

Immigrant Passing in Euripides' Ion, the Tragedy of Blood-Based Membership

Compare Homer's words "like some dishonored immigrant"; he who is excluded from the honors of the city is like a metic. But when this exclusion is concealed, then its object is to deceive fellow inhabitants.¹

– Aristotle, *Politics* 1278a37–1278a40

Euripides' *Ion* is a relentless exploration of the tenets of Athenian exceptionalism. Unparalleled as a sustained engagement with the founding myth of autochthony, the tragedy has drawn curiously little attention from readers interested in analyzing the workings of a democratic order.² The critical tendency to overlook the *Ion* as a work of political thought may have something to do with the general impression that the text solves its own conflict and equivocates on its own tragic and critical force.³ A recognition scene (*anagnōrīsis*) between Ion and his estranged Athenian mother establishes peace where mistaken blood ties previously threatened familial violence. For some readers, the mother–son unification gives the tragedy a happy ending that restores Ion to his proper and formerly unknown identity as a fortunate native Athenian. Ion's new blood knowledge sends him safely back to Athens, the city he left as a baby, where he is supposed to ensure the pure reproduction of the *demos* and its empire – the two dimensions of the city's self-conception promoted by the autochthony myth that was popularized in the fifth century BCE.

On closer inspection, the political realities established by the *Ion*'s ending are not as sanguine as they first appear. The question of what, if any,

¹ I have altered Jowett's translation to highlight Aristotle's use of the Greek terms *metanastēs* (immigrant) and *metoikos* (metic).

² Cohen (2000: 85–87), for example, reads the *Ion* as a deeply critical and mocking exploration of Athenian (and democratic) identity.

³ Sustained political theoretical interpretations of the play include Foucault 2010: 75–147; Lape 2010: ch. 3; Loraux 1993: ch. 5; Saxonhouse 1986: 257–260; Saxonhouse 1992: 76–89. I discuss these readings later on in the chapter.

political theoretical meaning we might find in this tragedy turns partly on whether we see the figure of the metic at work in this text. Although Euripides' singular use of marginal and liminal characters in this text is well noted – the tragedy is rife with illicit but apparently necessary mixtures – critics have generally failed to appreciate that much of the dramatic action revolves around analyzing, averting, and ultimately acquiescing to life as a metic. And in the *Ion*, I argue, figurations of the metic lead us to the text's tragic and political theoretical insights about democratic Athens. No resolution is ever reached, on my account, because the tragedy's central political conflict actually lies elsewhere, not over the characters' blood ties themselves but in the problems that the mobility of people creates for the blood-based calculus that is supposed to order this movement and mingling. Ion is actually made to reconceal the news of his Athenian blood as the condition of his return to Athens, its future as a democratic hegemony, and its colonization of Ionia. Thus Euripides' tragedy closes not with the triumphalist departure of a native son recovered, as typically thought, but with the imminent immigration of a foreigner whose nativity has been covered over. Once read from this angle, the recognition scene does not imply a happy restoration of a predetermined political status. For despite his autochthonous bloodright, Ion will go to Athens as a metic.

Taking this different lens to the tragedy, the following chapter reflects on the critical import of Euripides' new etiology for Athens' democratic-imperial regime. Ion's disquieting fate suggests that, contrary to what the autochthonous polis promises its natives, the possession of Athenian blood need not decide one's membership experience in Athens. But Ion's knowledge of his maternal Athenian lineage does accomplish something in this play: the news compels a young man to turn his kinship into a secret and, rather than repatriate, to immigrate, which is to say pass as a resident foreigner. That Ion refuses to go and live as a metic in Athens earlier on in the tragedy, when he mistakenly thinks that is his "real" blood-based assignment, makes the ending only more urgent to work through. Becoming Athenian in Euripides' tragedy amounts to taking on one's parentage as a secret. The closeting that reveals blood's failure to decide membership practice in advance is the very gesture that keeps this blood-based regime intact. In the strange logic of Euripides' tragedy, the concealment that makes an autochthonous son a metic, that reveals the city may not always deliver on its promise to the "well born," is the one and only act that can safeguard the city's future as an autochthonous (and colonizing) demos. Somehow the instability of these blood-based membership lines establishes the political utility of blood for future generations of

the regime. The question worth considering is what this Euripidean innovation helps us see about the fifth-century polis into which the poet retrojects it. In what sense does the new myth serve the democratic city it founds?

I argued in the last chapter that Athens grounds *isonomia* (equality before the law) in *isogonia* (equality in birth) and in this way generates a political desire for blood knowledge in a context of migration and mingling. What interests me about the *Ion* is not only that it depicts a family grappling with the demands and uncertainties of this political order but how, when read as a work of critique and political theory, the tragedy can help us analyze – can articulate a rationale for – the polis's interests in this particular membership calculus and its less-than-salutary political effects.

Reading the *Ion* afresh as an immigration fable, I try and understand why the concealment that reveals that Athens does not deliver on its civic promise is precisely what Athens' perpetuity requires. I suggest that the function of the closing secret is to show us how a blood-based, hierarchical membership order emerges. The secret founds a future, fifth-century Athens as a political order for which citizenship means a stable, hegemonic, and expressive status: the logic of concealment-disclosure establishes political membership in Athens as a "natural" fact that may be hidden or disclosed, like the content of a secret, a status that may be known prior to and in spite of its performance. That it culminates in an act of passing, however, suggests Ion's closeting has an additional constituting effect on the Athenian order: Ion's boundary crossing provides a paradigm of Athenian membership. Ion's passing founds a democratic future in which it will be possible and may be politically urgent to read a person's membership practice as the "wrong" (or "right") performance; inserts this instability into the foundation of the polis; and reveals that (the accusation of) masquerade is an effect of a political decision to construe membership as an expressive, internal attribute that promises but fails to determine membership performance in advance. If the *Ion* makes imposture and status flux foundational and therefore permanent Athenian risks, it provides a sort of alibi for the democratic policing of "natural" autochthonous difference in the city (and beyond) that we will encounter most explicitly in my reading of Demosthenes' court speech in Chapter 6 – not in order to endorse practices of detection, in my view, but to explain and reveal their political utility. From this vantage point, Euripides depicts Athens *needing* a notion of aberrational performance like the one Ion undertakes at the end. And therein resides what I see as the *Ion*'s arresting gambit: the

perpetuity of Athens as an autochthonous regime depends on a secret that does not simply establish political difference as an expressive attribute but also, and for this reason, lays the foundation for its continual and strategic undoing. If Athens needs Ion as such, that is because an imperializing democracy needs membership to stand as a pre-given and natural status about which it can also be mistaken.

