CHAPTER 8

THEOMIMESIS – THEOMACHY

In contrast to the intense scholarly interest that the *Alexander* has generated, Lucian's *Icaromenippus* is an un-mined gem. Karen ní Mheallaigh's recent monograph on the moon in the Graeco-Roman imagination goes some way in rectifying this scholarly oversight, offering sustained analysis of the *Icaromenippus*.[1] The subject matter of her book, however, leads ní Mheallaigh to focus on Menippus' lunar stopover and its contribution to 'selenography' (writings on the moon) and pioneering of '*selēnoskopia*' (viewing from the moon), as well as on the text's meta-literary comments on the hybridity and liminality of Lucian's poetics. My discussion fits into the contours of ní Mheallaigh's reading but focuses instead on Menippus' final destination (Olympus), as well as on the method and theomachic implications of his flight.

Mechanical Aids: Wings, Wells, and the Divine

The *Icaromenippus* takes the form of a dialogue between Menippus and a friend, where the former relates his recent astronomical journey to the very highest point in the Heavens, the acropolis of Zeus, and back again. He explains that his motivation for undertaking such a voyage is his disillusion at the lack of consensus among philosophers regarding a series of cosmological questions.[2] Menippus' method of ascent, a great source of curiosity to his friend, is thanks to a pair of composite wings, the right carefully plucked from an eagle and the left from a vulture, subsequently assembled together and fastened

[1] See ní Mheallaigh 2020b, especially chapters 5 and 6. Ní Mheallaigh 2024 turns her attention to the lunar journey especially as it interacts with contemporary ideas around mathematical astronomy. I am grateful to Karen for sharing lots of her work with me prior to publication.

[2] Luc. *Icar.* 4–9.

onto the human body.[3] The hybrid form that Menippus assumes once he dons the wings, and the possible theomachy of his flight, will be discussed in due course, but I begin by turning my attention to the wings as mechanical tools of divine mediation – technological prostheses that allow the human and divine realms to be bridged and man and god to come into direct contact.

Lucian is precise in how the wings work, describing that sturdy straps are fitted on the shoulders and grips made for the hands at the very tip of the last quill feather on each side.[4] While the choice of the eagle will later turn out to be advantageous to Menippus for this bird's characteristically keen eyesight, the selection of these two birds is initially justified through practical considerations of construction, namely that the wings of no other species would be large enough to uphold the weight of a man's body. The wings in the *Icaromenippus* are the ultimate technological enhancement, allowing the almost inconceivable feat of human access to the heavens, and as such explore the shady area between science and fiction in much the same way that the Lucianic corpus as a whole repeatedly does.[5] Specifically in the *Icaromenippus*, this centres around the distinction between *mythos* and *paradoxon* (to which we shall return at various points in the discussion). From the outset, Menippus explains that, contrary to what his friend thinks, his astronomical journey was neither a dream nor a myth, but a *paradoxon*.[6] The wings of Menippus become analogous to the text of Lucian, whereby the *Icaromenippus* serves as a prosthesis of the scientific imagination, allowing first the friend and then the reader to embark on an astronomical journey and to view the world from the moon, from the heavens, and from the perspective of the gods.[7] The slide from the scientific to the religious is seamless and compelling. The tantalising difficulty, borderline impossibility, of what these wings need to achieve thus serves, on one level, to

[3] Luc. *Icar.* 3, 10. Camerotto 2009, 116 notes that the two birds represent two opposing symbols: the eagle is a sign of Zeus and lofty heights, the vulture of the Underworld.
[4] Luc. *Icar.* 10. [5] On which see ní Mheallaigh 2014.
[6] Luc. *Icar.* 1–2. Especially Menippus to his friend: θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν εἴ σοι τὸ παράδοξον τοῦ λόγου μύθῳ δοκεῖ προσφερές. On *thauma* and the para-doxographical tradition, see Lightfoot 2021, 42–79.
[7] The analogy is made clear in the interchange between Menippus and his friends at 11–12.

elevate Lucian's poetics. On another level, however, the wings serve as a striking admission that if one *were* to be able to come face to face with Zeus, an ingenious *mēchanē* would be the way to do it.[8]

After a lunar stopover where he meets the natural philosopher Empedocles, Menippus continues his journey to arrive, three days later, at Olympus. Greeted by Hermes, Menippus is shaking in his boots as he enters the divine assembly, only to find that the gods too are apprehensive about the situation.[9] The success of the wings as technologies enabling divine encounter has collapsed the safe distance that objects of mediation typically uphold. The contraption threatens to undermine the distinction – spatial and subsequently ontological – between man and god. Furthermore, Menippus has set a precedent which the gods fear might result in the whole human race arriving at any moment, all sporting similar wings. We will return to this compelling scene presently.

