CHAPTER 3

THEOS APO MĒCHANĒS

Aiming to demonstrate the theatrical and theological richness of the *mēchanē* in Greek tragedy, six case studies are dealt with here individually, exploring how the mechanical mode of epiphany works in situ. Such a methodology avoids viewing the manifold uses of the machine through the prism of a single model,[1] while still allowing for interpretative overlaps to shine forth regarding what the *ex machina* epiphanies achieve and how they are treated. I have grouped the six plays loosely into pairs: the *Helen*, we shall see, uses the *mēchanē* to confirm divine form in a play otherwise full of illusion; concern for divine form also pervades the *Bacchae*, but in that instance the *mēchanē* is presented as yet another epiphanic mode of the mimetically inclined patron god of theatre. *Philoctetes* and *Heracles* use the *mēchanē* less to explore divine appearance and more to theorise (and theologise) issues of space, movement, and the connectedness of divine and mortal realms. *Orestes* and *Medea* are two plays which use the *mēchanē* to question divine epiphany by bringing to the fore issues of ontological boundaries between human and divine.

Mēchanē and Form: Euripides' *Helen* and *Bacchae*

A major theme of Euripides' *Helen* is that of constructing and identifying presence: divine and otherwise.[2] Based on an alternate version of the affair of Paris and Helen leading to the Trojan War, Euripides' play has Paris given an *eidōlon* of Helen who follows him to Troy, while the real Helen is hiding in Egypt.[3]

[1] A criticism rightly made of the examination of the *deus ex machina* of Spira 1960, by Burnett 1962 and Baldry 1962, for example.
[2] On *onoma* and *pragma* see Solmsen 1934; on appearance and reality see Burnett 1960; Segal 1971; on identity in the play see Davis 2009.
[3] Eur. *Hel*. 31–5. Compare Stesichorus *PMG* 192–3; Hdt. 2.112–20.

Complexities of the theme of appearance versus reality are played out first as a personal conundrum, through the discrepancy between the impact of Helen's actions and those of her divinely sent illusion. Helen is aware that she has a *Doppelgänger* at Troy, and continuously laments that she is impacted by this fact: 'Why loathe *me* for the troubles *she* has caused?' (ταῖς ἐκείνης συμφοραῖς ἐμὲ στυγεῖς;) Helen asks in her initial encounter with Teucer.[4] One Helen, we are told, is born from Zeus, the other is a divinely sent illusion made from aether by Hera, a divine *mēchanēma* of sorts.[5] According to Teucer, though the two Helens are physically identical (rendering the mere faculty of sight redundant),[6] they can be distinguished by the difference in their hearts.[7] The chorus do not profess the same sentiment, however, and in fact take the issue of the limits of human understanding to a general level when they express that any distinction is near impossible: 'What mortal can search out and tell what is god, what is not god, and what lies between?' (ὅ τι θεὸς ἢ μὴ θεὸς ἢ τὸ μέσον / τίς φησ' ἐρευνάσας βροτῶν;).[8] These are preoccupations with *identification*, and it is Menelaus, in his recognition scene with Helen, who understands that the problematics of *construction* come first, seeking to understand how the Helen back in Troy could possibly have been fashioned.[9] The point being made in the interchange between Helen and Menelaus – and in the play as a whole – is that if there is a difference between something (or someone) divine, and something divinely manifested, both are equally able to enact the same fate, to Helen's utter despair.

The cogitations around the construction of divine presence throughout *Helen* continue right through to the use of the *theoi apo mēchanēs* at the end of the play. If, after contemplating real and divinely manifested presence in the person of Helen and her *eidōlon*, viewers are left wondering how divine encounters can be presented unequivocally – above all in tragedy – the method of Castor and Pollux's epiphany is presented as a solution. The Dioscuri's appearance on the *mēchanē* leaves no doubt that they

[4] Eur. *Hel*. 79.
[5] Helen as daughter of Zeus: Eur. *Hel*. 16–22, 75–7, 81, 213–16, 259, 1527. Helen as made from aether: Eur. *Hel*. 119, 584–6.
[6] Problematising sight: Eur. *Hel*. 575–8. [7] Eur. *Hel*. 160–1. [8] Eur. *Hel*. 1138–9.
[9] Eur. *Hel*. 583–8.

are divinities specifically thanks to their mode of entry. It must be said too that they are also particularly appropriate given that their existence between different ontological categories – human/divine, mortal/immortal, celestial/corporal – makes epiphanies of the Dioscuri epistemically complex by nature.[10] The prevalence of the theme of constructing identity in *Helen* intentionally creates an ambience of uncertainty about ontological status. This would have made a stage-level entry for the Dioscuri far less compelling, failing to tie off the exploration of divine identification in any meaningful way and leaving the audience wondering whether they are in fact seeing one or both of the twins in their human incarnation. Dunn sees the epiphany of the Dioscuri as a 'contrived pretext for bringing on a *deus ex machina*', and he may well be right in terms of the inconsequentiality of their intervention for the plot.[11] But the use of the mechanical epiphany is far less contrived if we consider how it interacts more broadly with the theme of the incomprehensibility of the phenomenal world and the limits of human understanding.[12] It is precisely the appearance which is most mechanical that is unequivocally the 'real' divine appearance; it is precisely the visible mechanics which facilitate the Dioscuri's intervention that guarantee that they are truly divine. Counter-intuitively, then, we can have more confidence in the reality of the appearance of the gods if we understand how that appearance is created. *Helen* starts by questioning the reliability of the faculty of sight and problematising the security of divine ontology, and ends by employing the *mēchanē* as the only unproblematic identification of the divine. The choral *exodos* – appearing in at least four other Euripidean plays with only slight modifications – might be formulaic, but it is certainly not irrelevant, since it allows *Helen* to close with a meta-theatrical note on the many shapes that the divine and their plots take: 'What

[10] On which see Platt 2018.

[11] The same complaint he also makes for *Iphigenia at Tauris*: Dunn 1996, 137–8. Compare Griffith 1953, 41.

[12] Which, it must be said, is a broader fifth-century concern. On Gorgias *On Non-existence*, see McComiskey 1997, 7–10; on the influence of Gorgianic sophistic doctrines in *Helen*, see Solmsen 1934; Segal 1971.

heaven sends has many shapes, and many things the gods accomplish against our expectation.' (πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων, / πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί·).[13]

Yet the *mēchanē* in *Helen* does more than deliberate authentic ways of signalling and constructing (divine) presence. The mechanical *theophania* also exposes the 'rules' of this particular mode of human–divine interaction: its restrictions, its tolerances, and its peculiarities. Epiphany, it would seem, is subject to the politics of divine hierarchy as Castor and Pollux reveal that they would have intervened much earlier had this not been overridden by fate and the other gods.[14] Though the epiphanic encounter is perceived by the worshipper(s) in that moment to be the will of the god before them, the Dioscuri here underscore that epiphany is (or at least may have been) the outcome of a collective divine decision based on underlying divided opinions.[15] This same sentiment is further problematised through Iris and Lyssa's mechanical epiphany in *Heracles*.[16] Epiphany guarantees direct communication from the divine realm which is not susceptible to the human interferences or corruptions that burden prophecy, for example. As a seer, Theonoe is a human bridge between the realms yet she is corruptible, experiencing multiple pressures on her at any one time. She is obliged to act as a mouthpiece to the gods, but also as a daughter, a sister, and someone with her own reputation to maintain.[17] The play presents these interests in clear conflict to demonstrate the fallibilities of the inspired human medium as a method to bridge sacred and profane to obtain divine foreknowledge.[18] Yet Castor and Pollux's revelation that they themselves had a different will to other, clearly more influential divine powers serves to complicate the representation of epiphany, presenting it with its own set of problems stemming from the polytheistic system within which it exists.

[13] Eur. *Hel*. 1688–9. Compare Euripides, *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, and *Bacchae*. *Medea* has an altered version. See the sensible discussion in Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 415–17 arguing against Dunn 1996.
[14] Eur. *Hel*. 1658–61.
[15] Graf 2004 on collective epiphanies – that is, collective *human* experience of the divine. The opposite angle (i.e. epiphany and the collective *divine* opinion) has, to my knowledge, not yet been explored.
[16] On which see pages 78–83. [17] Eur. *Hel*. 999–1001. [18] Eur. *Hel*. 919–23.