Founding Athens

Initially, as Vincent Rosivach points out, the term *autochthōn* was used to describe Athenians as a people that had always lived in its land.⁴ By Euripides' production around 412 BCE,⁵ Athenian autochthony had likely taken on a strong genealogical dimension, symbolized by the incorporation of another long-standing origins story – the myth of Erichthonios, the early king and Athenian progenitor who was born from the earth itself.⁶ By “attributing to themselves collectively the autochthony of Erichthonios,” writes Nicole Loraux, citizens gained an exemplary status among Greeks as children of their land.⁷ To claim all Athenians were born from the earth was to collapse successive generations into one. This tactic of belying biological reproduction in a context of interpolis mobility had in practice the opposite effect of entrenching its political value. Athens granted citizen status only to those who could persuasively claim an uninterrupted and uncorrupted blood tie to their native founder. Laws governing marriage, citizenship, and inheritance concretized the emphasis on descent: on the basis of blood, they disenfranchised metics and their offspring. As we saw earlier, only the children of two married freeborn natives were eligible for democratic citizenship.⁸

⁴ Rosivach 1987: 294–306, 297.

⁵ There is no consensus on the *Ion*'s production date, but commentators posit it sometime between 415 and 412. I accept Zacharia's argument that the play was produced in March 412 (2003: 1–3).

⁶ Athenians are referred to as “the demos of Erechtheus” in Homer (*Il.* 2.19) but by Sophocles' time have become his descendants (*Aj.* 202). Rosivach sees this as a shift in Athenian self-conception: Erechtheus was eventually seen as Athenians' eponymous ancestor (Rosivach 1987: 295). But the story of the infant Erechtheus is actually one stage in the larger foundation myth of Athens. Erechtheus, the second earthborn king of Athens, is the figure most explicitly associated with autochthony. He is “probably the ‘adult double’ of the autochthonous infant Erichthonios,” mentioned earlier. Here, however, Euripides makes Erechtheus the descendant of Erichthonios. See Zacharia 2003: 56, 60, 63.

⁷ Loraux 2000: 10, 33–34.

⁸ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Periclean laws of 451/450 (reenacted in 403/402) prescribed double endogamy. That is, qualification for citizen status hinged on birth from two citizens. The law may have relaxed during the Peloponnesian War, however. See Patterson 2005: 267–289.

The double meanings of autochthony as original, uninterrupted habitation in a land and intergenerational purity of birth together service the exceptionalist view that Athenian democracy is founded in landedness, not mobility, and inheritance, not choice.⁹ When Athenians cast their descent from Erichthonios as a metonym for their own chthonic origins, they deterritorialize citizenship but resacralize the territory. So long as ancestry provided for citizenship, children born in colonial outposts to citizen parents were Athenian citizens regardless of their participation. This superior claim of blood over residence, socialization, and social mobility was played out vividly in the domestic context, in which Athenian-born children of metics inherited their deprived status despite a condition of assimilation and constrained participation in the Athenian community. Athenians born abroad thus came to mirror metics and metics Athenians. In the play, these two forms of social mobility are perfectly instantiated in the protagonist's duality: Ion is an autochthonous Athenian who will live as a metic in Athens before colonizing Ionia as an Athenian abroad.

The myth of autochthony emboldens a citizenship politics concerned with ancestry in a curious way. It eschews generational time to make each citizen appear as the unmediated offspring of the land. The figurative landedness – one is born *of*, not on, the land – implied that Athenians were ethnically and culturally antecedent and therefore superior to all other *poleis*, whose citizenries were, by contrast, the products of settlement, invasion, and migration, even as the city tracks this purity through consanguinity.¹⁰ Such a conception of inherited immobility, however, encourages physical mobility in and out of Athens while attempting to address the blurring and contaminating effects of interpolis flows. Those persons born outside of Athens but in its colonies could acquire citizenship through ancestry, while those persons born in Athens or its colonial outposts without dual Athenian ancestry could not.

Against this background, in 412 BCE, Athenians found themselves humbled and weakened by a disastrous military campaign to Sicily waged as part of the Peloponnesian War. This was a dark period for Athens, writes Katerina Zacharia, with “civic morale shattered, faith in democracy . . . beginning to fail, and the dockyards and treasury . . .

⁹ Here I invert a point Honig (2001: 75) makes about the myth of an immigrant America, an exceptionalist account that “recuperates foreignness” for a national project by “drawing on and shoring up the popular exceptionalist belief that America is a distinctively consent-based regime, based on choice, not inheritance.”

¹⁰ See Thucydides, Book 1; Lysias 17.2–4; Plato, *Menexenus* 245d.

empty.”¹¹ The ideology espoused by autochthony had promoted an expansionist policy whose realities were now leaving the myth and its implications vulnerable to scrutiny and contestation. In the midst of Athenians’ awakening to the political and psychic costs of their bloodright, Euripides produced a rewriting of the founding myth that, like any mythopoetic encounter, bore opportunities for assessment and renewal.¹²

Secrets and Lies

Set much earlier than the classical period, the *Ion* opens two generations after the original autochthonous birth of Erichthonios, with his daughter and grandson struggling to bear the burden of their lineage. Kreousa and her son Ion, the product of her rape by Apollo, are the first of generations of Athenians to face the problems that come with ensuring one’s ancestral heritage stays tied to a privileged political status, a predicament classical audiences would have recognized. All the action in the *Ion* is dominated by attempts to conceal or disclose what are supposed to be permanent and unalterable relations of kin. The effect is that in the *Ion*, blood ties emerge as unstable disclosures that acquire the semblance of ontological truth while remaining open to interpretation and revision.

The action unfolds in Delphi around Apollo’s temple. Hermes opens the drama, relaying that, years ago, Apollo raped Kreousa near the Acropolis. She gave birth to Ion as a result but left the newborn baby to die (8–18).¹³ Unbeknownst to her, Apollo had Hermes rescue the child and bring him to Delphi, where he has been growing up since, ignorant of his biological parentage (28–40). Kreousa has kept the incident a secret even from her eventual husband, a non-Athenian war hero named Xouthos (20, 57–58). When the audience meets them, the childless couple has just arrived from Athens to ask the oracle if they will procreate and continue their royal bloodline. The trip to Delphi, Hermes explains, was

¹¹ There were also “fears of a general imperial secession,” Zacharia argues, which fits with the “marked emphasis on Ionianism at the beginning and end of the play.” Consider as well that in March 412 the Erechtheum, the shrine to Erechtheus, “stood half-finished,” and all parts of the Acropolis building project that “concerned the inalienable mythical past of the city” were suspended for financial reasons (Zacharia 2003: 1–3). See also Thucydides 8.1.