The reason that Menippus is led to undertake his astronomical journey in the first place is the lack of clarity on earth about celestial and divine issues. Specifically in the latter category, he raises a series of topics about which philosophers have conflicting views: the form of god, the configuration of the pantheon, monotheism versus polytheism (even the possibility of atheism), and the extent to which the gods intervene in human affairs.[10] All of these will be clarified once Menippus sees Olympus for himself, but we, as readers, receive some answers more fully than others. While the precise form of Zeus is not described, for example, his terrifying thunderous voice is,[11] and while we come to understand that the traditional Greek pantheon with Zeus at its head must be in place, this is not explored in any depth. Instead, the dialogue is remarkably centred around Zeus. The experience of the heavens is through the lens of Zeus, and the reflections on the current

[8] The underworld is different to the heavens in this respect. The *Icaromenippus*' twin dialogue, *Menippus or the Descent into Hades*, sees the protagonist guided by a certain wise *magos* down to the underworld (Luc. *Nec*. 6–7) and shown a shortcut back up to earth (which, incidentally, joins up to Trophonios' sanctuary! Luc. *Nec*. 22).

[9] Luc. *Icar*. 22–3. [10] Luc. *Icar*. 9.

[11] Luc. *Icar*. 23. Zeus' indescribable form is typical of the epiphanic discourse surrounding the god, who (Pheidian statue aside) eludes visual description or representation to quite an unusual extent. Zeus' absence from the tragic stage is an obvious example.

situation in the human realm are from Zeus' perspective. Lucian describes Menippus taking a stroll, engaged in casual conversation with the supreme deity who enquires about the price of wheat in Greece and the impact of recent weather on the crops.[12] This flippant interchange does not simply question Zeus' omniscience or paint him as uninterested or uninvolved in the details of human affairs, but reverses the typical dynamic of human–divine oracular interchange by positioning Menippus in the know, and with the power to relay information to Olympus' reigning god. Zeus' most pressing concern is his waning popularity on earth, which he attributes to the presence of 'new' gods such as Apollo, Asklepios, Bendis, Anubis, and Artemis.[13] The collection of deities in the list makes much more sense if understood as commenting on the popularity of their respective *sanctuaries* as specified by Zeus: Apollo at Delphi, Asklepios in Pergamon, Bendis in Thrace, Anubis in Egypt, and Artemis in Ephesus. This is not so much about new deities as it is about emerging regional religious presences and long-standing tensions between local cult and Panhellenic notions of the gods. Explored in the *Alexander* from the point of view of the enterprising religious charlatan, we here are given the divine perspective and the way it 'dilutes' the ancient prestige of Zeus.

Continuing in this vein, the dialogue points to the fragility of typical divine mediators not from the point of view of the human, who risks facing a mediator that is inauthentic and thus ineffective in forging a religious connection, but from the point of view of the immortals. Zeus asks about the maintenance of his cult statues,[14] holding festivals in his honour, finishing the construction of his temples, and the wealth (or poverty) of his sanctuaries.[15] These actions do not threaten the *existence* of Zeus, but they are elementary to his *relevance* in the human realm. The literal and metaphorical emptiness of cult statues is a favourite theme of Lucian's,

[12] Luc. *Icar.* 24. For the importance of the banal (and philosophical) to the satiric hero, see Camerotto 2014.
[13] Luc. *Icar.* 24.
[14] This is what is meant when Zeus asks if any of the descendants of Phidias are still alive. According to Paus. 5.14.5, the relatives of Phidias were proverbially tasked with cleaning Zeus' chryselephantine statue.
[15] Luc. *Icar.* 24.

who in two different dialogues offers the same ludic image of mice occupying the inside of Zeus' cult statues.[16] If, as we have seen, the *Alexander* explores issues of new gods and 'empty' material mediators, the *Icaromenippus* uses the perspective that an astronomical journey offers to reflect on some of the same anxieties from the 'other' side.

Lucian's questioning of the superfluity and effectiveness of traditional channels of human–divine mediation is part of a re-visualisation of how the two realms are connected. This is not through song, dance, or ritual, nor through cult statues or temples, but through devices. After the initial success of the wings in getting Menippus to Olympus, we get to see how Zeus orchestrates his daily life and how religious rituals are experienced at the receiving end. We arrive, with Menippus and Zeus, at a row of ritual peepholes described as a series of little windows like the mouths of wells with lids (θυρίδες δὲ ἦσαν ἑξῆς τοῖς στομίοις τῶν φρεάτων ἐοικυῖαι πώματα ἔχουσα).[17] The hinge is once again acting as a cultural technique delineating ontological realms.[18] A golden chair stood beside each peephole which gave Zeus a glimpse of and access to a different ritual in turn: prayer, oaths, sacrifice.[19] The conflicting demands of the voices that come out of the orifices are theologically interesting for opening up questions of theodicy and divine perspective. Of greater interest to the current discussion, however, is the *method* of communication and the simile of the well. The imagery that Lucian uses is, as with the wings, a composite structure, this time drawn not from the animal world, but from known artificial interventions from the human realm. Windows, rather straightforwardly, allow access – visual, auditory, olfactory – to what is otherwise hidden. It is the comparison with the well that allows Lucian to enrich the perceived relation between the technical object and its divine function. Wells typically draw a source of sustenance for mankind from an unseen place, which works metaphorically for the well as cistern of divine knowledge from which humans attempt to

[16] Luc. *Gall*. 24; Luc. *JTr*. 8 looking back to the *Batrachomyomachia* 177–96. Compare Luc. *Sacr*. 11, where Lucian offers a variation on the theme where cult statues are not empty, but the very clear products of raw materials fashioned by human hands.
[17] Luc. *Icar*. 25. [18] See discussion on pages 180–184. [19] Luc. *Icar*. 25–6.

draw. The well is also always mysterious in its depth and consequently is not just a reservoir but also a channel to send and to receive information across metaphysical realms, familiar to the modern reader from the image of the wishing well. Lastly, the well also stands as the paradigmatic example of an object offering sonic echo, this acoustic characteristic aligning it perfectly with its role as a vehicle to transmit oral prayers up to Zeus and to bounce Zeus' answer back down to earth. I suggest that Zeus' ritual wells in the *Icaromenippus* are not (just), as scholars have claimed, a parallel to the well-cum-lunar-mirror of *True Histories*, but rather a revision of the autophone in the *Alexander*.[20] Put crudely, this is another way of asking readers to conceive of human–divine communication as enabled through artificial tubes. Indeed, visualising prayers as telephonic is something we also find in Plutarch's *On the Sign of Socrates*: there – in a passage that makes avid use of images of techniques and technologies as analogies for the way that thought and speech function – through the use of an allusion to the sonic properties of brass shields.[21] Technology was being explored as both a literal medium and useful metaphor for the ways that physical and metaphysical might coalesce.

Menippus as Pseudo-Divinity

The very first thing that Menippus does in order to test his new contraption is to launch himself off the acropolis, swooping down to land in the theatre below.[22] The allusion to the *deus ex machina* could hardly be clearer.[23] Aside from contributing to Lucian's ever-present exploration of the boundaries between life and illusion, reality and theatre, aligning the wings with the best-known example of mechanical epiphany prompts us to view Menippus' Icaran wings not simply as an artificial device which *bridges*

[20] Luc. *VH* 1.26 with Fusillo 1999, 372n49; Camerotto 2009 132–3. For other suggested parallels for the prayer wells, see ní Mheallaigh 2020a, 173n46.
[21] Plut. *De gen*. 589c–d. Compare Hdt. 4.200.
[22] Luc. *Icar.* 10. To Camerotto 2009, 116, the theatre of Dionysus is symbolic of the true field of experimentation of the flight of Menippus: ancient comedy.
[23] Compare Luc. *Icar.* 17, where Menippus, looking down from the moon, sees the earth as a stage and humans as actors in the spectacle, and Luc. *Icar.* 29, where philosophers are assimilated to actors in tragedy.

human and divine realms, but one which *converts* the title character into a pseudo-deity.[24] The jump down to the theatre is a quick one, serving to prove that the wings were working well and then leading Menippus to practice the art of flying by mountain-hopping across various known sanctuaries of Zeus (Parnitha, Hymettus, Geraneia) and other well-known peaks (Acrocorinth, Taygetus) before heading onwards and upwards to Olympus as if he were a welcome member of the divine entourage.[25] At least that is Menippus' self-perception, for when he stops for a rest on the moon he notes that he looked down on the earth 'like Homer's Zeus' (ὥσπερ ὁ τοῦ Ὁμήρου Ζεὺς ἐκεῖνος).[26] This is also the way that the journey is initially interpreted by the friend who, in response to Menippus' relating that he is just back from the heavens, mockingly addresses him as 'O divine and Olympian Menippus' ('ὦ θεσπέσιε καὶ Ὀλύμπιε Μένιππε').[27] Read in this way, Menippus plus his wings – 'Icaromenippus' – takes fraudulent Alexander and his fashioning of Glykon's mechanical snake-head into new territory. That Icaromenippus (or Glykon) might pass for a god at all depends on the familiarity of theriomorphism within the Greek religious tradition. Lucian points to the absurdity of the fact that since the form of the gods is a human construct, recognising the divine becomes complicated in a world where 'geese and dogs and plane-trees'[28] could be divinities as much as anthropo-serpentine statues or, now, birdmen.

The issue of representation of the divine is pertinent to both the *Alexander* and the *Icaromenippus*, but while Glykon is a hybrid composition of a real snake with a mechanical, anthropomorphised head, Icaromenippus is a human with a mechanical, zoomorphic prosthetic. In both cases, mechanics are integral to the

[24] Camerotto 2009, 114–15 notes wings are integral to accessing the truth already in Pl. *Phaed*. 109e but that the mechanical component is here looking to the persona of the comic hero, especially as we have it in the Aristophanic tradition. Camerotto notes Socrates' need to rise high away from the earth in order to investigate the cosmos and the gods in Ar. *Nub*. 226–33 and the way that the novelty of the project is a fundamental element of the comic hero's undertaking there.

[25] Luc. *Icar*. 11. [26] Luc. *Icar*. 11.

[27] Luc. *Icar*. 2. On the dangers of divine appellation, we might point to the story of Alcyone and Ceyx who were transformed into birds for calling each other Hera and Zeus. See Whitmarsh 2018, 27.

[28] Luc. *Icar*. 9.

tricky business of navigating the junction between human and divine, between material and ephemeral. While Alexander centres around making manifest a god on earth, and the mechanics of the image are integral to producing a miracle which authenticates the religiosity of that cult to its worshippers, Menippus uses mechanical device to embody the characteristics of the divine (flying) and to make manifest a god in heaven.[29] This takes mechanics from a discussion about the miraculous, to one about ontology. Lucian presses the issue further in the *Icaromenippus* by extending the significance of the wings from prostheses of flight (already no mean feat), to objects that endow the human with a telescopic 'eagle eye', encapsulating the animal kingdom's advantage over the human and bestowing it on Menippus to convert him into a hybrid deity. It is Empedocles, during the lunar stopover, who advises Menippus to flap only the eagle wing in order to sharpen his vision.[30] Thanks to this trick, from the height of the moon, Menippus is able to make out clear landmarks and topographical features.[31] In actual fact, Menippus' vision is more than optically enhanced, for he also becomes witness to the unseen, observing political conspiracies, personal secrets, sexual scandals, and philosophical perjury.[32] The wings stand as more than an aid in flight: they are a tool for ontological transformation allowing Icaromenippus to exceed the boundaries of the animal and to infringe, in the omniscience he gains, on characteristics which define the supernatural.[33]

Yet Menippus' transformation is neither complete nor irreversible. Indeed, he carefully retains his status as 'human-plus-wings' throughout the dialogue, and this is crucial. Being able to transition in and out of his human and pseudo-divine states – between Menippus and Icaromenippus – throws up further questions of ontological categories. *Icaromenippus*' playful experimentation with human/divine/animal hybridisation overtly asks what

[29] Compare the 'flying mirror' described in Ps-Hero *Catoptr.* 21, where the viewer stands between two mirrors placed diagonally above them and by tilting forwards and backwards will feel as if they are flying ('*putabit volare*').
[30] Luc. *Icar.* 14–15. [31] Luc. *Icar.* 11–12. [32] Luc. *Icar.* 15–16.
[33] For animals in Greek religion, including issues of ontology, see the contributions in Kindt 2020.

mechanics can 'do' in temporarily blending what should be distinct categories.[34] While there is more to say on the ornithological element – not least for the way that it destabilises relations between animal and human, and is an intriguing example of the use of animal bodies as media technologies – I will focus not on the *natural* but on the *manufactured* quality of the wings and on their role as an ingenious gadget to access Olympus: a divine *mēchanēma*. For all that they are taken from real birds, Menippus' wings are contraptions designed overtly in the tradition of Daedalus'. The association with Daedalus helps to position the protagonist as somewhere between an artist and an engineer. This is a good moment as any to note, however, that the instability of the perceptions of characters such as Lucian's Menippus is integral to the construction of the satiric hero more broadly, as Camerotto has demonstrated.[35] In the case of the *Icaromenippus*, Lucian ensures there is never a simple association between his title character and the Cynic satirist Menippus. The opening scene, for example, sees Menippus 'playing astronomer' in adding up the astronomical distances of his recent journey.[36] This aligns him with Hellenistic authors, such as Hipparchus and Aristarchus, known for their writings on the sizes and distances of planets. Menippus' identification with astronomers and astronomy is not an empty move on Lucian's part but, given that Cynics were known to be suspicious of pastimes such as astronomy,[37] serves to destabilise the identification of the protagonist as a straight representation of the historic Menippus. This is all part and parcel of working within the flexibility of the satiric hero's personas which will be integral, among other things, to Lucian's transformation of Menippus into a pseudo-deity.

Thus, although Menippus' first inspiration for astral technology comes from Aesop's fables, he quickly dismisses the idea that he could possibly *grow* wings and turns to a model based on

[34] There is a fascinating parallel to be drawn here with pneumatic texts which use animal bodies as the external presentation for the demonstration of pneumatic properties: the siphon 'becomes' a drinking animal, for example.
[35] Camerotto 2014.
[36] Ní Mheallaigh 2024 discusses Menippus' mathematical astronomising in detail.
[37] Compare Luc. *Icar.* 6.

engineering.[38] Even the wings that Daedalus made for his son, however, needed improvement (τὸ Δαιδάλειον γὰρ ἐκεῖνο σόφισμα τῶν πτερῶν καὶ αὐτὸς ἐμηχανησάμην.).[39] The wax of Icarus' wings, Menippus explains to his friend, was the clear weak point in Daedalus' design which resulted in the disastrous failure of the flight. It is precisely when this technical detail is revealed that the friend's mockery becomes true curiosity, and he is intrigued to the extent that he admits that he is starting to believe the epistemological claims of Menippus' story.[40] From the point of view of the poetics, this helps to transfer the story from *mythos* based on hearsay to *paradoxon* based in empirical fact. In terms of the object of the wings, Menippus' alternative design successfully creates a hybrid where categories remain distinct: the wings do not sprout like Pegasus' but are fastened on, first assembled together and then put onto the body like Lego blocks. As artificial tools of enhancement, they can be donned and removed at will; and since, unlike Icarus', they allowed a safe passage to Olympus and back to earth, the wings facilitate a multiplicity in Menippus' character between astronomer, engineer, pseudo-god, and, ultimately, ally to the philosophers and thus a threat to the gods.

