented as an heir to Menelaus²⁶. Along with introducing the adoption as means of perpetuating the household Solon’s legislation is said to have limited the inheritance claims of children born out of the wedlock. Since one could bequeath his estate to anyone he

²³ Cf. J. Vernant: *Mythe...*, p. 36: “tension entre le mythe et les formes de pensée propres à la cité, conflits dans l’homme, le monde des valeurs, l’univers des dieux, caractère ambigu et équivoque de la langue – tous ces traits marquent fortement la tragédie grecque”.

²⁴ Cf. Is., 2.14 ff, 3.68. 7.30.

²⁵ C.B. Patterson: “Those Athenian...”, pp. 47 ff.

²⁶ In the Homeric society νόθοι were excluded from inheritance only by male γνήσιοι.

wished (ὅτι βούλεται [...] δοῦναι τὰ αὐτοῦ)²⁷, the need of “producing” natural descendants, heirs, from extramarital unions was significantly diminished. From this moment on such bastard-children (νόθοι) could no longer claim inheritance save a strictly limited amount of their father's goods known as νοθεῖα. To be more specific, excluded from inheritance-claims were bastard-children who had been recognized by the κύριος, whereas illegitimate children not acknowledged by their father were deprived of any rights anyway, and hence of no interest to the new legislation.

As mentioned above there is a striking similarity between the status of Euripides' *Ion* and of Homeric Megapenthes. Both are sons of foreign fathers, married in a matrilocal union, both are the only male descendants, and finally both are meant to inherit the estate of their father's wives. Both are borne out of the wedlock, both are bastards (νόθοι). Xuthus recognizing his bastard-son, borne from an unknown mother, and attempting to institute him as heir to the throne of Erechtheus repeats thus the schema common in the world of Homer and in the historical society of archaic age.

Yet again *Ion*'s status as a bastard and its implications, seen with the perspective of fifth-century Athens, are repeatedly stressed in the text of the tragedy. More than once he is referred to as νόθοι (545, 1105), the word itself however, employed frequently already in Homer, is not enough evidence. Xuthus' attempt to introduce *Ion* as his heir is met with violent resistance, but the indignation of Creusa and her attendants could also be understood simply as dynastic strife, not reaction against a grave transgression. It is Xuthus himself who admits to his own limitations and thus obliquely pointing to *Ion*'s inferior status (655–660):

I shall bring you to the land of Athens as a visitor, as if not my son. For I do not wish my wife to grieve in her childlessness, while I myself rejoice. In time I will seize the right moment to make my wife let you have my sceptre.

As a bastard he cannot be heir to the throne of Erechtheus: this is where the power of the *kyrios*, i.e. Xuthus, fades away²⁸. *Ion* cannot be introduced to the throne of Athens otherwise than through illegal scheming. He who in the world of Homer would have been a splendid royal successor, here is nothing more than a bastard, whose only share in the land of Athens are his father's shield and sword (1035).

²⁷ Actually the procedure of adoption took place in two distinct ways: 1) the foster-father himself introduced his son-to-be to the phratry and deme or 2) the adoption was a part of the deceased testament. The latter, according to Z.K. Isaacs, proved to be far more ambiguous and open to questioning.

²⁸ Despite the inferior status of women in classical Athens the heiresses apparently had significant, although rather informal, power over the household and the family, cf. Men., f. 333, 334 with discussion in C.B. Patterson: “Those Athenian...”, p. 91, and n. 55, see also H. Foley: *Female...*, p. 69.

The polis and the kings

So far we have examined the inheritance issues presented in the *Ion* as concerning a more or less ordinary family. Up to this moment the source of the conflict appears to lie in confronting the traditional mythic, heroic story pattern with the contemporary laws and customs. The Erechtheids, however, are no ordinary family; they are a powerful, royal dynasty, where the problem of inheritance reaches far beyond the material estate. It is the royal power and its transmission that forms the main issue here.

Most tragic plots, as had been recognized already by Aristotle, involve powerful royal families of the heroic past. These families are usually involved in a bitter dynastic strife where the underlying issue, although not always explicitly formulated, is the royal power. The Atreids, the Danaids, the Labdakids – the conflicts in these families are of different origin, however it is obvious that each catastrophe, each killing results in a shift of power: Clytaemnestra with Aegisthus become rulers having slain Agamemnon, as does Orestes – having killed the latter two; Oedipus' parricide renders him king of Thebes, while his catastrophic exile transfers the royal power to his brother-in-law; the last act of the Labdakid tragedy (presented in the form of trilogy by Aeschylus) explicitly presents the conflict as a strife for power between Polyneices and Eteocles²⁹.

The *mythos* of the *Ion* fits all too well into this schema. Here, however, the dynastic struggle for power is not hidden between the lines, but put forward as the main source of conflict. Stepmother versus stepson engaged in a circle of reciprocal violence, with the first unsuccessful attempt to kill latter by poison immediately followed by the second – equally unsuccessful – attempt to slay the former at the altar. And all this in the absence of the male ruler of the household, i.e. Xuthus.