¹² Like many Euripidean tragedies, the *Ion* is innovative because it engages in mythopoesis, a radical reworking of traditional myths. Such mythmaking is pedagogical insofar as its departure from the traditional myth invites comparison that animates reflection on the productivity of all myth. Because tragedy is characterized by ambivalence and paradox, its representations of mythological traditions serve to illuminate the myths’ irreconcilable demands and multiple meanings in the polis.

¹³ Citations to the play indicate the Greek lines, which are the same as those in the English of Euripides 1997 (the translation by K. H. Lee), cited throughout the chapter unless otherwise noted.

masterminded by Apollo to precipitate an encounter between Xouthos and Ion (64–68). Apollo's plan is for Xouthos to mistake Ion as his own son and invite Ion back to Athens to be his heir. Ion will join the Athenian ruling class and his descendants will go on to found Ionia, part of the fifth-century Athenian empire (69–75). Only once in Athens, or so Hermes thinks, should Kreousa recognize Ion as her biological son so that Apollo's affair may stay safely concealed (72–73). Kreousa and Xouthos will then have their own biological children together. But things don't exactly go according to Apollo's plan. Kreousa and Ion recognize each other while still in Delphi. The incident provokes Athena to insist that they keep their blood relation a secret from everyone, including Xouthos. For Athens to realize its democratic, hegemonic future, everyone (but the audience) must believe Ion is Xouthos' long-lost biological son.

Two scenes raise the question of Ion's homecoming and residence in Athens. In both scenes, the possibility of Ion's departure is raised in light of his newly discovered biological identity. In both, at least one character speaks from the assumption that there is a stable correspondence between this blood knowledge and political status. Yet on both occasions, shortly after a recognition scene, Ion's political standing fluctuates: he moves from a statusless temple servant to an Athenian metic to an autochthonous Athenian back to an Athenian metic. In each case, Ion's political membership is (re-)constituted by some act of concealing or disclosing of status – what the city suggests is mere uncontroversial facticity.

Xouthos takes to heart the oracle's insinuation that his first encounter out of the temple will be with his (long-lost) son (534, 536). This, conveniently, is Ion, who appears incredulous of Xouthos' disclosure and finds him foolish (526). But Xouthos perseveres and asks his newfound son to come back to Athens with him, precipitating an argument two foreigners might have about the costs and benefits of moving to Athens. Ion's long reply, to which I will return, imagines his life as a metic in Athens to be without privilege and full of danger, resentment, competition, and censure. In addition to the social discrimination he would face, his arrival in Athens would cause Kreousa, now his stepmother, embarrassment and pain (617–620). He begs Xouthos to let him stay in Delphi, where he is happy.

Xouthos dismisses Ion's hesitance. He tells him to stop talking and to think instead about the success he will enjoy there (650). (Given metics' exclusion from public political speech and their reputation for economic prowess, the advice is appropriate.) Xouthos acknowledges the problem of Kreousa's feelings, however, and to this at least responds,

I'll take you, as a sight-seer, of course, and not as my son. For in fact I do not want to cause pain to my wife, childless as she is, while I am fortunate myself. But in time I shall grasp the right moment and induce my wife to allow you to inherit my rule over the country. (655–660)

The proposal calls for the reconcealment of what Xouthos has taken to be Ion's newly recovered biological identity. The implication is that Ion will *act as someone else*, a tourist this time, not an immigrant looking to infiltrate Kreousa's family/polis. The interaction ironically anticipates Athena's closing dictum that Ion will have to reconceal his "real" autochthonous identity. That secret will fulfill a similar purpose, but it will keep Xouthos, not Kreousa, unsuspecting.

This is the first of several instances in which Ion, an Athenian progenitor, acquires and then sheds a kinship position, and it contrasts sharply with the notion of permanence and transparency that the autochthonous twinning of ancestral and political identity purports to secure. The characters' efforts to discover their blood ties at all costs may appear to underscore their belief in blood's univocality, but the same characters – Xouthos in particular – also exhibit a perceptive grasp of how easy and necessary it will be to fake these relations from time to time. The plan to dupe Kreousa is the play's first signal of blood's inability to dictate membership in or as a practice. Ion may *be* Xouthos' son, but, as Xouthos says, he does not have to act like it. No one will know the difference.

Still, secrets and lies cannot seem to undo autochthony. They may even work in its service. In order to affirm Ion as his birth son, privately for a while and then publicly in time, Xouthos asks that he pretend *not* to be his son. (Ironically, playing Xouthos' son will turn out to be the role of Ion's lifetime.) The request to misrepresent the biological relation Xouthos thinks he has just restored may signal kinship's instability, but it also attests to (Xouthos' belief in) the forcefulness of blood to constitute and organize political society. That Ion should perform a role in spite of who he has learned he "is" indicates that Xouthos grasps the indecisive yet productive power of blood's importance in Athens. Xouthos' plan may express an awareness that one's blood-based status in Athens is irresolvably unstable because it is performed, but this does not neutralize the political utility or effects of blood's invocation. The plan to hide Ion's identity as his birth son actually helps Xouthos establish the necessary conditions for perpetuating his ancestry within the polis' kinship economy of membership. With Ion in Athens, Xouthos can hope to bequeath to his son the household he has married into. Like a good immigrant, Xouthos reproduces and exhibits his allegiance to the patriarchal order of inclusion of the host city that has done him well.

Unlike Pericles' Funeral Oration (2.39), which, in Thucydides' version, figures Athenian hospitality as a source of civic pride for the polis that is open to all, Ion's protestations present an exclusionary underside to this openness as equally (in)famous. The city may be welcoming to foreigners, but within the polis, hospitality has its limits. Athens incorporates autochthonous persons into the demos but keeps other long-standing and native residents disenfranchised. Foreigners like Xouthos willingly go to Athens to live despite these conditions and affirm the city's attractiveness above and beyond the costs – censure, powerlessness, and danger. Ion rejects Xouthos' invitation because he thinks these are costs from which no wealth can insulate an individual. There will always be discrimination against the nonautochthonous, he says: the law may establish some parity between an Athenian and a successful, assimilated metic like Xouthos, but metics experience exclusions that the law does not capture. For Ion, the myth of autochthony invests Athenians in a politics of belonging that extols proper parentage above participation in its institutions. In Athens, good blood displaces good character as the criterion for political inclusion.¹⁴ There is no way to live in Athens without feeling the effects of this coupling of blood and membership, he says. If he lived in Athens as a metic and a child born out of wedlock, he would always be inferior if not invisible. Voiced from the safe distance of Delphi, Ion's reply to Xouthos offers a heartfelt account of a metic point of view:

They say that renowned earth-born inhabitants of Athens are not a people brought in from outside. I shall land there suffering from two disadvantages: being the son of an outsider and being myself born out of wedlock. Burdened by this slur, if I stick to a position without influence, I shall be spoken of as a nobody. But if I aim for a place in the first ranks of the city and strive to become someone, I shall be detested by the powerless. Superiority causes offence. On the other hand. . . . I shall attract ridicule for being foolish, because I do not stay in the background in a city full of censure. Then again, if I manage to acquire a standing superior to +those again chroniclers+ having dealings with the city I shall be hemmed in by their votes [. . .] Those who control cities and enjoy privilege are full of hostility towards any rival contenders. (585–606)

¹⁴ Although the play does not call Xouthos a naturalized citizen, the tragedy might have brought this possibility to mind. The classical approach to naturalization avoided granting membership to average foreigners who might actually use it and instead bestowed citizenship to benefactors as a way of facilitating diplomatic objectives. In the view of Ion, naturalization would not insulate an outsider from Athenian prejudice. The division between the autochthonous and the foreign-born persists and trumps social and legal equality. See M. J. Osborne 1981: 5–6.

No ways of living with virtue appear open to Ion in Athens. How could he consent to inhabit the margins of political society when doing so would mean leading no (political) life, not just a restricted one? If Ion does not make himself invisible in Athens, he will engender the scorn of insiders who will block his political ascent and effectively disenfranchise him. And then there is Kreousa, whom the speech invokes in its most explicit identification of a metic's way of living with death. "Moving into a strange house as an outsider to face a woman who is childless," he will "incur her hatred," just as he would the demos', and put himself and Xouthos at risk of murder (606–607, 611, 616–617).

For Xouthos, who adopts the conventional Periclean view in this interaction, all the difficulties of living in a foreign city can be overcome by wealth, which secures influence and safety in an adoptive city, as it would for Ion, who would acquire his newfound father's. The idea holds no sway for Ion, who argues that money in the hands of a nonnative brings the same sorts of pains as political visibility (630–631). Besides, it is not wealth that makes life worth living in a city. In Delphi, where Ion leads a moderate (*metrion*, 635) life, things are good, better than in Athens even (645). There is peace, leisure, and happiness – not just for the few but for everyone – because everyone in Delphi is transient (640). There is no myth of exceptionalism at work, no status to dole out.

Ion inhabits an outsider's perspective more than once in this scene. He puts forward criticisms of Athens through a projected metickness that displays a deep knowledge of an Athenian citizen's view of the insider-outsider. He criticizes wealth for being inadequate (for metics) to trump law and custom. When he praises life in Delphi by contrast, he does not do so because he enjoys the privileges of an insider there but rather because Delphi circumvents that distinction altogether.

The answer Xouthos gives Ion to all this is dismissive – "Enough of this talk! Learn to be happy!" (650) – and, in spite of the concerns his new son has voiced, shifts back to planning for Ion's arrival. Xouthos effectively talks past his son. That may be his new right as a father, but the incompatibility dramatized by their discussion about Ion's immigration begs a prior question about the argument Ion has just given. Might Ion have talked past Xouthos, too?

Recall that it was the need for an heir that first motivated Xouthos' invitation to Ion. Ion "will be seen" in Athens as *eugenēs* ("well born") on account of inheriting not Athenianness but "life's comforts." Ion's immigration is further justified for Xouthos by his desire for familial restoration. "For your part you have found what is most dear, though you did not know

it earlier," he says when he first sees Ion (571). But Ion thinks about his immigration differently – in terms of what it will mean for his everyday life above and beyond the material comforts or power that a family tie to a foreign resident could secure. He talks past Xouthos not because he has not heard the blood reason Xouthos offers for his immigration but because he does not yet share his father's Athenian view that this counts as a sufficient reason to act as Xouthos would like.

As a foreigner, Xouthos may never be a complete insider in Athens, but he buys into the polis order and represents its wishful self-conception as hospitable, which may be true by comparison with some other *poleis* but not, as Ion has pointed out, by comparison with Delphi. When the news of their kinship relation opens lines of action and destiny as far as Xouthos is concerned, his request of Ion bespeaks his Athenian sympathies. In Athens, blood matters. For Ion the situation is less certain: blood does not dictate a course of action. Even if Ion's speech fails instrumentally (he does ultimately consent to going to Athens *twice*), it draws our attention to the Athenian interest in blood-based difference and stages a gap between the status bestowed by a fact of blood (Ion's supposed tie to Xouthos) and the activity that should follow from it (Ion's prospective *metoikia*).

This first broaching of Ion's immigration may look like an ironic foreshadowing of Ion's eventual and seemingly proper repatriation at the end. The audience knows Ion is not really Xouthos' son and that he should therefore not be worried about his place in Athens. Indeed, his encounter with Xouthos provokes a series of dangerous mishaps that ultimately push Ion and Kreousa toward their own recognition scene. As we shall see, despite or even because of the near misses and thwarted murder plots that threaten the future of Athens, many interpreters conclude that Ion's departure for Athens feels like a triumph. Ion does find out who his birth parents are after all. But the play has also suggested that genealogy is a truth that, though rife with political significance, may only be contingently detected in practice. Rather than reassure us, then, the near misses around family violence and misrecognitions have another effect. They make visible the unreliable and paradoxical character of the polis' blood criterion for membership. Origins are a thing about which the city, and we, may well be mistaken – but that does not neutralize their political utility.

Ion warily consents to Xouthos' plan in the end. He prays that his unknown mother will turn out to be an Athenian so that he can enjoy *parrēsia*, the privilege of speaking publicly and freely in the city (672). But the chorus of women has overheard their scheme. They cite his foreign

ungratefulness (702–704) and, equating the plan with a foreign invasion, call for Ion's death in the name of Athenian self-defense (719–722). The women disclose the secret plan to Kreousa and the old tutor. He convinces Kreousa to murder Ion as a way of keeping him out of her household. The plot backfires once Ion realizes he is about to be poisoned (810–815, 845–846). And having identified the basket in Ion's hands as the one she abandoned him in as a baby, Kreousa finally recognizes her son (1355).

Ion rejoices at the news but, as Kreousa explains, it is not all good. Not only was Ion born to her out of wedlock, he is actually Apollo's son, not Xouthos', and born of a rape that she has concealed from everyone, including her own husband (1468–1487). The revelation of the secret only confuses Ion: why would Apollo want to give his own son away? “[Apollo] does you a favor in setting you up in a noble house,” Kreousa unsatisfactorily explains. “If you were known as the son of the god you would never have got a house as your inheritance nor the name of a father” (1539–1553). Ion wishes to confront Apollo and hear it directly from him, but the god never appears in the play to give a reason for Ion's adoption by Xouthos. Athena arrives to affirm everything Kreousa has said and closes the tragedy with a forecast (1574). Ion will go to Athens. His descendants will “settle in the island cities of the Cyclades and the territory on the sea-coasts,” giving “strength” to her land and settling parts of Asia and Europe (1584–1588). The Ionians “will win glory” for her and the Athenians, and Xouthos and Kreousa will go on to have their own biological children, the progenitors of the Dorian tribe (1589–1590).

For all this to occur, Athena warns Kreousa, “Keep it a secret that this boy is your son, so that Xouthos may happily retain his delusion and you too, lady, may go on your way enjoying your blessings” (1601–1603). Ion now accepts the importance of blood to which he earlier objected and, as Xouthos' son, prepares to move, with Athena as his escort. He accedes as well to the notion that he has a role to play in Athens' imperial destiny. Ion sets off for Athens not knowing how long he will have to live as a noncitizen before his descendants carry the banner of Athens to a new imperial outpost.¹⁵

In light of this closing reprisal of Ion's immigration, let us treat Ion's earlier speech to Xouthos, with its anxious elucidation of a metic life in

¹⁵ Thucydides reports that the Ionians asked Athenians, their “mother-city,” to be their leaders after the Persian Wars, and Athenian acceptance led directly to the formation of the Delian League or Athenian Empire (1.95).

Athens, not as a typical dramatic obstacle en route to a happy ending but as a mirror and prediction of this final scene. Does Ion's ultimate compliance neutralize the concerns he voiced about *metoikia* when he did not know that autochthonous Kreousa was his mother? It may, or that earlier speech may yet ring in our ears. Ion never reconsiders his speech to Xouthos. Life as a metic will be his and it will be what he feared unless he learns to take Xouthos' advice to love talk less and be happy. In other words, Ion will for the time being have to give up any hope of *parrësia*, the speech of truth and justice that comes with political freedom in Athens. Ion's "true" blood and the insider status it is said to bestow will not determine his experience of living in Athens.

Romanced by Blood

From Ion's perspective, life as a metic could hardly be called happy. Yet most readings of the tragedy argue that the play ends on a surprisingly upbeat note, even going so far as to call it a "happy" ending.¹⁶ Efforts to make sense of the *Ion*'s treatment of autochthony tend to foreground, even celebrate, the recognition scene between Ion and Kreousa.¹⁷ This interpretive habit has tended to distract readers from considering the political problems created by the same kinship tie's immediate concealment.¹⁸ To illuminate the stakes of this general approach, I elaborate on three issues that appear to ground this "romance" reading: the shape of the plot, readers' expectations for the tragic genre, and a lack of attention to *metoikia*.¹⁹

The anticipated and long-threatened reunion between Kreousa and Ion certainly drives the play's plot. If Ion finally leaves Delphi to take his place in Athens' line of rulers, it is because he has received information about the autochthonous heritage he inherits from his mother. But this is not just about Ion. The homecoming will also shore up Athenian hegemony.

¹⁶ In addition to Loraux's reading, Zacharia 2003 is an exception to this conventional view. She writes, "We are not given a wholly neat and tidy (happy) ending; we are left with loose ends: Xouthos will remain deceived; Ion will remain illegitimate" (Zacharia 2003: 99). See Loraux 1993: 184–236. See also Walsh 1978: 301–315.

¹⁷ Critics who think the play is ambiguous about and in some cases sympathetic to the nativist ways the polis creates divisions include Dougherty (1996: 249–270); Loraux (1993); Rehm (1992: 131–147); Saxonhouse (1986); and Zeitlin (1989).

¹⁸ This is perhaps starkest in the case of Zacharia, who is alert to the range of conflicts in the play but maintains that "Athena's appearance" does not make a "serious claim to any directorial function" because "she only comes at the point when all the serious conflicts have already been resolved (e.g., the prevention of the killing of son by mother and mother by son)" (Zacharia 2003: 146).

¹⁹ Lape (2010: 95) calls the *Ion* a "family romance of Athenian racialism."

On Athena's closing prediction, Ion will retroactively domesticate Ionia, a colony that was controversial at the time of the play's staging.²⁰ His return will also ensure the continuity of the kinship calculus democratic Athens uses to justify *isonomia*, the principle of political equality based on birth (from the Athenian earth). Insofar as the mother–child reunion leads to Ion's departure for his city of origin, autochthony's (and the polis') tenuous future does look secure. For many of *Ion*'s interpreters, then, by sending Ion safely on his way to Athens, the play celebrates the autochthonous logic the city uses to constitute legitimate families and authentic citizens.

This romance reading finds further support in the view that the *Ion* subverts the genre expectations of tragedy.²¹ Under the assumption that tragedy is predominantly characterized by human destruction, much secondary commentary misidentifies the cessation of physical violence in the play with the resolution of the tragedy's tension. By the time Ion's reconcealment occurs, readers have already settled the play's conflict: Kreousa and Ion's plans to kill each other are set aside when they discover their autochthonous blood relation; the peace that "true" blood knowledge apparently brings – discounting the colonization of Ionia it precipitates – gives the play a sense of closure.²² Ion "is successful at Delphi" in part because "he avoids killing his mother," writes Carol Dougherty.²³ Similarly, for Froma Zeitlin, "Ion's story is a success. What threatened to become a typical tragic scenario in which misrecognition between kin led, as in the *Bacchae*, to a mother's destruction of her child has been turned into a series of happy reversals" that "initiate those present into the happy forecast of the future." The play does not lead to a "destructive negation but to a joyful if complicated ending about parents and children, lost and safely found," Zeitlin says.²⁴

Not only do those "lost and safely found," including their relatives, live complete and happy lives on these sanguine accounts of birth family

²⁰ For a discussion of the play in the context of Athenian imperialism, see Zacharia 2003.

²¹ Donald J. Mastrorarde, however, emphasizes that tragedy was an innovative and changing genre in the classical period; see Mastrorarde 2010: 44, 47, 51.

²² The costs to Ion's citizenship in Athens do signal autochthony's violent effects, however, which include the structural exclusions of imperialism and its costs to human life.

²³ Dougherty thus looks elsewhere to salvage the *Ion*'s tragic sensibility in spite of its "happy ending" and finds it in its use of Delphi, which "functions in Greek tragedy as a dramatic topos . . . where things work out . . . and contradictions can be reconciled" (Dougherty 1996: 263–264). For a view that opposes reading the play as a "Delphic tragedy," see Loraux 1993.