Menippus as Theomach

No matter how innocent, even well-intentioned, the aims of Menippus' astronomical journey might be, his flight poses a challenge to the divine order. We saw already how the gods collectively viewed Menippus' arrival with some apprehension, fearing that the whole human race might appear at their doorstep at any moment.[41] Zeus makes no secret of his feelings by aligning Menippus with the Aloadae, the giants Otus and Ephialtes who had aspirations to swarm Olympus.[42] At the same time as marking him out as a transgressor and theomach, the comparison retains (or

[38] Luc. *Icar.* 10. For more on the hybridity of Menippus in relation to the Aesopic tradition, see Abel 2018, especially 130–55 and 176–8.
[39] Luc. *Icar.* 2. Compare the friend to Menippus: τοῦτο μὲν ἤδη καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν Δαίδαλον ἔφησθα.
[40] Luc. *Icar.* 3. [41] Luc. *Icar.* 22–3. [42] Luc. *Icar.* 23.

acknowledges) Menippus' 'divine' status. Even though Zeus ultimately invites Menippus to spend a night with the gods and all seems to go rather smoothly, the wings are confiscated prior to Menippus' return to earth so that he does not risk turning up again.[43] In order to understand the nuances of Menippus' role as theomach, and to ascertain what is Lucianic invention and what is tradition, I begin by looking backwards and exploring how and where technology and theomachy coincide earlier in the Greek literary tradition.

The pages of Greek and Roman literature are filled with theomachs and theomachies of many kinds.[44] In a recent monograph concerned with theomachy in Roman Imperial literature, Pramit Chaudhuri starts by tracing how the primarily martial theomachies of Homeric epic are expanded into intellectual and political confrontations with the gods in Greek drama.[45] Facilitated by the genre's dialogic mode, tragedy reflects upon the relationship between human and god from a number of angles. Tragic authors relish staging the complex webs of motivations of their theomachs, producing for the audience a taxonomy of stronger and weaker theomachic acts, from accidental insult to arrogant scorn, disbelief, and utter rejection of a deity.[46] While all stories of theomachy are about exploring the limits – literal, metaphorical, ethical, spatial, ontological – which separate humans and gods, Lucian's Menippus in the *Icaromenippus* is cast at the intersection of two specific theomachic traditions: humans who physically try to reach the heavens and humans who insult the gods by being overambitious in their technical abilities.

The former theme, which I will term 'astral theomachy', is more common in Greek literature and the comparisons more evident in the

[43] Luc. *Icar.* 34. Camerotto 2009, 97 notes the parallel with Prometheus, who is also forbidden to return to Olympus after his theft.

[44] I restrict discussion to conflict between humans and gods though 'theomachy' can also refer to conflict within the divine realm. Hogan and Schenker 2002 offer a nice overview of theomachy in Greek literature. Yasumura 2011 focuses on the challenges to Zeus in early Greek poetry, best read with the review by Gagné 2014. Chaudhuri 2014 focuses on theomachy in the Roman Imperial tradition and is the fullest treatment of the topic to date, looking at the models from Greek epic and tragedy in the first chapter. Whitmarsh 2015, 173–84 discusses Epicurus as theomach especially in Lucretius; Whitmarsh 2018 looks at theomachy in archaic mythology.

[45] See Chaudhuri 2014, especially 39–55. Compare Mikalson 1991, 147–52, 158–62, 177–8, 206–7; Padel 1995, 202–18.

[46] See Whitmarsh 2018 for how this plays out already in archaic poetry.

Icaromenippus. Alongside Zeus' allusion to Otus and Ephialtes, Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, melting the wax holding his wings together and spiralling to his death, provides the most obvious model of haughty astral aspirations for Menippus, already flagged in the title. The visual record for Daedalus and Icarus is rich and the insistence on the manufacture of the wings by human hand and with human tools is persistent. This begins with Etruscan, Roman, and Graeco-Roman gems which show Daedalus alone making the wings.[47] Adzes, hammers, and other tools of carpentry can be made out in these intricate pieces, which range from the fifth to first centuries BCE.[48] Scenes of Icarus alone flying appear on gems, pottery, and statuettes.[49] Straps can very clearly be seen securing the wings to the arms in three bronze statuettes dated to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.[50] Depictions of Daedalus fitting the wings onto Icarus' body with rope or straps are also plentiful in a variety of media.[51] Particularly striking are a series of Roman reliefs, contemporary with Lucian's text, which show Daedalus part way through making the second wing with Icarus beside him, already wearing the first wing and the baldric crossing of the straps clearly visible across his chest.[52] The flight and fall are also common artistic themes.[53] Of particular note for our purposes is a mid second-century CE Roman sarcophagus depicting the whole story from the fashioning and fitting of the wings to the flight and fall.[54]

Another astral journey relevant to thinking about how the Greek theomachic traditions involved the technological, and attested earlier in the Greek literary record than the myth of Icarus, is that of Bellerophon. Bellerophon was already hated by all the gods ('ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν') in the *Iliad*, though no explanation is there given as to why.[55] In Pindar's seventh *Isthmian Ode* we are told that divine contempt towards Bellerophon was due to his

[47] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos* 1–11.
[48] Compare LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 12d, a late fourth/early third-century BCE bronze mirror showing a winged youth surrounded by tools and holding a hammer.
[49] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 12–18, 56.
[50] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 15, 16, 18. [51] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 19–30.
[52] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 23. [53] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 36–45.
[54] LIMC s.v. *Daidalos et Ikaros* 35. Note too *Pal. Anth*. 16.107, which playfully describes a bronze statue of Icarus, pointing out the irony of the role of wax in the casting of bronze.
[55] Hom *Il*. 6.200.