Castor and Pollux speak first to Theoklymenos and then to Helen, though she is no longer on stage, having already boarded a ship with Menelaus.[19] A similar situation occurs in *Iphigenia at Tauris* (*IT*) when Athena addresses Thaos and then the absent Orestes and Iphigenia.[20] The intervention of divinities in such contexts surely represents the omniscience of divine knowledge providing a place 'on high' to draw a visual metaphor for the view of the gods being further reaching than any individual's restricted vision of events. The objection could be made, however, that the height of the *theologeion* would have served fine for this purpose. But the *mēchanē*'s materiality, and especially its unique locomotion, are crucial to communicating the theological understanding that the Greek gods are not, in fact, always present but need to be made to appear. Tapping into the Dioscuri's cosmic existence as stars, the slowly rising beam suspending the twin gods (and perhaps even pivoting them above and across over the orchestra) represents the theological imperative for the Greek gods not just to *appear*, but to *be mobilised*. Castor and Pollux in *Helen*, and Athena in *IT*, can thus make pronouncements to two different audiences in two different locations thanks to the fact that they are not standing stationary upon the *theologeion*, but are carried upon the *mēchanē*, an object with a unique ability to straddle on- and off-stage spaces, performing not just divine arrival, but the divine arriving.[21]

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Bacchae revolves around encountering the god Dionysus, and the consequences of the misrecognition of divine presence. While *Helen* uses the *mēchanē* as the only epistemologically legitimate mode of divine presence, *Bacchae* presents it as just *one more* way that the Dionysiac miracle works. The final epiphany upon the *mēchanē* should be seen not as a mere theatrical convention

[19] Eur. *Hel*. 1662–79. [20] Eur. *IT* 1435–89.

[21] For a completely different view of the suitability of the *mēchanē* in this play, see Wiles 1997, 182–3: 'The crane allows Euripides to offer his audience a concrete image of the Egyptian idea later popularised by Plato that the psyche or soul of the dead person becomes a star.'

tacked on to the end of the play to enact divine retribution, but rather as an active part of this palimpsestic exploration of Dionysiac epiphany.

Interpreting sacred presence relies on correctly identifying a divine encounter in the first instance. In other words, *knowing* the god and understanding what an epiphany might mean for the viewer-worshipper relies first on *seeing* the god for what she or he is.[22] *Bacchae*'s insistence on vision has been noted by various scholars.[23] While, for example, Justina Gregory argues that the motif works to explore 'the nature, varieties, and scope of human perception in the play',[24] I focus on how this same motif of seeing is used to comment on the nature of Dionysiac epiphanic encounter in order to then fit the *mēchanē* into the broader picture. The issue of seeing in the *Bacchae* is not as simple as the binary posited by Gregory, between secular and religious points of view.[25] Even within the religious 'view', the *Bacchae* explores the many manifestations that Dionysus can and does adopt, as well as the ways that humans interact in creating, viewing, and understanding these epiphanic forms. While tragedy as a genre explores human–divine relations, and mechanisms for bridging the mortal and supernatural realms in an abstract sense, *Bacchae* is deeply rooted in Dionysiac cult and Dionysiac epiphany.[26] Euripides explores through this play what it means to see, and thus to encounter, not just any god, but specifically the god Dionysus.

To do this, *Bacchae* presents us with waves of Dionysiac epiphany which work cumulatively towards the climactic apparition on the *mēchanē* at the end of the play.[27] To see how this progression works to present various facets of the god's presence, it serves us well to follow the text in order. Dionysus opens the tragedy

[22] On the mystic connotations of knowing the god, see Seaford 1981, 253.
[23] Gregory 1985; Segal 1985, 159 and the theme is even more prominent in the revised 1997, especially 221–3, 229–32; Vernant 1985.
[24] Gregory 1985, 24.
[25] Gregory 1985, 29. Compare Vernant 1985 on Dionysiac epiphany fitting outside the binary of 'inspired' and 'lucid' modes of viewing.
[26] Seaford 1981.
[27] Petridou 2015, 97 discusses the multiple epiphanic strategies of the *Bacchae*, omitting the mechanical. On the visual representations of Dionysus in the fifth century, see Carpenter 1997, especially 104–18 on *Bacchae* and *Frogs*.

himself, taking the stage alone to deliver the prologue.[28] Discord between theatrics and dialogue, and between knowing and seeing, are established even before the first words of the play are uttered. Either the actor's costume marks him out as a god in some way[29] intentionally jarring against Dionysus' opening words (and with the expectations of the Euripidean divine prologue) which situate him concretely in Thebes and not far-off Olympus;[30] or the actor appears dressed as a mortal priming the audience for a human prologue in the tradition of *IT* or *Electra*, in which case viewers are unsettled by the immediate revelation that this is in fact a god in disguise. In his identification, Dionysus presents himself as the son of Zeus and Semele.[31] The origin myth evoked through this specific choice of genealogy alludes blatantly to the power of epiphany since Semele, Dionysus' mortal mother, died after requesting that Zeus appear to her in his true form.[32] The tomb of Semele still smoking from Zeus' thunderbolt is apparently present in the orchestra – a potent visual reminder of the story.[33] Ironically, the *Bacchae* goes on to make a far clearer statement about the perils of *failing* to see and to recognise the divine than it does about the potential dangers of *seeing* the divine.[34] From the very outset, then, and preceding all action in the play, the first few lines and the mythic background to the plot put the effects of divine epiphany and the issues of divine form front and centre.

The interplay between visual and verbal cues allowing the audience to identify the character they see as Dionysus creates a benchmark for how characters in the play should subsequently respond to the sight of the stranger, and how they should receive his rites. The disguised Dionysus recounts how he has traversed many parts of Asia establishing his rites 'so as to be a visible god for mankind' (ἵν' εἴην ἐμφανὴς δαίμων βροτοῖς).[35] The connectedness of ritual and epiphany is clear, alerting the audience to the fact that Dionysiac rites are what enable worshippers to encounter their

[28] Eur. *Bacch*. 1–63.
[29] Possibly through the smiling mask (Eur. *Bacch*. 439, 1021) on which see Foley 1980, 127.
[30] Eur. *Bacch*. 1–2. [31] Eur. *Bacch*. 1–3.
[32] Apoll. *Bibl*. 3. 26–8; Hyg. *Fab*. 167, 179; Ovid, *Met*. 3.304ff. [33] Eur. *Bacch*. 8.
[34] On the dangers of epiphanic viewing, see Gregory 1985, 25–6. [35] Eur. *Bacch*. 22.

god in a deeply personal way. Alongside dance, music, prayers, and libation, the deity also marks out the importance of ritual objects (fawn skins, *thyrsoi*) to bring about the religiously induced change of state that happened to worshippers during mystic initiation.[36] The parodos then reinforces this visually.[37] As has been noted, the chorus' entry would have been theatrically impactful as the actors were equipped with many cultic accoutrements referred to in their song: *thyrsoi*, ivy crowns, snakes, branches, fawn skins, wool, and, critically, *tympana*.[38] Hitting their drums and tossing their bodies, the chorus sing about the blessed state of those who truly know the god Dionysus. As Helene Foley observes, both Dionysus in the prologue and the chorus in the parodos place extraordinary emphasis on presenting the god's divine status through non-verbal means: spectacle, costume, and sound.[39] Building on this observation, we can note that there is, in the parodos, specific emphasis on the aetiology of Bacchic rites and on the origins of objects used to connect with the divine. The chorus give us a sense of how both elements have long histories during which time they were first invented, then created and passed on to man. The *tympanon*, in particular, is singled out and the chorus explain that it was invented by the Korybantes, then combined with the Phrygian pipes and given to Rhea, from whom it was eventually passed to the satyrs and arrived in the hands of the maenads.[40] The notion that the objects and rites – or, as later referred to generally, the *technai* of the god[41] – are what allow divine encounter and manufacture divine presence is pervasive throughout the play. The *mēchanē* is one more tool, one more application of *technē*, which facilitates Bacchic contact, and we shall see why it is particularly pertinent to Dionysus.