²⁴ Zeitlin 1989: 154. The discourse of happiness is also used by Saxonhouse, though she rightly senses the "disquieting tone to the successful and happy conclusion to the plot" (Saxonhouse 1986: 272, 257–260).

reunification. Recognition by one's birth parents provides one's political standing.²⁵ Ion's autochthonous family reunion should therefore restore his citizenship. And while birth-mother reunification does drive Ion's move from Apollo's sanctuary into Athenian political society, Athena's introduction of the secrecy requirement makes a full (political) restoration difficult to argue for. What is more, an avoidance of death is not the same as an avoidance of political conflict. Readers for whom tragedy's conflicts are legible only within an arc of murderous plotting are misled by the play's avoidance of violence and neglect to attend sufficiently to the criticality that the play mobilizes both before and after the recognition scene.²⁶ The failure to account for the secret keeping that occurs at the end of the play and the effects it will have on Ion's standing enlists the *Ion* in a wholesale positive valuation of restoring biological identity – the very belief that sustains Athenian hegemony. When readers displace the politics of *metoikia* from this rewriting of autochthony, they risk reproducing Athens' self-conception, an idealized vision in which the demos, like the play, is invulnerable to contamination by the metics that are otherwise everywhere.

To see precisely how and from what the metic's erasure diverts readers of the *Ion*, it is necessary to explicate the broad lines of Nicole Loraux's interpretation of the tragedy. Loraux offers a bridge between the romance reading, which sees the *Ion*'s central conflict as one of violence averted through the recovery of biological identity, and the one developed here, in which the play troubles the autochthonous claim that blood settles questions of membership and belonging at the same time that it seeks to incorporate that instability into the democracy's etiology.

Loraux's way out of the romance reading is to see the play's tragic dimension not in the plot, where critics often seek it to no avail, but in its autochthonous theme.²⁷ This promising shift in register allows her to argue both alongside and against the familiar view that the recognition

²⁵ Ion's repatriation signals his *compliance* with Athena's instruction and her invocation of Athenian destiny but little more as far as his own sentiments are concerned. Euripides gives us no reason to assume that Ion goes home happy or that he will live a happy life there.

²⁶ Such emphasis on violence leads Dougherty, for example, to argue that the recognition scene not only "avoids murder" but "restores all participants in timely fashion to their proper and productive identities" (Dougherty 1996: 264). The play, she and others suggest, is restitutive not destructive, and for this reason quite unlike a tragedy. Even Zacharia calls the end "superficially" happy but tempers her assessment by seeing it as a means to an end. For the play's logic "is not just there to lead to the happy ending"; it "has a thought-provoking function of its own" (Zacharia 2003: 148–149). We should note, however, that violence nevertheless haunts this play, from Kreousa's rape to Ion's impending colonial efforts.

²⁷ Loraux 1993: 184.

scene may resolve conflicts in the plot but that this in and of itself does not alleviate the play's tragic tension. In fact, the way Euripides "resolves" Ion's incorporation into Kreousa's family, says Loraux, exposes the paradoxical and therefore tragic nature of any autochthonous narrative.²⁸ What gives autochthony and, by extension, the *Ion* a tragic quality for Loraux is that it expresses a demand to repeat (over generations) what can only happen once (the original birth).²⁹ Loraux focuses on the play's treatment of gender, particularly its depiction of Kreousa, to illustrate this paradox. Kreousa captures the impossibility as well as the attractiveness of autochthonous birth because, as a woman, she is both unnecessary to the original autochthonous birth (from earth) and necessary to the biological reproduction whose monitoring will sustain the myth, and the Athenian people, in and over time. Thus, when Loraux concludes that "woman is restored to the shadows" by the end, with the "dilemma" of incorporating Ion into an Athenian household "only in extremis . . . resolved," she invites us to see that the final scene functions as an instructive elaboration of an autochthony paradox.³⁰

Athena anchors the identity of Athenians as a mythically pure (and colonizing) people in a concealment of the very blood tie that the city claims to celebrate above all else. From Loraux's vantage point, Kreousa's restoration to the social realm expresses the ambivalent role woman plays in the myth of autochthony. The myth is premised on rejecting the women it nevertheless depends on to perpetuate itself on (not from) the ground. The paradox of Kreousa's "return to the shadows" is that it occurs in spite, if not because, of her importance to political life.

An open secret, however, is not the same as a resolution. Loraux does not consider the disorderly effects of a restoration that is *shown* to rely on a lie. Kreousa may be emblematic of the paradoxical role woman plays in the autochthony myth, but even that category's construction is shown to be dependent on a secret, which, as the chorus demonstrated, can always be revealed. Loraux's analysis seems to assume, despite the addition of Athena's secrecy requirement, that the play simply mirrors, rather than critically recasts, the meanings (of woman, metic, autochthonous, Athenian) that the myth of autochthony aims to secure.

My quarrel with Loraux, then, concerns this move away from an initial willingness to seek the politics of tragedy at the discursive level, where new meanings are produced and not simply represented by the play. Rather than treat the *Ion* as an autochthony story par excellence, I want to read it

²⁸ Loraux 1993: 230. ²⁹ Loraux 1993: 195. ³⁰ Loraux 1993: 204.

as an active participant in the construction of new meanings. This involves asking how the secret helps construct and does not simply reflect the city's ideology. Loraux provides the conceptual language to do this when she suggests that all tragedy is mythopoetic. Let us extend the claim and say that the *Ion*, like all mythopoesis, is engaged in reproducing an original (myth) anew: tragedy, whether as text or performance, always marks a difference between an original (autochthony) and its copy (the *Ion*).³¹ The question is not how the *Ion* enacts the paradoxical maneuvers that are demanded by a myth of autochthony but how it rewrites the myth to shine a critical light on Athenian membership politics.

Closeting Ion

One reason Loraux's reading overlooks possibilities it otherwise licenses may be that it focuses on the category of woman to the exclusion of the metic. Insofar as the reconcealment restores Kreousa to the private realm, as Loraux thinks it does, the ending of the *Ion* fulfills (her) Athenian expectations by bringing full circle the inclusion-exclusion that makes Kreousa a woman and the *Ion* a tragedy. But this is only half the story. What Athena demands of Kreousa she also demands of Ion. And in Ion's case, the reconcealment makes a metic out of an Athenian man who should be a citizen. The decline of an autochthonous son into *metoikia* is hardly reassuring. Ion's metic predicament presses us to look again at what it means that secrecy constitutes the political order for a regime like Athens. That Ion admires Athens is made clear in the play. The question is why, in this rewriting of the myth, Athens needs Ion as such. Why should autochthonous blood need to be hidden to secure its subsistence as the city's membership criterion?