attempt to reach Zeus and Olympus.[56] By the time of Euripides' tragic *Bellerophon*, things had escalated to the point where the title character not only attempted to access divine space, but possibly denied the existence of the gods altogether.[57] Bellerophon's attempt to reach Olympus (and his ensuing plight) was, to judge by the fragmentary evidence, a major part of the tragic plot. The journey was apparently staged to great theatrical effect using the *mēchanē* which, if the repeated attention drawn to Pegasus' wings in the fragments depicting the flight is anything to go by, had wings represented or attached.[58] In myth, then, Bellerophon's ascent is upon the winged horse Pegasus, and Euripides' use of the *mēchanē* in his tragic version aptly triangulates mechanics, theatricality, and astral theomachy in a way which is highly relevant to understanding the range of models that Lucian had at his disposal in composing the *Icaromenippus*.

To this picture we must add the parody of Bellerophon's flight from Aristophanes' *Peace*.[59] The comic spoof not only lends strong support to the idea that the *mēchanē* was used in the *Bellerophon*, but the transformation of Pegasus into a giant dung beetle resonates within the broader tradition of astral theomachies and technology as it is reinterpreted by Lucian. In defining the parameters of his own astral journey, Menippus first firmly denies that he might make it up to Olympus as a Ganymede favoured by the gods for his good looks.[60] He later explains that the Aesopic tradition, on the other hand, did provide some inspiration since there, the heavens are accessible to various animals: the eagle, beetle, and camel.[61] The erudite, multi-layered inter-textuality between Aesop's fables, Aristophanic comedy, Euripidean tragedy, *and* their performative traditions is characteristically and brilliantly Lucianic. In referring to the various Aesopic fables in which animals had access to the heavens – the eagle, beetle, and camel – Lucian is pointing out the fallacy of Trygaeus' claim in *Peace* that the beetle was his only option in parodying Bellerophon's tragic journey on the winged *mēchanē*.[62]

[56] Pi. *I.* 7.44–8. [57] Eur. *Beller.* 286 *TGF* interpreted by Riedweg 1990.
[58] Eur. *Beller.* 306–8 *TGF.* [59] See pages 42–43. [60] Luc. *Icar.* 2.
[61] Luc. *Icar.* 10.
[62] Ar. *Pax* 129–30. See Bowie 2007, 36–7 for the reception of Aristophanes in Lucian's *Icaromenippus*.

Technology and Theomachy

Must we rely on stage machinery to insert the mechanical into the ancient narrative on theomachy which Lucian so deftly reappropriates? In what follows I explore the tradition of the technophile as theomach, not only to ascertain what models Lucian might have had in mind for his *Icaromenippus*, but also to answer wider questions on the nature of the relation between technology and the divine within Greek culture from as early as the archaic period.

I turn first to Salmoneus, who, like Bellerophon and, indeed, Prometheus, had Zeus as his main opponent.[63] Instead of attempting to reach the heavens, Salmoneus insults Zeus by imitating the supreme deity's thunder and lightning. He does so by dragging bronze cauldrons (and sometimes dried hides) behind a chariot and flinging torches into the sky. The important elements of the myth for our purposes, namely the imitation via human contraptions of celestial phenomena that are usually Zeus' prerogative, are already recorded in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, dated somewhere between the early seventh and the late sixth centuries.[64] Later sources, first Diodorus Siculus and then Apollodorus, flesh out the details from the fragmentary Hesiodic papyrus, adding that Salmoneus also denied Zeus sacrifices and ordered them to be offered to him instead.[65] What is striking about the accounts of Salmoneus' mimetic impiety is the detail surrounding the techniques used, and particularly the role of the mechanical. Indeed, Diodorus Siculus pulls together the various components of Salmoneus' mimetic thunder-and-lightning machinery and calls it a *mēchanē*. Even Prometheus, another obvious technophile and theomach, did not have, in the archaic tradition at least, such overt links to technological media for, as we have seen, it is simply the theft of fire that features in the Hesiodic myth. If Prometheus' theomachy consists of stealing divine prerogative and sharing it with

[63] As a brief side note, we might like to see the Zeus-centric narrative of the *Icaromenippus* as a way to strengthen the parallels between Menippus and the Bellerophons, Prometheuses, and Salmoneuses before him.
[64] Hes. *Cat*. fr. 27 Most. On the text, see Hunter 2005.
[65] Diod. Sic. 6.6.4–5; Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.

mortals, Salmoneus' challenge of divine order involves autonomously producing divine prerogative through technological aids.

Scholars have rightly noted that mimesis lies at the core of the early versions of the Salmoneus story and of its retellings throughout antiquity.[66] Whitmarsh sees Salmoneus' imitation of Zeus as an early contribution to emerging anxieties about the representation of the gods at the hands of humans in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE.[67] Certainly, representation, even creation, of the divine become topics of interest and of unease, not only in early poetry, but also within visual and performative cultures, from evolutions in statuary to developments in theatrical display, as well as in the early philosophical tradition. Yet there are two distinct, if interrelated issues concerning man, god, and technique at stake here that ought to be teased apart: the representation of the divine, on the one hand, and fabricating the numinous, on the other. The main anxiety behind Salmoneus' actions is not related to what gods look like, but rather to what gods can *do*, and particularly to the way that divine actions exceed the capabilities of mortals. The myth of Salmoneus is inevitably invested in contemporary theological discourse, but explores what is at stake behind miraculous actions which are a mark of divine presence, rather than targeting the problematics of divine form. It is the artificial production of sound and light, of thunder and lightning, that impinges on divine prerogative here, and the myth of Salmoneus places a *mēchanē* at the crucial juncture that defines the relation between gods and mortals. Read in this way, Salmoneus' contraption of astral imitation is certainly among the earliest contributors in the conversation on the technological miracle which will subsequently make its way – through the Peripatetic *Mechanica* and Hellenistic automata – into Lucian's dialogues.