The dynastic strifes in tragedy are not simply presented as mythic tales of the past however, their background lies not in the heroic age, but is formed by the *polis*. It is the fifth-century, democratic city-state with its laws and customs that provides the scenery for the conflict. The pattern presented in the *Ion* so far (that is to the point where the royal dynasty is engulfed in a circle of reciprocal violence) is indeed quite common in tragedy. In fact the powerful families are thus either violently ravaged (e.g. the Atreids) or utterly destroyed (e.g. the Labdakids). This is where the tragic tensions between the (heroic) past and the (democratic) present appear in full light. To speak of “happy” or “sad end” in Greek tragedy seems rather anachronistic, however one cannot fail to notice that, no matter what havoc has actually been inflicted upon the royal family presented in the dramatic plot, its outcome, while anything but “happy”, often is positive. The family hated by the

²⁹ Other examples of dynastic strife underlying the tragic plots are given by J. Ma i t l a n d: “Dynasty...”.

gods is wiped away from the face of the earth (A. *Sept.*), the impious are punished while the god's prerogatives are thus reaffirmed (S. *Ant.*, E. *Hipp.*, *Ba.*) and all this often followed by the foundation of a new cult (S. *Tra.*, E. *Hipp.*, *Ba.*). Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, where the "happy end" has often proved troublesome to scholars as unfit for tragedy (despite the unquestioned tragic feeling throughout the entire trilogy)³⁰ gives strong validation to such pattern (destruction of family, foundation of cult). In short, it is obvious that no matter how "tragic" the miseries which befall an individual and his family (i.e. the *oikos*), the final outcome is actually beneficial to the entire community (i.e. the *polis*). The conflict between the household and the *polis* is resolved either with destruction of the former (as e.g. in *Sept.*) or with its conforming to the latter (as e.g. in the *Oresteia*)³¹.

In the *Ion* the royal household of Athens is threatened with destruction arising from dynastic strife. This time, however, the conflict does not end in blood, but in reconciliation, the house of Erechtheus is spared. Why so? The most obvious, and correct, answer is that this time the drama speaks of Athenian kings: Attic tragedy on Attic history. It is no longer "the Other"³² presented onstage, the deranged and cursed families of Thebes (traditional foe of Athens) or Argos³³. Although sufficiently distanced (in terms of timespan: mythic past) from the contemporary reality to allow some freedom of religious and political exploration, the plot still concerns the οἰκεῖα πράγματα (to travest Herodotus' οἰκεῖα κακὰ in relation to Phrynichus' *Sacking of Miletus*)³⁴. It should be noted that while the heroic kingship in tragedy is usually equated with tyranny³⁵, a form of monarchy far closer to the common fifth-century experience, it is never so in relation to the mythic rulers of Athens. The monarchs of Argos and Thebes are consequently presented as oppressive tyrants who pay no heed to the (human or divine) laws and mistreat their fellow-citizens. These are not only villains, like Agamemnon's murderers in the three tragedies of Orestes, or Lykos in Euripides' *Heracles*, but also more ambiguous characters like Oedipus (in *OT*), Creon (*Ant.*, *OC*, *Supp.*), Eurystheus (*He-*

³⁰ On the discussion about the "tragic" in the *Oresteia* see A.M. van Erp Taalman Kip: "The unity of the *Oresteia*". In: *Tragedy and the tragic*. Ed. M.S. Silk. Oxford 1998, pp. 118–138. A.F. Garvie: "The tragedy of the *oresteia*". In: *Tragedy and the tragic*. Ed. M.S. Silk. Oxford 1998, pp. 139–148.

³¹ This is presented most explicitly in tragedies where the "scapegoat complex" underlies the plot, as in E. *Hipp. Ba.* (esp. 963 f).

³² F. Zeitlin: "Thebes: Theatre of self and society in Athenian drama". In: J. Winkler & F. Zeitlin: *Nothing...*, pp. 144–150; E. Hall: *The Sociology...*, p. 100.

³³ On the superiority of Athenian governments next to those of Thebes and Argos, as presented in tragedy see E. Hall: *The Sociology...*, p. 101.

³⁴ Tragedy as religious and political exploration: Ch. Sourvinou-Inwood: *Tragedy...*, P. Cartledge: "'Deep plays'...", p. 21. On the safe distancing such exploration (transgressed by Phrynichus) see Ch. Sourvinou-Inwood: *Tragedy...*, P. Cartledge: "'Deep plays'...", p. 24 f.