Consider again that the function of the autochthony myth is not simply to ground civic equality in a notion of shared and superior birth but also to guard against the kind of mingling and confusion of identities that blurs discrete lines of demarcation in the social order. To prevent this chaos, Athenians promote a civic ideology according to which social and political difference, and the categories that signify it, have meanings that preexist their production and figuration by the myth. Autochthony establishes difference in claims of nature – specifically in earth and blood – to give these categories an antecedent status. The natural difference autochthony insists on between a metic and a citizen, then, is one version of the city's

³¹ This makes tragedy an especially interesting mode for exploring the theme of originality.

secret. Woman is not the only category that reveals the irreconcilable tensions that generate the polis' ideas of belonging, exclusion, and political membership. The metic also resecurures and reperforms the value of autochthony as being at the expense of those outsiders who are at once and always the product of, but also the condition for, democracy's regeneration.

But the metic perspective sheds light on something the play's politics of gender imply and are implied in but cannot obviously illuminate: if a native Athenian can pass as a metic, a metic can pass as an Athenian, for the so-called facts of blood do not speak for themselves – and, as Ion told Xouthos, they do not determine a course of action either. This is a worrying thought from an Athenian hegemon's perspective. And yet it is precisely what the marriage of imperialism and autochthony spawns while trying to suppress.³² When a polis colonizes but restricts full membership to natives on the basis of blood, it cannot but produce the metic, a figure whose inclusion-exclusion – whose ability to pass – bears the promise and the risk of that form of citizenship. In asking Ion and Kreousa to keep his autochthonous identity a secret, Athena indicates that the polis' seemingly inviolate identifications are really vulnerable performances of naturalized identifications. From this perspective, the *Ion* does not merely equivocate on or reproduce the claims of the traditional autochthony story, as other readers have suggested. Nor does it simply expose a tension between political membership as blood-right (status) and political membership as a lived experience (practice). Euripides' tragedy lays bare the Athenian practices that function to ascribe a pregiven quality to the city's categories of standing. As the subsequent section will suggest, Ion's fate makes manifest the violability of these categories and suggests it is this violability that is foundational to and servicing of Athenian citizenship politics. This is the groundwork for passing, and it is what the *Republic's* myth of the metals will try to preclude.

So far my efforts to recover the political implications of the *Ion's* treatment of autochthony have focused on the ways the tragedy draws on figurations of *metoikia* to destabilize settled views of hereditary attachments and publicize their known instability. I have argued that if the play is a reworking of a traditional myth (*mythopoesis*), it does more than criticize an existing myth. To make sense of how the *Ion* reconceives of the democracy's civic ideology by way of the concealment, we need to think more carefully about the secret's symbolic effects. The secret does more than unsettle the traditional myth after all. It sits at the core of a new one.

³² For a discussion of the play's twinning of imperialism and autochthony, see Dougherty 1996.

The marriage and inheritance practices of the fifth-century context in which the play was produced shed some light on the reasons for the secret, but they ultimately cannot explain its constitutive effects on the founding myth. All the attractions of Erechtheus' house (name, power, wealth) belong to Kreousa's side. Because she has no brothers, Kreousa is *epiklēros*, heir to her father's *oikos*. Loraux suggests that Athenian law was probably particularly strict on issues of inheritance at the time of the tragedy's production. In order for name and power to stay inside the family, standard practice would have ensured that a female heir marry her close relative. Kreousa's marriage to a foreigner makes her situation abnormal from the perspective of family law and practice. For Loraux, this may be the play's way of exploring some of the tensions in Athenian exceptionalism, particularly around gender: the fact that Kreousa "alone transmits to her son the name and power of the Erechtheidai" highlights the polis' commitment to kinship, its self-image as a clan or family.³³ At the same time, however, the city builds alliances with foreigners. When an Athenian royal like Kreousa marries outside the clan for political reasons, she does something Athenians in the audience would recognize. She forges a political alliance as a reward to Xouthos for aiding Athens in war.

But Kreousa cannot perpetuate the autochthonous line by way of her marriage to Xouthos, which is (so far) fruitless. The marriage suggests that from time to time, Athens must go outside of its autochthonous line to renew itself. Each time Kreousa and Xouthos' union resorts to adoptive, extrabiological measures to procure an heir, as it does again with Athena's forecast, the couple plays out the idea that the polis cannot sustain itself through a marriage of imperial power. This is not just to reproduce biologically but for the city to secure its capacity to maintain itself. It is a problem Xouthos acknowledges early in the play when he hopes for Kreousa's eventual and painful acquiescence to Ion's incorporation into the family. Athena invokes it, too, when she intimates that Kreousa will remain childless unless she endures Ion's inclusion as an apparent foreigner in the house of Erechtheus. Only then will she and Xouthos go on to have a *koinon genos*, a "common race" (1589), which the tragedy outs as really a mixed race.

If Kreousa represents Athens here, as Loraux's reading claims, what might the closing secret say about the city? Kreousa was raped by a god, bore an illegitimate child, and married a foreigner whom she needs to secure and define her future. This feminized Athens should be

³³ Loraux 1993: 203.

autonomous. Kreousa, after all, has an *oikos* of her own. But a female-headed household is not adequate under Athenian law. This patriarchal polis depends on violence, foreigners, trickery, and coercion to reproduce itself. There is no future for Athens without cultural mixing.

One reason for this condition is that the Athenian political order is inevitably self-limiting. As Jacqueline Stevens notes, “The appeal to intergenerationality is always paradoxical” because it rests “on the naturalized rules of kinship that are produced by political societies,” the very same political societies that turn to kinship as their natural ground.³⁴ The secret at the center of the polis, then, is that the blood ties the city relies on are actually its own production.³⁵ From a fifth-century perspective, a woman in Kreousa’s situation could bequeath her family’s inheritance only to a son of a legitimate union, which Ion is not. Only if Ion is thought to be the adopted son of Kreousa and the nonautochthonous, natural, but illegitimate son of Xouthos can he inherit and play a role in Athenian destiny. Through the secret that transforms him into Xouthos’ metic son, he inherits wealth (and military power) from Xouthos, though not full citizenship, and gains some status in the polis as well as its legacy.³⁶

Here, however, Loraux issues the useful caution that the play’s historical contexts cannot do the work of rendering the secret a necessary or understandable solution to the tragedy. The tensions created by the polis’s laws for membership are never actually solved, she reminds us: “Xouthos is and remains an intruder who cannot therefore really be the legitimate father.” Echoing Ion’s worries, she surmises that “in the eyes of the Athenians, given the standing of Xouthos, Ion could at most be regarded as an adopted son, unable to inherit the *oikos* of his adoptive father.”³⁷ Loraux may be right about this. But the absence of a neat solution to the play makes the theoretical significance of the secret all the more necessary to pursue.³⁸

³⁴ Stevens 1998: xiii.

³⁵ For this reason, Zeitlin’s use of the phrase “mysteries of identity” (also the title of her chapter on the *Ion*) to argue that the play represents the self as performed does well to point to the fragility and uncertainty surrounding subjectivity, but it does not recognize the further political implication that Athens maintains and profits from the uncertainty and the appearance of verifiability (rather than verifiability itself).

³⁶ Similarly, K. H. Lee has argued that the secret is necessary “because there is little likelihood that Xouthos would allow an adopted child [Ion] to exclude from his inheritance any son which may be born to him later.” See Lee’s commentary on lines 71–73 of the tragedy in Euripides 1997: 166–167.

³⁷ Loraux 1993: 204n85.

³⁸ It is surprising that Loraux does not see this and relegates her discussion of the secret instead to a provocative footnote: “Thus, read in the light of the present, Xouthos’ illusion (1602)—which prevents the disclosure that Ion is Kreousa’s son—is unfortunate, since the city as an entire community will be involved, and Ion will continue to be considered an intruder.” Loraux 1993: 200n69. See also Loraux 2000: 20.

In the context of the *Ion*'s production, inheritance laws serve as just one instance of the range of institutional practices driving the insistence on and attachment to familial identity and its knowability. The desire Xouthos feels for his son's return might also be an effect of the polis's insistence on the importance of kinship.

Zacharia brings us closer to the secret's meaning when she suggests, "the outsider must be allowed in if what lies within is to be rescued."³⁹ She rightly shifts attention back to the necessary role the foreigner plays in securing autochthony's perpetuity, but her language betrays the autochthonous view that there is a stable inside to begin with. From Zacharia's perspective, the *Ion*'s criticism of autochthony on this issue amounts to little more than its empirical debunking. In other words, one effect of the *Ion*'s retelling is that it posits retroactively an Athenian founding in which foreigners were just absorbed into the polis (maybe even the demos) and a native was left out. Zacharia is not wrong, but her case and its dyadic structure are driven by their exclusive focus on Xouthos' foreignness. The future of autochthonous Athens certainly needs Xouthos' inclusion, but what of the performative, shifting, in-between foreignness *Ion* expresses? In the play, Xouthos and Kreousa's procreation hinges only in part on Xouthos' deceptive inclusion. It also requires Kreousa's and *Ion*'s silence about *Ion*'s nativity and *Ion*'s living in Athens as Xouthos' metic son.

In Foucault's reading of the *Ion*, the future of Athens also depends on an exclusion – of what he calls oracular pronouncements of truth – that makes space for Athena to found the city instead in a political order of *parrësia*, the practice of political freedom.⁴⁰ Foucault's account depends, like other happy-ending readings, on understanding *Ion*'s return as a homecoming not a *metoikia*. Indeed, Foucault sees "the truth of *Ion*'s birth and his right to exercise power now in Athens" in Athena's closing pronouncement.⁴¹ If Foucault cogently perceives the power of Athena's dictum, it is in decidedly rosier hues than *Ion*, who knows his life will lack *parrësia* in Athens. Foucault is right to fasten to the generative power of Athena's "truth under the reign of a share of illusion," but his sanguine view of *Ion*'s standing implies that the political order he takes it to generate may be similarly idealized. Once seen in terms of *Ion*, the exclusion at the play's end founds the field of citizen truth telling, as Foucault insists, but only insofar as it establishes an autochthonous order in which *parrësia* will be claimed as the special privilege of natives.

³⁹ Zacharia 2003: 101. ⁴⁰ Foucault 2010: 145. ⁴¹ Foucault 2010: 144.

At this point, a couple of recurring questions remain. Why should *Ion*'s secret keeping serve as the act that secures the city's political order? The concealment that establishes in perpetuity the pre-given difference between the autochthonous and the unnobly born is the same one that demonstrates its instability. How might this apparent contradiction enable, rather than simply undercut, the claims of the regime?

To take stock of how the concealment is not merely privative but also helps to refashion the myth and the notion of Athenian membership that belongs to this political order, consider it an act of closeting, the sort of discursive act Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick analyzes for its generative effects. Addressing the discourse of sexuality in the nineteenth century, Sedgwick maintains that sexuality comes to mean a "function of stable definitions of identity (so that one's personality structure might mark one as a homosexual, even, perhaps, in the absence of any activity at all)."⁴² What enables the shift to conceive of sexuality in terms of conscious identity rather than a spectrum of behavior, she explains, is the act of closeting, which moves sexuality out of an economy of activity and into an economy of knowledge. "'Closetedness' itself," Sedgwick argues, "is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence."⁴³ So long as same-sex desire has the status of a fact that can be disclosed or hidden, it remains a matter of being, not behavior. To bring this idea to bear on the Athenian case is to see how *Ion*'s secret keeping establishes blood as the natural and univocal ground of political status, a pre-given difference that can be concealed or revealed. From here on out, political status stands as an object of potential suspicion. *Ion*'s act of closeting turns him into a (temporary) metic in order to found Athenian membership in static, oppositional terms (citizen/metic). And yet this effort at stabilization is precisely what *Ion*'s anticipated metic masquerade exposes as the city's necessary and generative maneuver. Closeting *Ion*'s nativity works in the service of Athens' autochthonous project even as it appears to betray it.

By reconcealing his Athenianness, *Ion* secures the metic/citizen binary that is both the condition and product of the hegemony espoused by autochthony. The secret tries to keep up the appearance that all forms of membership, even if deprived, are inviolate identities. Naturalized status in the *Ion* is not merely a fact to be covered, recovered, discovered, or disclosed. It is a reminder of the city's efforts to make statuses seem like facts. The *Ion*'s rewriting of autochthony thus exposes the Athenian prioritization of a status-oriented citizenship and suggests it is the

⁴² Sedgwick 2008: 83. ⁴³ Sedgwick 2008: 3.

inevitable outcome of privileging circumstances of blood. Euripides' tragedy shows Athena founding a democracy and a conception of citizenship in which all, even citizens, are vulnerable to threats of exposure.

The *Ion* unsettles the forceful presumption that the right blood establishes citizenship, but it does so in an unconventional way. The tragedy does not focus on a person with the wrong blood who nevertheless infiltrates Athenian society undetected by virtue of active participation in the polis' institutions. But there were cases of this, as Chapter 6 will attest, as well as a politics of suspicion around such infiltration. In the *Ion*, practices of disclosure and concealment are exposed as the daily work that enables the city to give its self-serving and exclusionary guarantee that status, bestowed by blood, grounds a practice of citizenship. Euripides suggests that there are practices, like secret keeping, that make political status look prior to and generative of political practice, and so the tragedy founds the possibility of passing, that is, of a deceptive membership performance. The resolution of the play, however, implies that Ion's passing tragically resecurates the citizen/metic binary it also unsettles.