The focus on technological mimesis of divine action is one of the elements that made Salmoneus' story particularly apt for theatre, as Sophocles' satyr play on the topic shows. Additionally,

[66] Platt 2011, 197–8 (on a first-century BCE epigram on Salmoneus' fate); Chaudhuri 2014, 6; Cowan 2014, 7; Whitmarsh 2018, 30–1.
[67] Whitmarsh 2018, 31.

there was, even in antiquity, something slightly amusing about the simplicity, even vulgarity, of Salmoneus' thunder and lightning machine, and this blend of the serio-comic likely made it attractive as the subject of satyr play. Lastly, satyr play's penchant for presenting wonderful inventions – both positive and negative – made Salmoneus and his thunder-and-lightning machine triply apt.[68] While next to nothing of this fifth-century BCE satyr play survives, the little that we can piece together points to the presence of miraculous action, technical spectacle, and divine imitation within the play.[69] Stephen Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith's suggestion that Salmoneus' story preserves him as the inventor of the *bronteion* 'thunder machine', known from its use in the theatre (and possibly in ritual), is now widely accepted.[70] Sophocles, conscious of the layers of mimesis at stake between and within both the Salmoneus myth itself and the dramatic art form within which it was now embedded, drew meta-theatrical attention to the fact that the machinery on stage was able to reproduce Salmoneus' imitation of Zeus' thunder and lightning.[71] The act of remediation here follows a logic of hyper-mediacy as Sophocles makes viewers aware at each juncture of the new medium as a medium. In one fragment, a character (most likely Salmoneus himself) prepares to present the artificial fire bolt before the eyes of all, stressing the visuality of the production of the miracle, in this case, fire: 'with a cloud I shall proclaim the spectacle of the fire to everyone' (πέμφιγι πᾶσιν ὄψιν ἀγγελῶ πυρός).[72]

We see in the figure of Salmoneus, then, an early model of the technophile theomach. It is important to stress, however, that Salmoneus is rather exceptional in the early mythological tradition as we now have it. Attempts to confront the gods and their powers *technologically*, through imitation or otherwise, is a motif that has surprisingly little traction in the Greek world. Daedalus, as the

[68] On satyr plays and inventions: Seaford 1984, 36–7; Voelke 2001, 273–99; Laemmle 2013, 371–80.
[69] See especially Cowan 2014.
[70] Smith and Trzaskoma 2005. The latter claim is, in my opinion, less certain or at least needs some further investigation.
[71] See especially the discussions of Cowan 2014; Whitmarsh 2014, 2018.
[72] Soph. fr. 539 Radt with Wenkebach's conjectures. See Cowan 2014, 8–10 for more on *opsis* and meta-theatre.

inventor and creator of Icarus' wings and of the wooden cow that leads Pasiphae (divine in some traditions) to bestiality, meets a tragic fate in the loss of his son, but still stands as a respected artist and the engineer-craftsman par excellence. The only other contender for an early story which combines theomachy and excessive human skill in mechanical contrivance comes from the *Iliad*. There, in book 7, the Achaeans are said to have built a great wall without offering the appropriate sacrifices to the gods, which causes Poseidon to worry that such a purely human feat will eclipse the fame of the Trojan wall built by himself and Apollo.[73] This is a better comparison for the present purposes than the martial theomachies common in epic given that it concerns human *technē* challenging the gods in a way which clearly worries them. But the issue at stake in this example is not so much the ingenuity of the wall but the lack of recognition of divine assistance in creating such a feat of engineering. It does help us to understand the way that superior engineering skill is conceived as something divine or divinely endowed in the archaic Greek cultural imagination, bringing us back to issues discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. As we saw, if invented dedications or automata in procession were to be theologically persuasive it was, in part, thanks to technological ingenuity always being a carefully measured enterprise between human and divine, as the tripods of Hephaistos or the story of Prometheus show. Interestingly, however, and as explored by Chaudhuri, the ideas of technology and fame come to have stronger theomachic associations in Roman epic, creating a true poetics of ambivalence surrounding the power of technology.[74] Indeed, the discourse surrounding spectacle, technology, and political power will, in the Roman world, take on a completely independent cultural life of its own including, as pointed out by Kathleen Coleman more than thirty years ago, in the form of 'fatal charades' staged in Roman amphitheatres.[75]

[73] Hom. *Il*. 7.446–53, discussed in Chaudhuri 2014, 37–9. Compare Bassi 2016, 40–63.
[74] Chaudhuri 2014, 39. Compare too Plut. *Vit. Marc*. 16, where Archimedes' inventions make the Romans think they are fighting against the gods themselves.
[75] Coleman 1990, 1996; Hammer 2010.