The first epiphanic form of Dionysus presented in the play is as a mortal. The audience observe this form of the divine themselves in the prologue, and then through the eyes of Pentheus in the first episode. Despite noting that the Stranger has fragrant hair and light-coloured locks, is wine-coloured in the face, and has the

[36] Eur. *Bacch*. 24–5. [37] Eur. *Bacch*. 64–169.
[38] Foley 1980, 108 notes that 'the *Bacchae* is one of the few Greek plays in which we can make reliable inferences about the stage production from the text'.
[39] Foley 1980, 108n4. Compare 110. [40] Eur. *Bacch*. 123–31. [41] Eur. *Bacch*. 675.

graces of Aphrodite in his eyes[42] – telling signs in the tradition of the god's *Homeric Hymn* that he is dealing with Dionysus[43] – the foolish *theomach* fails to recognise the divine nature of Dionysus and the legitimacy of the rites performed in his honour. Instead, he orders the Stranger to be captured and brought to him in chains in order to kill him.[44] Successful in his capture of this 'beast', a servant appears with a calm Dionysus whose hands have been bound.[45] We will learn later, during a crucial scene of epiphanic revelation, that this proved useless as he was miraculously able to free himself.[46] More immediately we hear that attempts similarly to restrain and imprison the maenads failed as 'the chains were loosed from their feet of their own accord, and keys opened doors with no mortal hand to turn them.' (αὐτόματα δ' αὐταῖς δεσμὰ διελύθη ποδῶν κλῃδές τ' ἀνῆκαν θύρετρ' ἄνευ θνητῆς χερός.).[47] Spontaneous animation of the inanimate is a clear mark of divine involvement. As noted by Eric Csapo, there is something particularly Dionysian about spontaneous movement and spontaneity more broadly.[48] Dionysus is renowned, especially following prominent structuralist readings of the *Bacchae*, for his ability to confuse binaries: human/beast, man/woman, restraint/frenzy, domestic/periphery, reality/illusion, to give some examples.[49] Spontaneity or automation is another avenue for the god's influence to manifest itself as the division between animate and inanimate becomes mutable under Dionysian auspices. This is no doubt why the two examples of automata given in Hero of Alexandria's treatise on the topic relate to Dionysus: one is an automated shrine to the god, the other an automated miniature theatre.[50] Dionysus' connection with spontaneous movement and automation is already present in the god's *Homeric Hymn*. Put in a similar position to Pentheus, a group of Tyrrhenian pirates fail to recognise the god and attempt, to no avail, to bind the god; the shackles fall away mysteriously: 'And they meant to bind him in grievous bonds; but the bonds would not contain him, the osiers fell clear away from

[42] Eur. *Bacch*. 233–6. [43] Dionysus' locks are explicitly mentioned in *hHom* 7.4–5.
[44] Eur. *Bacch*. 355–7. [45] Eur. *Bacch*. 434–40. [46] Eur. *Bacch*. 616, 633–4, 649.
[47] Eur. *Bacch*. 447–8; compare the *autos* in 614. [48] Csapo 2013, 25.
[49] Segal 1982; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1986, 255–7; discussion of Seaford 1996, 30–3.
[50] On which further see pages 203–212.

his hands and feet' (καὶ δεσμοῖς ἔθελον δεῖν ἀργαλέοισιν / τὸν δ' οὐκ ἴσχανε δεσμά, λύγοι δ' ἀπὸ τηλόσ' ἔπιπτον / χειρῶν ἠδὲ ποδῶν).[51]

Autonomous movement is also one of the telling signs of Dionysus' presence in the 'palace miracle'[52] – the most multi-layered of Dionysus' *Bacchae* epiphanies, possibly the most visually arresting scene in the play, and certainly the most hotly contested.[53] What is perceived as unnatural trembling of the man-made structure[54] is given an underlying meteorological force as Dionysus impels cooperation from an earthquake personified.[55] The booming voice of the unseen god heard from within also commands a fire to light up spontaneously at the tomb of Semele accompanied by a thunderbolt.[56] It is impossible to know what happened on the ancient stage and to what extent each of these elements were visually represented.[57] Even if entirely contained to the imagination, this was a flaunting of Dionysiac divine potential and of what it represents in the human realm. Dionysus' presence in this scene is at once auditory, intangible, and amorphous as well as deeply materialised, palpable through meteorological effects, and, in one clever Euripidean move, acting autonomously through man-made objects on multiple levels. The miraculously loosening fetters are props on stage, fetters in the tragedy and symbols of freedom; the palace is the physical *skēnē* structure, the palace of Theban ruling family, and the political order the palace represents.[58]

Linked to Dionysus' ability to provoke spontaneous movement in the man-made world is his propensity for creating

[51] *hHom*. 7.12–14. On Dionysiac epiphany in the hymn, see Jaillard 2011.
[52] Eur. *Bacch*. 576–656.
[53] If, indeed, the miracle was thus staged, on which see Dodds 1960, 148; Castellani 1976; Foley 1980, 111; Seaford 1981, 1996, 195–203; Segal 1985, 158; Goldhill 1986, 278–83 with Wiles 1987; Fisher 1992. For an interesting later parallel, see Sen. *Ep*. 88.22, which records the building of stage devices that rise up autonomously and devices that collapse without an evident cause.
[54] Eur. *Bacch*. 586–9, 606, 623. [55] Eur. *Bacch*. 585.
[56] Eur. *Bacch*. 596–7, 623–4 (fire), 598–9 (thunderbolt).
[57] Suffice it to note that mechanically, along with some sort of 'collapsing' of the *skēnē*, it is not impossible that thunder and lightning were theatrically manifested by the *bronteion* and *keraunoskopeion* (Poll. 4.127, 130; compare page 253) and that pyrotechnical knowledge might have allowed the fire to blaze up of its own accord too (anecdotally, e.g., Ath. 1.19 and technically, Hero *Aut*. 4.1–4; Hippol. *Haer*. 4.31). See too Hippol. *Haer*. 4.32 on manufacturing thunder and 4.39 (though corrupt) on earthquakes.
[58] On the latter see Connor 1985.

plenitude in the natural world. Already alluded to in first choral ode,[59] the motif of natural abundance is then fully revealed in the first messenger speech through reference to the wondrous appearance of springs of water, wine, milk, and honey.[60] Again, this is a theme introduced at least as early as the *Homeric Hymn* where Dionysus makes wine gush forth and vines, ivy, grapes, and berries grow around the ship.[61] Natural plenitude and artificial automation – what we might term the general 'vibrancy' of Dionysiac matter to use Jane Bennett's adjective[62] – are integral and unique to Dionysiac epiphany and the motif will take its most spectacular form in the use of the *mēchanē* at the end of the play. Essential to the use of the *mēchanē* in *Bacchae* is the fact that it is clearly a man-made mechanism, and the epiphanic value thus comes from seeing its component parts move of their own accord – the play having conditioned the viewer to understand that this aligns with Dionysus' influence – to allow the god to reveal himself in a final, decisive form. While other tragedies use the *mēchanē* to make statements about theology and epiphany in general, *Bacchae* harnesses the machine's defining features to make statements very specific to Dionysiac epiphany, which is in turn part of a broader exploration within the play of the ways that Dionysus' divine aura can be experienced and recognised.

When Pentheus is persuaded by Dionysus to disguise himself as a maenad to infiltrate their revelry, it becomes apparent as soon as the king comes out in full cultic gear that the transformation involved more than just a new costume. The inspired state of maenadism that Pentheus now literally and symbolically wears – and which we saw the chorus introduce so powerfully in the parodos – has utterly entranced the king to the point of modifying his vision:[63]

[59] Eur. *Bacch*. 142–3. [60] Eur. *Bacch*. 705–11.

[61] *hHom*. 7.34–43. Compare *hHom* 1.A14 (West) which, though fragmentary, alludes also to Dionysiac plenitude, and, visually, as does the so-called Dionysus (Exekias) Cup (Attic black-figure kylix, *c*.530 BCE. Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich 2044). On the date of the seventh *Homeric Hymn* to Dionysus see Jaillard 2011, 133–4n2. On *automatos bios* in comedy, see Ceccarelli 1996.

[62] Bennett 2010.

[63] On Maenadism, see Dodds 1951, 270–82; Henrichs 1978; Bremmer 1984; Vernsel 1990, 133–50; Osborne 1997.

καὶ μὴν ὁρᾶν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
διπλᾶς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ᾽ ἑπτάστομον·
καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγεῖσθαι δοκεῖς
καὶ σῷ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
ἀλλ᾽ ἦ ποτ᾽ ἦσθα θήρ; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.

Look, I seem to see two suns in the sky! The seven-gated city of Thebes – I see two of them! And you seem to be going before me as a bull, and horns seem to have sprouted upon your head! Were you an animal before now? Certainly now you have been changed into a bull.[64]

To make sense of this part of the play, scholars have pointed to Dionysus' link to wine and attribute Pentheus' double vision to a state of intoxication. Yet Richard Seaford has also suggested that the sense of this passage relies on understanding the allusion to the role of the mirror in Dionysiac mystery cult.[65] Evidence from catoptric manuals supports Seaford's position. Catoptric texts attest to the use of mirrors for epiphanic purposes and one arrangement described, for example, makes specific reference to distorting human features and projecting bulls' heads.[66] Given this evidence, it is reasonable to see Pentheus' outburst here as a reference to the manufacture of a catoptrically manipulated epiphany used to make Dionysus appear as a bull.

The *Bacchae* began with Dionysus disguising himself in human form to appear in the mortal realm. Seeing and acknowledging the human Stranger as the god Dionysus is thus established as a premise for the play. As the tragedy progresses, the vocabulary of Dionysiac epiphany in enriched by having him enact a variety of miracles centred around spontaneity and plenitude to mark his presence in different ways. In the course of these manifestations, the chorus become increasingly eager to see the god in his most godlike form, and by the fourth *stasimon*, there is a direct appeal for Dionysus to appear before them, precisely alluding to the many shapes that he might take:

[64] Eur. *Bacch*. 918–22.
[65] Seaford 1987; 1996, 223; 1998. See too de Grummond 2002.
[66] Ps-Hero *Catoptr*. 18. Compare Ps-Hero *Catoptr*. 24, which explains how to use a mirror to project some unexpected image chosen in advance (discussed further on pages 113–16). We might add too the fresco from the villa of the mysteries in Pompeii, which seems to be showing some sort of catoptrically manufactured epiphany (cf. Bur 2020, 116–17).

φάνηθι ταῦρος ἢ πολύκρανος ἰδεῖν
δράκων ἢ πυριφλέγων
ὁρᾶσθαι λέων.

Show yourself as a bull in appearance or a many-headed
serpent or a lion
blazing like fire![67]

It is plausible that here too there is an allusion to catoptric epiphany since we know that fashioning mirrors to produce many-headed figures was a favourite trick of catoptric manuals.[68] The *mēchanē* is the final dramatic answer to the chorus' appeal to the god to reveal himself where the man-made machine allows Dionysus, at last, to appear as unmistakably divine. The audience witness the mechanics of the machine working to present to them, as well as to Cadmus and Agave, the god whom we have seen enacting spontaneous movement of the man-made world. At last, the smiling mask of ambiguous personality when lifted up of its own accord on the *mēchanē* takes on an unmistakable divine character to all who witness it.[69]

The first lines of Dionysus' mechanical entry are unfortunately lost in an extensive lacuna.[70] The text picks up again with the god's prophecies to Cadmus on how the rest of the old man's life will play out.[71] Despite the lack of verbal cue securely placing Dionysus on the machine at this point in the play, the scholarly consensus is that the god entered for his final speech on the *mēchanē*.[72] Aside from his predictions for the future, Dionysus' mechanical arrival allows him to offer strong reproaches to Cadmus and Agave for being too late in their eventual understanding of the god that was before them.[73] Visually, however, Dionysus on the *mēchanē* does far more than this. Given the variety of epiphanic forms that have

[67] Eur. *Bacch*. 1017–19.
[68] For example, Ps-Hero *Catoptr*. 18; Anthem. *On Burning Mirrors* 6.
[69] While overwhelmingly accepted in modern scholarship at least as a possibility, the smiling mask has critics, most recently Billings 2017.
[70] The lacuna is thought to contain first a lament by Agave over the body of Pentheus, followed by the opening of Dionysus' speech. On the end of the play, see Segal 1999–2000.
[71] Eur. *Bacch*. 1330–43.
[72] Contra: Rehm 2002, 213, who sees Dionysus on the *theologeion*.
[73] Eur. *Bacch*. 1345.

been rehearsed over the course of the play, Dionysus appearing in a way that gave room for no doubt about his divinity finally allows divine retribution to be enacted and the play to come to a close. Though at this point, the audience has lost their superior epistemological position over the characters in the play in recognising the god,[74] the actor wearing a mask pretending to be Dionysus pretending to be a human is now indisputably divine.[75] If the mask facilitates the actor becoming the god, the *mēchanē* facilitates the (actor masked as a) god disguised as a mortal to (re)assert his divine status. *Bacchae*'s interest for the study of mechanical epiphany lies precisely in the way that the divine has taken so many forms throughout the course of the tragedy.[76] The epiphanies have expanded to occupy a great amount of the theatrical space: the orchestra floor, the auditory field, the *skēnē*, and now the semantically loaded, disconnected bubble of theatrical space which the mechanics of the crane are uniquely able to create. As in the case of *Helen*, a reading of the *Bacchae* that integrates the theological value of the mechanical epiphany renders the formulaic choral exodus less banal, instead allowing *Bacchae* to close with one last final nod towards the many *morphai* of the divine.[77]

As well as the waves of epiphany within the play, the context of the Great Dionysia suspended layers of Dionysiac epiphany over the spectators' viewing experience of the play too.[78] As we have seen, *Bacchae* revolves around recognising divine manifestations of Dionysus – the most theatrical of which the god orchestrates through harnessing the unique spectacle offered by the *mēchanē* to authenticate divine epiphany – and the dangers that failing to recognise the god might provoke. This plot is embedded within a festival whose ultimate framework is also an epiphanic experience of Dionysus, based around commemorating the deity's first appearance to the Athenians. On that initial instance, the god was not smoothly integrated into the city at all. Rather, failing to

[74] Compare Foley 1980, 131.
[75] On the ambiguity and ambivalence of the mask in the *Bacchae*, see Vernant 1985.
[76] Note too Mueller 2016 on mimesis, costume, and Dionysiac epiphany. She there argues rightly that even the decapitated head at the end is meant to be epiphanic in the way it reminds us of images of the god through the tragic mask (70). Compare Chaston 2010, 179–225.
[77] Eur. *Bacch*. 1388–92. Seaford 1996, 257. [78] Compare Vernant 1985.

properly venerate the deity, all Athenian men were afflicted with a terrible, incurable disease on their genitals. The cure, an oracle pronounced, was to hold the god in all reverence, notably by publicly constructing and displaying *phalloi* in honour of the god.[79] The aetiological myth of the Great Dionysia serves as a reminder that recognition of Dionysus is always a loaded moment which can end happily or tragically.[80] The festival itself re-enacts precisely this anxiety, as well as simultaneously displaying its solution. *Bacchae*, then, comments not just on the genre of tragedy, as various successful meta-tragic readings of the play have shown,[81] but also on the context in which it is performed, the context within which the audience presently sat and watched the dramatic performances, (the statue of) Dionysus himself sitting among them.

Mēchanē and Space: Euripides' *Heracles* and Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

Euripides' *Heracles* questions the notion of divine justice and presents competing wishes of individual gods upon the human world. The *mēchanē* plays a critical role in this exploration thanks to its ability to create an isolated bubble of disconnected space between unseen Olympus and the city on stage (Thebes), offering a unique dramatic location for theologising and deferring the moment of divine intrusion. The machine permits two supernatural figures – Iris and Lyssa – to hover unattached for the duration of a heated exchange regarding the appropriateness of an intervention on Hera's behalf. The audience are privy to divine deliberation of which the characters below remain unaware. The eventual departures of the goddesses in different directions offer a striking visual message on the divided will of the gods and the repercussions in the human realm.

Euripides' *Heracles* presents in two very clear halves. The play opens with the protagonist's family – his mortal father, Amphitryon, his wife, Megara, and his three sons – sitting as

[79] Csapo-Slater 1995, 110–11.
[80] Foley 1980, 119–120n21.
[81] Foley 1980; Segal 1982.

suppliants at the altar of Zeus Soter waiting for Heracles to return from his final labour in Hades to rescue them from their plight. As it seems increasingly unlikely that the hero will return, and given the threat of death upon them by the usurper Lycus, they decide instead to take their own lives.[82] Heracles does, in fact, return in time to save his family and exact vengeance on Lycus. The king's death is over quickly,[83] and not presented in a very dramatic fashion, but is necessary to conclude the first half of the action and to usher in the second half of the play with its new themes, far more pertinent to the discussion at hand.

There follows the third stasimon[84] and then the abrupt epiphany of Lyssa and Iris. To G. W. Bond, it is uncertain whether the deities were on the *mēchanē* or on the *theologeion* on the roof.[85] His hesitation may stem from Oliver Taplin's suggestion that the use of the roof would have allowed Lyssa and Iris to enter 'more abruptly'.[86] Mastronarde, on the other hand, in his investigation of the use of the *mēchanē* in Attic drama, sees the *Heracles* as one of the plays which offers clear verbal cues for the use of the machine.[87] He points out that it is nonsensical for the two deities to appear on the roof by a stair or ladder from behind the *skēnē* and then for them to depart the same way again since the text makes very clear that in their exits, one goddess is raised aloft (*pedairous'*) while the other descends (*dysomesth'*).[88] The *mēchanē* seems, then, to be the most logical choice in terms of stagecraft, and the ensuing discussion centred around the appropriateness of the crane to the visual epiphany might further substantiate Mastronarde's position. In terms of visual symbolism too, the rising and arcing motion of the *mēchanē* suited the cosmic nature of Iris as the rainbow, as it suited the twin stars, the Dioscuri, as well.

Heracles' unusual mid-play *ex machina* epiphany was no doubt intended to be highly dramatic. The internal audience, the chorus, are terrified by the apparition (*phasma*) visible above the house.[89] The chorus' panic and feeble attempts to run away are interrupted

[82] Eur. *HF* 284–7. [83] Eur. *HF* 749–54. [84] Eur. *HF* 763–814.
[85] Bond 1981, 280. [86] Taplin 1977, 445. Compare Barlow 1996, 159, who concurs.
[87] Alongside Euripides' *Andromache* and *Electra*. Mastronarde 1990, 268–9.
[88] Eur. *HF* 872, 874. [89] Eur. *HF* 817.

by Iris' address. She identifies herself and Lyssa, with whom she appears, and explains that they do not intend to hurt the city, but a single man. Lyssa is referred to as servant (*latris*) to the gods; this is not, as some have read it, a term of derision, but rather places respectful emphasis on the performance of service she owes to higher divine beings.[90] Indeed, Iris as a messenger of the gods is herself a kind of medium making the assemblage of the actor playing the divine being placed the *mēchanē* a strikingly clear example of the *deus ex machina* working through the logic of hypermediacy.[91] The emphasis on Iris as channel will be necessary given that her personal opinion on what is to follow is at odds with those of Iris and Hera, and she is thus forced to act in a way that is inconsistent with her personal beliefs. She acts here as an archetypal medium effacing herself in the service of those whose will she communicates, akin to the functioning of the crane itself.

Iris explains that the man they are after is Heracles, whom she and Hera are finally free to attack since he has finished his labours. As with the Dioscuri in the *Helen*, who would have interfered earlier had they not been overruled by fate and the other gods, *Heracles* again expresses that had Heracles not been under Zeus' divine protection the divine intervention would have come sooner.[92] This notion of delayed interference creates delimitations in the 'rules' of epiphany according to broader power structures in the supernatural realm. The individual whims of deities are, it seems, placed in a hierarchy, though this is not, as we are about to see, in order to protect mortals by any means. This detail tells us more about how Greek divinities are perceived to interact among themselves than it does about the relations of the Greek gods to their worshippers, despite the repercussions being played out in the mortal realm.

Iris also explains that Lyssa is due to inflict a child-killing frenzy onto Heracles as punishment for being the son of Zeus by another woman. According to Hera and Iris, if Heracles is not punished, the gods will be of no consequence (*oudamou*) and mortals will instead be great (*megala*).[93] Superficially, Iris'

[90] Bond 1981, 281–2. [91] On which see page 40. [92] Eur. *HF* 827–9.
[93] Eur. *HF* 841–2. On this use of the adverb with a verb of being (here understood), see Bond 1981, 284–5. Compare LSJ s.v. οὐδαμοῦ (2).

arguments appear to be about divine justice and keeping a balanced cosmic order, yet we, as an audience, are very conscious that Heracles has in fact done nothing wrong.[94] On the contrary, he is responsible for many praiseworthy actions on behalf of both humans and the gods, some of which we hear second-hand in the first stasimon, witness first-hand in the rescue of his family, and learn of again in Lyssa's speech advising against Hera and Iris' plan.[95] The questionable nature of Iris' statement is even clearer given the positive theodicy just expressed in the third stasimon. Faith in divine justice is a major theme of that choral song,[96] which brings into far greater relief the contrast with divine plans in the *mēchanē* scene.[97] Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the audience's knowledge of the Heracles myth would have been activated to think of moments when the hero possibly acted hubristically and thus deserved his fate.[98] But even Iris, on her own and on Hera's behalf, fails to present such arguments, for had Heracles truly committed *hybris* then Hera would have been entitled to punish him. Instead, *Heracles* dramatises the discrepancy between what is just and the tragic actions that follow by the two deities presenting their opposing points of view in the hermetically sealed space created by the *mēchanē*.

In response to Lyssa's praise of Heracles and word of warning, Iris snaps at Lyssa in agitated trochaic tetrameters not to try to correct Hera's and her *mēchanēmata*.[99] There must be a metatheatrical pun intended here: attention is being drawn to the way in which the mechanical intervention into the plot at this point is precisely the machination that will bring about a reversal of fortune for the protagonist. The moment of divine epiphany is presented as a clear fork in the road, and Lyssa is trying to set Iris on the more desirable track (ἐς τὸ λῷον ἐμβιβάζω σ' ἴχνος).[100] This is made visually evident by the presence of two deities with conflicting ideas on the issue who, despite having used the same mode of entry, depart in distinct manners. The *mēchanē* allows for

[94] Heracles will go on later in the play to make the same point himself: Eur. *HF* 1305–10.
[95] Eur. *HF* 348–441, 562–82, 849–53, respectively.
[96] Eur. *HF* 772–3 (in general), 801–4 (in Zeus specifically).
[97] On which see Bond 1981, xxi–ii, 279. [98] Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 365–6.
[99] Eur. *HF* 855. [100] Eur. *HF* 856.

the arrival of the goddesses, deliberation of the situation before them, contemplation of multiple possible resolutions to the human conundrum. The metaphorical *ichnos* to be chosen is rendered very real when Lyssa, agreeing against her will to enact unjust madness on Heracles, sends Iris back up to Olympus on foot while she herself then sinks down invisibly (presumably first onto the roof and then down into the *skēnē*):[101]

> στεῖχ' ἐς Οὔλυμπον πεδαίρουσ', Ἶρι, γενναῖον πόδα·
> ἐς δόμους δ' ἡμεῖς ἄφαντοι δυσόμεσθ' Ἡρακλέους.
>
> Lift your noble feet, Iris, and make your way up to Olympus!
> I shall go down invisible into the house of Heracles.[102]

As a whole, the *ex machina* scene of *Heracles* dramatises divided divine will, which is why it would not have been appropriate for Hera herself to have been sent. A single deity epiphany would not have been able to illustrate the tensions of divine justice in the way that Iris and Lyssa do. In order to show this division in divine opinion, the *mēchanē* is employed to physically detach the goddesses from the setting of Thebes. The crane is used simultaneously to connect Olympus and Thebes as well as to create emphasis on the space between the two places. This speaks extraordinarily well to Aristotle's slightly later idea of *metaxy* in sense perception where it is precisely *distance* that makes perception possible.[103] While natural philosophers before him had stressed the importance of contact to explain sensation, Aristotle stressed heterogeneity between organ and medium. In the case of divine perception, it is rather unsurprising that a model of mediation that relies on distance and heterogeneity suits better since the entities to be bridged belong to completely separate ontological categories. The actual moment of divine epiphany in *Heracles* is quite literally suspended to emphasise the deliberations surrounding an epiphanic intervention that otherwise occur with mortal knowledge. The *mēchanē* is the ideal tool for the playwright to stage the 'functionings' of the epiphany which works as much in a literal sense – with the

[101] On her exit through a trapdoor, see Mastronarde 1990, 261–2.
[102] Eur. *HF* 872–3.
[103] Especially Alloa 2020.

visible mechanics suspending Iris and Lyssa – as it does to represent symbolically the interior mechanisms of divine intervention which rely on the baunastic and human to transmit the ephemeral divine.

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In Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Heracles intervenes *ex machina* at the very last minute to nudge the tragedy back onto the course of the familiar Greek myth and ensure the sack of Troy.[104] Overtaken by compassion for the crippled Philoctetes, Neoptolemus is about to disobey Odysseus and lead Philoctetes to his home in Oeta when Heracles appears in order to ensure that they head to Troy instead. This is one of the most consequential divine interventions in the corpus of extant tragedy in terms of plot, and in this sense it fits comfortably with the conventional use attributed to the machine by many scholars. In its structural function, Heracles' entrance in *Philoctetes* can be compared with the *deus ex machina* in Euripides' *Orestes*, for example, where Apollo's entrance is similarly used to guarantee that events will conform with the traditional story. Using the *mēchanē* to bring about a previously determined resolution does not, however, render it empty of other meanings. In *Orestes*, the *mēchanē* not only redirects action, but also creates authoritative sacred space given that the tragedy has escalated to the point of having human characters act as divine agents from the rooftop orchestrating the events around them.[105] I would like to suggest that the *mēchanē* in the *Philoctetes* also does more than alter the direction of the plot, and that Heracles' epiphany works with other spatial explorations within the play to introduce the vertical plane in

[104] I take as a given that Heracles appeared on the *mēchanē*. See Jebb 1932, 217, for whom Heracles perhaps appears on the *theologeion* because the entrance is not anticipated textually; Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 50, for whom the appearance of Heracles could, but need not, have been made *apo mēchanēs*; Webster 1970, 8, for whom Heracles probably appeared on the *skēnē* roof; Segal 1981, 359, for whom Heracles appears at the mouth of the cave, not on high; Mastronarde 1990, 283, for whom Heracles possibly appeared on the crane; Wiles 1997, 181, for whom there is no reason why Heracles should not stand on the *skēnē* roof; Rehm 2002, 151 for whom Heracles appeared on high (without further detail); Schein 2013, 334, for whom Heracles appeared on the roof of the *skēnē* but see also 5, 28n82. Regardless, these discussions often still refer to Heracles' entrance as a *deus ex machina*.

[105] For more on the *Orestes*, see pages 88–91.

a way which uniquely connects the protagonist Philoctetes to the demigod Heracles.[106]

The many myths surrounding the life of Philoctetes would have been familiar to an Athenian audience from archaic poetry as well as from various classical plays – including by Aeschylus and Euripides – which dealt with this tragic hero's story.[107] The major innovation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, however, was recasting Lemnos as a completely barren, uninhabited island.[108] This, combined with the unusual choice to employ only one *eisodos* – leading to and from the ship – helped to characterise the stage space as uniquely inhospitable: a literal dead end.[109] The Lemnos of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* was a place into which one would not want to venture deeper, and a place from which no one emerged, emphasising Philoctetes' confinement and isolation. Add to this the fact that the story revolves around getting Philoctetes (and Heracles' bow) *off* the island, and we appreciate how the audience are encouraged throughout the play to imagine *other* spaces which are not presented before them, but to which the plot connects them. Repeated references are made to Neoptolemus' home in Skyros, for example, as well as to Philoctetes' home in Oeta.[110] Above all, it is Troy that is mentioned without respite from the beginning to the end of the play.[111] *Philoctetes* generally exploits the tensions between seen and unseen spaces, and Heracles' mechanical epiphany again points laterally to the very same imagined spaces of Troy and Oeta[112] not simply for the sake of repetition, but to contrast with the unseen home of the gods from which he comes, which introduces the vertical axis into the spatial dynamics of the tragedy.[113] Troy is presented as a place that will finally offer Philoctetes relief

[106] For a summary of scholarly interpretations on the *deus ex machina* scene, which, it must be said, ignore the machine and its materiality, see Schein 2003, 28–9 with Schein's own view on 29–31.
[107] For full discussions, see Jebb 1932, ix–xxxiii; Webster 1970, 2–7; Schein 2013, 1–10.
[108] Schein 2013 7–8, 14–15. For space in *Philoctetes* in general, see Rehm 2002, 138–55.
[109] For discussion of the single *eisodos*, see Taplin 1987; Wiles 1997, 153–4. On Philoctetes' 'living death', see Segal 1981, 357–9.
[110] Soph. *Phil*. 239–40, 459–60, 969–70 (Skyros); 479, 490–2, 662–6, 729, 1212, 1399 (Oeta).
[111] Soph. *Phil*. 112–13, 196–200, 353, 548–9, 561–2, 570–1, 591–3, 603–21, 919–20, 941, 997–8, 1174–5, 1296–8, 1329–46, 1363–4, 1376–7, 1392.
[112] Soph. *Phil*. 1423–4 and 1430, respectively.
[113] On the *eisodoi* and the *skēnē* connecting seen and unseen spaces, see Padel 1990, 343–6.

from his diseased leg, and as a city that will fall to the Greeks when Heracles' bow kills Paris. The spoils of this victory will lead Philoctetes back to his home town of Oeta at last.[114] The constant references to Oeta in *Philoctetes* should be read not merely as the desperate calls of a crippled protagonist yearning for home, but also as a way to draw links between the mortal Philoctetes and the divine Heracles. The mythological pasts of the two characters are intimately connected through location since Philoctetes' home was the site of Heracles' last labour and death.[115]

If their pasts are connected through horizontal space, the futures of the two heroes are connected by vertical space, and Heracles on the *mēchanē* is able not just to allude to or introduce this new axis into the plot, but to create it before the eyes of the audience as a final manoeuvre in the play's exploration of space.[116] Though all *ex machina* interventions introduce the vertical axis and tend to have an element of prophecy, Heracles' epiphany is different in that he uses his own life as mimetic exemplum for how Philoctetes' will end. The life of Heracles, which passed through labours to eternal glory, is the predicted pattern of Philoctetes' life:

> καὶ πρῶτα μέν σοι τὰς ἐμὰς λέξω τύχας,
> ὅσους πονήσας καὶ διεξελθὼν πόνους
> ἀθάνατον ἀρετὴν ἔσχον, ὡς πάρεσθ' ὁρᾶν.
> καὶ σοί, σάφ' ἴσθι, τοῦτ' ὀφείλεται παθεῖν,
> ἐκ τῶν πόνων τῶνδ' εὐκλεᾶ θέσθαι βίον.

And first I will tell you of my fortunes, of how many labours I suffered and endured to achieve eternal glory, as you can see. You too, know it clearly, are due to suffer the same, to make your life glorious after these labours.[117]

Linked through labours (*ponoi*), the future apparently holds a life of great renown (*euklea bion*) for Philoctetes just as it has delivered eternal glory (*athanaton aretēn*) to Heracles.[118] In the

[114] Soph. *Phil*. 1425–30.
[115] On which see Jebb 1932, vii–ix. Compare Webster 1970, 56, who stresses why Heracles is an appropriate intervention for Philoctetes given their close relationship in the past.
[116] On vertical space in Greek tragedy, see Wiles 1997, 175–86, especially 181–4 on the *mēchanē*.
[117] Soph. *Phil*. 1418–22.
[118] On the link between Heracles and Philoctetes see Winnington-Ingram 1980, 300–1; Segal 1981, 346–7n49; Seale 1982, 45; Alessandri 2009, 120–1; Schein 2013, 334–5.

ordinary myths surrounding Philoctetes' life, this was not what followed for that hero,[119] but it was perhaps picked up as a theme in Sophocles' lost *Philoctetes at Troy*.[120]

Regardless of what the future held for Philoctetes, Heracles' claims in the *deus ex machina* scene rely on his previous apotheosis. Heracles' new-found divine status has already been referred to at various points in the play alongside Philoctetes' help in achieving it.[121] *Athanaton aretēn* in the passage just cited can also mean 'the glory of immortality' where the double meaning works with the ambivalence of Heracles' divine status. Yet part of the point here must surely be that Heracles' apotheosis is being presented as a 'technological' transformation of sorts which the *mēchanē* facilitates. The mechanical epiphany reinforces the attainment of apotheosis visually, and a touch meta-theatrically: [having suffered and endured this many labours] I achieved eternal glory/the glory of immortality, *as you can see*. Since Heracles' divine status has been achieved, and we now know that Philoctetes' projected future involves his gaining eternal glory as well, the *mēchanē* works to connect the present with the future, and Heracles with Philoctetes, along the vertical plane so that Heracles *is* the future of Philoctetes. Heracles makes reference to this axis immediately upon his descent, stating he has come from his home in heaven for Philoctetes' sake (τὴν σὴν δ' ἥκω χάριν οὐρανίας / ἕδρας προλιπών).[122] The reference to this distant, unseen space puts the action into a broader cosmological context quite suddenly. Yet the epiphany of Heracles on the *mēchanē* does not just manifest the god before the eyes of Philoctetes, it also works as a vision in which he sees himself reflected: a novel Sophoclean touch to the notion of divine epiphany.

There is every chance that the connection between Heracles and Philoctetes was theatrically represented too, perhaps by mimicry of gesture or position, or similarities in mask design or costuming. Certainly, the playwright exploited the ability of the *mēchanē* to create an unattached sacred space which Philoctetes, it is implied, will eventually have a share of, in one form or another. It would

[119] Winnington-Ingram 1980, 302; Rehm 2002, 145–6. [120] Sutton 1984, 104.
[121] Soph. *Phil*. 670, 726–9, 801–3. [122] Soph. *Phil*. 1413–14.

make far less sense if Heracles were making such claims simply on the *skēnē* roof. It is not often in tragedy that characters in the play are deemed to be able to access the vertical plane (Medea is another interesting case treated later in this chapter)[123] and this choice serves at least in part to alert us to complexities of the integration of deified heroes within the divine–human paradigm of ancient Greek religion. Throughout the play, Philoctetes' movements were restricted by disease and, as we have seen, the stage space intentionally confined. Unexpectedly, the mechanical epiphany opens a hitherto unknown axis and Olympus is the first entirely new space in the tragedy which will be accessible to Philoctetes. This works directly thanks to the parallels drawn with Heracles in the *deus ex machina* scene. Further, the obvious mechanics of the crane serve to point to a new dimension of space which the tragedy has so far excluded from its explorations along the horizontal axis.

As pointed out by Charles Segal, given his condition and the nature of the island of Lemnos, Philoctetes relies on various *technēmata* for survival.[124] The Odysseus of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* is the *polymēchanos* par excellence who, against Neoptolemus' wishes, wants to use *technē kakē* to get Philoctetes' bow.[125] It is precisely the tension between *technē* and *bia* as appropriate ways to obtain their end goal that Neoptolemus and Odysseus cannot agree on.[126] Is there, then, some dramatic irony in the *mēchanē* – a most ingenious example of *technē* whose status as such is precisely flagged by the visible mechanics – being the ultimate solution to getting Philoctetes to acquiesce in taking the bow to Troy? Such a reading could support the view of scholars who, emphasising the doubling of the actor, see Heracles as Odysseus' final cunning trick.[127] Alternatively, and more convincingly in my opinion, one could see this as a comment on divine *technē* as the ultimate tool: more ingenious than any mortal *technē*, stronger than any human *bia*, and more persuasive than any *logos* given that what Heracles offers from the *mēchanē* is authoritative *muthos*.[128]

[123] See pages 91–101. [124] Soph. *Phil*. 32–6.
[125] Soph. *Phil*. 80, 88, 926–7, 1135. Segal 1981, 295–6. [126] Soph. *Phil*. 55–120.
[127] See especially Errandonea 1956 with the discussion in Rehm 2002, 151–2.
[128] Soph. *Phil*. 1410, 1417.

Mēchanē and Ontology: Euripides' *Orestes* and *Medea*

Euripides' *Orestes* picks up where his *Electra* would have finished had it not been for the mechanical intervention of the Dioscuri in the latter play.[129] Lacking the advice given by Castor and Pollux, Orestes has not fled to Athens to clutch the *bretas* of Athena and purify himself and has not been acquitted for his actions. The opening of *Orestes* stages a frightful alternative reality: Orestes is being tortured by visions of the Furies[130] and the citizens of Argos will soon vote that he and his sister be stoned to death as punishment for matricide.[131] The siblings are allowed instead to take their own lives, and they plan, with their loyal friend Pylades, to take Helen down with them, until Electra comes up with a plot twist. She suggests holding Hermione hostage to force Menelaus to change the vote of the people, allowing Orestes and herself to go free. Having failed to kill Helen, who was whisked away by the gods at the crucial moment, Pylades and Electra armed with torches, and Orestes with a knife to Hermione's throat, then appear above the house.[132] Finally, however, Orestes is upstaged by Apollo and Helen's entrance on the *mēchanē*, which creates for the audience a spectacular and clearly stratified tableau of gods and humans on which to end.[133]

When the action of the *Orestes* had escalated to such a level that neither the orchestra nor the *skēnē* roof sufficed to contain it any longer, the *mēchanē* offered the playwright a space superior to the roof in quality and in height in order to demarcate the divine. This reinforces the preceding discussion concerning how the *mēchanē*'s unique spatial and material characteristics proved theologically and dramatically useful. As with the *Helen* and the *Medea*, the *mēchanē* in the *Orestes* serves to differentiate who is god and who is human and thus the knowledge and actions appropriate to each category. The *ex machina* epiphany of the *Orestes* does not simply contrast divine knowledge and human ignorance, however, but also stages the issue of humans simulating divine epiphany, an issue pertinent both within the play and, more broadly, within contemporary Greek religion.

[129] On the intervention of the Dioscuri in *Electra*, see especially Andújar 2016.
[130] Eur. *Or.* 34–7, 255–75. [131] Eur. *Or.* 943–7. [132] Eur. *Or.* 1574–5.
[133] Some find Eur. *Or.* 1631–2, which points to Helen's presence, suspect.

That Orestes is adopting divine posturing through his intervention on the roof is evident not just from his elevated position, but also by the stopping action of his initial utterance, and by his general attempts at concluding the drama.[134] More subtly, however, Helen's miraculous vanishing earlier in the play becomes vital to understanding the eventual resolution between Orestes' simulated epiphany and the true, mechanical, epiphanic form. Helen's fate is the subject of the heated exchange between Orestes from the roof and Menelaus below. It allows a hierarchised discrepancy of knowledge to be set up between Menelaus and Orestes, mimicking the distance between divine knowledge and mortal ignorance so typical to *deus ex machina* scenes (including this one later). Menelaus is incorrectly convinced that Helen has been killed by Orestes; Orestes knows that this is not the case. The importance of Helen's fate in distinguishing the two levels of human and pseudo-divine knowledge helps to explain her prominence in Apollo's *ex machina* speech when, finally, a third and conclusive solution is put forth by Apollo. The three theories concerning Helen speak directly to the three visual ontologies: Menelaus who, from the ground, thinks Helen is dead;[135] Orestes acting as god from the *skēnē* roof who knows he did not manage to kill Helen, and thinks she has inexplicably vanished;[136] the *mēchanē* and Apollo who, standing beside Helen herself, explains that she has been divinely extricated from the mortal world in order for a cult to be set up in her honour.[137]

While the play ultimately discredits Orestes' simulated epiphany, it also entertains the notion enough to create three, and not two, levels of knowledge. At first his arrival might seem legitimate, halting the action as an *ex machina* deity does,[138] but the physical threats – to smash Menelaus over the head with a stone, for example[139] – promptly reveal the failure of his simulation. The fact that Orestes stands with a knife at the throat of his future bride

[134] Eur. *Or.* 1567 'You there, don't lay a finger on those fastenings.' Compare Mastronarde 1990, 262–3; Porter 1994, 257–8; Dunn 1996, 159–60.
[135] Eur. *Or.* 1554–60.
[136] Orestes does not mean line 1580 (εἰ γὰρ κατέσχον μὴ θεῶν κλεφθεὶς ὕπο. i.e. that he was robbed by the gods of the chance to kill Helen) literally, though the turn of phrase turns out to be apt.
[137] Eur. *Or.* 1634–7.
[138] Eur. *Or.* 1567; compare Eur. *IT* 1435; Eur. *Hel.* 1642.
[139] Eur. *Or.* 1569–70.

further dismantles any pretence at divine omniscience.[140] Questioning divine intervention in the human realm is pertinent to the plot of the play as a whole, most of all as it relates to Apollo's role in Orestes' matricide.[141] When the issue is finally resolved in the *ex machina* scene, Orestes breathes a sigh of relief in the realisation that Apollo is not a *pseudomantis* and that his prophecies have not come from some avenging spirit (*alastōr*).[142]

Ultimately, Orestes' interference is convincing because he looks just like (an actor playing) a god might look. In other words, Orestes' simulated epiphany works because Greek gods were often anthropomorphic. The danger in such a system is, as we saw in *Helen* and *Bacchae*, misidentifying divine presence, or, worse and as dramatised here, falsifying divine presence.[143] As in the case of the Dioscuri in *Helen*, in *Orestes* the mechanical is the authentic epiphany and the mechanics are what authenticate the epiphany, differentiating Orestes from Apollo. The *mēchanē* and the human body of the masked actor become one ontological unit in an *ex machina* epiphany, giving a different visual quality to the anthropomorphised divine appearance, a visual quality which Orestes lacks. One cannot ignore the meta-theatrical dimension of all of this since, at the end of the day, Apollo too remains an actor 'playing god'.[144]

Simulated epiphanies would have fitted comfortably within the religious expectations of the audience. Enacted epiphanies are attested from the Bronze Age until the time of Pausanias, at least. The best-known case is Phye's false epiphany as Athena, accompanying Peisistratus' triumphant return to power at Athens in 556/5 BCE.[145] There, Herodotus' incredulity in relating the story is key, alerting us to the fact that performed epiphanies did provoke some ambivalence in Greek culture. Equally, the Athenians are said to have accepted the spectacle entirely. As noted by scholars, enacted epiphanies such as Phye's rely on the

[140] Eur. *Or.* 1653–5.
[141] Apollo is blamed at Eur. *Or.* 28–31, 75–6, 285–6, 416–20, 590–9, 955–6.
[142] Eur. *Or.* 1667–9.
[143] For more on this theme and the role of technology, see Part III 'Faking the Gods'.
[144] This speaks to Sourvinou-Inwood's 2003, 461 assessment of *ex machina* epiphanies always being both real and staged.
[145] Hdt. 1.60.

common practice of ritual re-enactment undertaken by priestly personnel.[146] The very same plurality of viewing and of reconciling of ontologies that underscored simulated epiphanies was at stake in theatrical epiphanies. Greek worshippers were evidently comfortable with resolving these modes of viewing. In staging this simulated epiphany beside (or below, as it were) the genuine epiphany, *Orestes* is doing in theatrical terms what we find on contemporary visual evidence such as votive reliefs and vases which, as has been increasingly acknowledged, depict in complex ways the concerns surrounding humans, gods, their interaction, and their depiction.[147] By virtue of the complexity that the plot affords the visual scenario, *Orestes* explores the authenticity of anthropomorphic divine presence and what it means to *be* divine. In such an exploration, the object of the *mēchanē* becomes a vital marker of genuine divine presence, used to tease out the ontologies of gods, of humans, of actors.

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Euripides' *Medea* staged in 431 BCE is one of the earliest plays in which the use of the *mēchanē* can be securely attested.[148] We must remember, however, that though *Medea* is an early play in the extant corpus, Euripides had already been competing in dramatic performances for twenty-four years by the time he staged this tragedy, and that there is every chance that audiences were already familiar with the *deus ex machina* when they saw this play.[149] Based on later uses of the machine in Euripidean tragedy, scholars stress that the *Medea* in many ways subverts expectations and thus relies on the audience understanding its more 'orthodox' uses. Although one of the aims of this part of the book is to challenge the notion of orthodoxy when it comes to the use of the *mēchanē*, there is still some value in delaying the discussion of this play until last, so as both to understand better the arguments of past scholars,

[146] On enacted/simulated epiphanies see Sinos 1993; Harrison 2000, 90–2; Platt 2011, 15–16; 2018 241–4; Petridou 2015, 43–9, 142–68; Koch Piettre 2018. As it relates to tragedy, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 460–1.

[147] Compare pages 91–2 with especially Platt 2011, 2014 and Marconi 2011. Compare Hölscher 2010; Klöckner 2010.

[148] For discussions, see Cunningham 1954, 152; Mastronarde 1990, 264–6.

[149] On dating the *mēchanē*, see page 35n1.

and to bring elements into question with the support of the previous case studies.

The mechanical appearance of Medea on the crane at the very end of the play allows her to escape from Corinth to Athens after having committed the atrocious murders of her children and Jason's bride-to-be. Euripides' use of the *mēchanē* in *Medea* is unique, most strikingly because it is the only extant tragedy that puts a human character on the crane. This fact, combined with its prominence in the Aristotelian discussion, has meant that this *deus ex machina* scene has received more detailed attention than others. Scholars have overwhelmingly argued that Medea's placement on the machine allowed her as a human agent to perform the 'normal' functions of a *deus ex machina*[150] – wrapping up the plot, explaining the aetiology of cult, predicting the future of the characters, etcetera.[151] As this discussion has tried to show, however, the *mēchanē* did more than simply fulfil functional roles. Further, there are various instances in the extant corpus of tragedy when characters fulfil these 'normal' functions of the *deus* without being on the *mēchanē*. In the *Heraclidae*, for example, Eurystheus before his death gives instructions for his burial, reveals a Delphic oracle which gives his buried corpse protective powers for Athens in future wars, and forbids a cult of his grave.[152] In the *Hecuba* Polymestor prophesies the transformation of Hecuba and the deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra.[153] In the *Heracles*, Theseus is introduced late in the play to help to bring the plot to a close, and the last part of Theseus' closing speech to Heracles acts in many ways as the *deus ex machina* does in other plays: Theseus tells Heracles to follow him to Athens to be cleansed of the killings and to receive a portion of his friend's wealth, and goes on to explain the aetiology of the cult of Heracles in Athens.[154] The formal structural features which scholars typically attribute to the *deus ex machina* do not need the mechanical, and the inclusion of these elements in the exodus of the *Medea* therefore cannot account for why Medea needs to be 'on high'.

[150] Knox 1979, 303; Mastronarde 1990, 266; 2002b, 32.
[151] Mikalson 1991, 65–7; Dunn 1996, 26–8; Brulé 2015, 165–6.
[152] Eur. *Heracl*. 1028–44. [153] Eur. *Hec*. 1259–79. [154] Eur. *HF* 1322–39.

Scholars have also argued that, since the *mēchanē* was a location otherwise reserved for deities, the use of the machine was intended to endow upon Medea some sort of divine or at least 'quasi-divine' status, allowing her to become a *deus*.[155] This reading of the use of the *mēchanē* allows scholars to maintain various consequent views: that Medea visually symbolises the moral chaos and disintegration of all normal values which the play as a whole produces; that the escape demonstrates the complicity of divinity (and particularly Zeus) in Medea's revenge; that Medea is divine retribution incarnate, punishing Jason's betrayal of oaths taken in the name of gods; that Medea is a vengeful individual who has lost her humanity by her cruel action against her own offspring.[156]

While it is conceivable that ancient tragedians used the *mēchanē* for apotheosis scenes, the extant corpus contains no such instances. Closer inspection, as noted by Bernard Knox, reveals a preference for *not* showing apotheosis scenes on stage.[157] Peleus in the *Andromache* is told that he will become a *theos*, and is given a rendezvous for this to happen, but the actual event does not take place on stage.[158] