

For Us the Living: Lament in Euripides' *Ion*
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When Euripides wrote the *Ion* in 412 BCE, he was working from a loose mythological tradition which he adapted to fit contemporary Athenian circumstances. The play was by most accounts a failure and continues to be largely ignored even by modern scholars, with a few notable exceptions. Katerina Zacharia, in her book *Converging Truths*, deals with the *Ion*'s theme of Athenian autochthony and identity; Helene Foley considers the marriage of Xuthus and Creusa in her book *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*. For the most part, however, the play and the character of Creusa remain unexamined, and in particular, neither has been examined through the lens of women's lament.

It is not difficult to see why modern scholarship rarely grapples with the *Ion*. The play contains themes such as sexual violence and infant exposure, which often seem disturbing to a modern audience. The *Ion* also obscures these topics with less disturbing cultural issues such as Athenian attitudes around autochthony, inheritance and *epiklêroi* (female heirs), and the relationship between humans and gods. Moreover, the play as it is usually read and interpreted is confusing. The plot of the *Ion* is largely verbal and expository, comprising multiple retellings of Creusa's rape and the abandonment of her child, sandwiched between a prophetic prologue and a remarkably facile use of the *dea ex machina*. When, at the end of the play, Creusa proclaims her praise for Apollo in an abrupt *volte-face* from her previous hatred, readers are often left wondering what the purpose of the preceding 1600 lines has been.

In this paper, I show that Creusa's expression of her grief and anger about her rape and the subsequent abandonment of her child is lamentation. Women's lament has recently been given a great deal of attention by such scholars as Margaret Alexiou, Nicole Loraux, and Casey Dué. Alexiou, in her book *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, traces the ritual lament from epic and later poetic and dramatic traditions into the Byzantine era and thence to the modern rural Greek lament. In so doing, she notes the characteristics common to lament, and states that one of the purposes of lament is to forge connections. Loraux, in *The Mourning Voice*, and Dué, in *The Captive Women's Lament in Greek Tragedy*, also comment on the connective function of women's lament. If Creusa's speeches in the *Ion* are indeed lament, this provides the possibility of a new approach to the characterization of Creusa and to the plot of the *Ion*.