From Faking to Fighting in the *Icaromenippus*

To finish, let us return to Lucian and to the *Icaromenippus*. Clearly, Lucian is engaging with models from Greek literature that explore theomachic astral flights and technological aids in theomachic actions including those of Icarus, Bellerophon, and Salmoneus. But before the Roman imperial period, attempts upon the divine world remain the stuff of mythical lunacy, another way of testing the boundaries of the theoretically possible, but not a theme with much cultural traction. No one would dare attempt what those mythical figures do, for fear of ending up just like them: plunged violently to their deaths from literal and metaphorical lofty heights. That is not to say, of course, that early explorations of theomachy exclusively affirmed conventional religious values. Limits are tested in very real and very suggestive ways, but no theomach in Greek myth gets away with it as Lucian's Menippus does.[76] So while Lucian's title might align him with Icarus, his fate actually draws him from the tradition of the foolish theomach who gets his just deserts, to a new kind of human enquirer who toes the line between human and divine prerogatives, finally overstepping it not by visiting Olympus, but by divulging divine plans to those whom the gods perceive to be a bigger, truer threat: philosophers.

Once Menippus has made it up to Olympus thanks to his mechanical prosthesis and has witnessed how Zeus attends to various religious rituals through peephole wells, he is invited to dine with the gods.[77] This scene looks back to an early mythic world where gods and humans cohabited and specifically where hospitality was indifferent to the boundaries between mortal and immortal.[78] At dinner, Menippus indulges in a wonderful feast hosted by the gods and even has a share in the divine privilege of nectar and ambrosia. Apart from taking us back to mythic times, collapsing mortals and immortals together once more, Lucian's redrawing of mythic commensality plays into creating a sense of commonality and thus of common

[76] The divinisation of Roman emperors surely has a role to play here as seen, for example, in the vicious exasperation towards the apotheosis of Claudius in the Senecan *Apocolocyntosis*.

[77] Luc. *Icar.* 27.

[78] For example, Hes. *Op.* 108–201; Hes. *Cat.* fr. 1.6–7 Most; *Th.* 535–7 (more contentious). Compare the discussion of Whitmarsh 2018, 17–21.

purpose between Menippus and the gods. At the divine assembly the next morning, Menippus is present when Zeus raises not only the moon's concern, regarding her misinterpretation by philosophers, but also general concerns relating to philosophers including their duplicitous moral conduct and, most of all, the Epicurean denial of the involvement of the gods in human affairs.[79] Cacophonous outrage ensues from the gods and it is agreed that, once the festival season is over in four months' time, all philosophers will meet the kind of end which we might have expected for Menippus: a wretched death by the horrid thunderbolt.[80] The brief addition that the gods will not undertake this act until the start of spring does more work than might initially appear. The reason given by Zeus is that the truce for the duration of the festival period has already been announced and so it would not be right (*ou themis*) to punish anyone in that time. While one could read this as Zeus being true to his word, we also know from his previous interaction with Menippus that festivals are a key time for the (increasingly forgotten) god to receive sacrifice and other rituals. Furthermore, Zeus' depiction of things, while pretending to give him authority, in fact bends divine agenda to the mortal calendar, implying, absurdly, that the divine must, like mortals, follow the rules set by them to start with! This is yet another clever way for Lucian to articulate how mortal and divine realms have started to bleed into each other and to question where authority ultimately lies. Finally, the four-month gap sets up a chronological distance for Menippus' newly acquired knowledge that the gods are going to obliterate all philosophers, allowing him, in the dialogue's swift final sentence, to trot off and divulge the divine plan to mortals. Menippus' wings have gone from tools for him to go and explore Olympus to find out cosmological truths, to tools that make him akin to a seer, but against divine will. *Technē* has enabled him to go and be privy to a divine discussion, and while in Lucian's twin dialogue *Menippus* the (same?) title character is initially reluctant to divulge what he has learnt from the other realm as he deems it would be impious,[81] there is no such concern in the *Icaromenippus*. If the wings themselves do not prove to be theomachic, the knowledge that

[79] Luc. *Icar.* 29–34. For a reading of *Icaromenippus* and *Alexander* as contributing to discussions on philosophical atheism, see Van Nuffelen 2011, 179–99.
[80] Luc. *Icar.* 33. [81] Luc. *Nec.* 2.

Menippus gains thanks to his mechanical aids – the epistemological advantage that the discipline of mechanics has offered – should surely be seen as threatening to the divine.

A nice paradox remains. Using technical knowledge for religious fraud implies certain doubts or apprehensions about the religious system in question. Using technical knowledge to attempt to threaten the power of the divine relies on deep theological convictions about the realness of the gods because it is predicated on a world view in which they can be challenged through man-made technologies. Faking the gods exposes – or attempts to expose – worshippers as naïve and credulous by, as we have seen in the *Alexander*, dismantling the authenticity of the mediators which give claim to give access to the gods. The potency of these very same mediators is increased exponentially if they are used not just to bridge the human and supernatural realms, but to access and inhabit one or the other on equal terms. Indeed, Menippus is saved precisely thanks to this fact: he believes in the gods enough to go and consult Zeus when he has theological doubts; it is the philosophers who are the true *theomachs* and who will suffer the consequences.