³⁵ R. Seaford: *Reciprocity...*, pp. 232 ff, P. Cartledge: "'Deep plays'...", p. 23.

racl.), Eteocles (*Phoen.*) or Pentheus (*Ba.*). The truly positive kings, whose reign is not tainted with tyranny, are Demophon (*Heracl.*) and Theseus (*Supp.*). Both more or less explicitly praise the democratic principles dear to the fifth-century audience; the latter, when engaged in a dispute with the Theban Herold (395–462), is the most instructive example here.

With this in mind one might notice with astonishment that the Athenian kingship in the *Ion* is explicitly presented as tyranny. When refuting his father's exhortation the hero thus describes the way life offered to him:

The mask of tyranny – which is praised in vain – is sweet indeed; but inside the house there is only pain and grief. For who would be called fortunate or happy when passing his life in constant fear? I would prefer to live as a common-man yet happy, than to be a tyrant, who pleases in having the wicked as friends, while hating the noble in fear of death.

This is not an incidental use of the word τύραννος and its derivatives. The key dark sides of tyranny are here listed in detail. Why so much criticism in picturing the Athenian monarchy? Why are the royal ancestors of the noble Theseus equated with deranged tyrants of Thebes and Argos? The answer is to be found in the subsequent passages of *Ion's* *rhesis*. As Xuthus' bastard son, he would rule Athens in defiance of its (fifth-century and democratic) laws and customs. A νόθος has no share either in the family inheritance or in the state citizenship. And yet as such *Ion* would have been both heir to the legacy of the Erechtheids and ruler of Athens. A royal successor on the one hand, and a bastard of unknown descent and foreign blood, denied the elementary rights of citizenship on the other. Unlike Theseus and Demophon, who praise the fifth-century democratic institutions, *Ion* would have ruled in defiance of them. Although ruler of Athens, he would, in fact, have been a tyrant.

And yet this potentially dangerous conflict is resolved without bloodshed, in a merry reconciliation, which prompted many modern scholars to deny this play the status of tragedy and label it as “melodrama”. Without getting entangled into the inquiry on the “true” nature of tragedy, we may draw a parallel between the *Ion* and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Although the latter deals with quite exceptional horrors of violence, it is also concluded with a “happy end”. The obvious reason, already mentioned, is that the tension between the household and the *polis* is resolved with the former conforming to the latter: with the dynastic strife submitted to the judgement of the Areopagus. In the *Ion* the dynastic strife is also resolved with conforming the household to the *polis*: *Ion* is to be king of Athens, however no longer as Xuthus' bastard son of unknown origin but as an autochthonous demigod, in compliance with the contemporary laws and institutions.

Jan Kucharski

Ion Eurypidesa: współczesność i tradycja

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą odczytania tragedii Eurypidesa *Ion* jako zderzenia heroicznego tradycji mitycznej z współczesną Atenom V wieku p.n.e. ideologią państwową i obywatelską. Dominujący problem dramatu stanowi kwestia obywatelstwa i dziedziczenia, nader istotna w codziennym życiu ateńskiej *polis*, o czym świadczą chociażby zachowane mowy sądowe. Postacią, wokół której skupia się problematyka, jest tytułowy *Ion*, z jednej strony – pozornie – traktowany jako nieprawny syn obcego władcy Aten, Ksutososa, z drugiej zaś – rzeczywiście – jako pełnoprawny potomek starożytnej dynastii władców królów ateńskich. Tę właśnie – pozorną – ambiwalencję tytułowego bohatera autor traktuje jako źródło konfliktu w *Ionie*, interpretowanego tu jako problematyka i następnie, przez swoje szczęśliwe rozwiązanie (uznawane nieraz za tragikomiczne lub melodramatyczne), legitymizacja wartości składających się na ideologię obywatelską klasycznych Aten.

Jan Kucharski

Ion von Eurypides: Gegenwart contra Tradition

Zusammenfassung

Im vorliegenden Artikel wird es versucht, die Tragödie *Ion* von Eurypides als ein Konflikt zwischen der heroischen mythischen Tradition und der staatlichen und bürgerlichen Ideologie des Athens vom 5. Jh. v. Ch. abzulesen. Das Hauptproblem des Dramas sieht der Verfasser in den für tägliches Leben der Athener *polis* wesentlichen Problemen des Bürgerrechtes und der Vererbung, wovon z. B. die erhalten gebliebenen Gerichtsreden zeugen können. Die Hauptperson des Dramas ist *Ion*, der einerseits – scheinbar – für unehelichen Sohn des fremden Athener Herrschers, Ksutosos, und andererseits – wirklich – als ein vollberechtigter Nachfahre der altertümlichen Dynastie der Athener Könige gehalten wird. Gerade diese scheinbare Ambivalenz des Haupthelden ist, so der Verfasser, die Quelle des Konfliktes in *Ion*, der hier zuerst als eine Problemstellung und dann, dank einer glücklichen (manchmal auch für tragikomisch oder melodramatisch gehaltenen) Lösung, als eine Legitimierung der, die bürgerliche Ideologie des klassischen Athens bildenden Werte interpretiert wird.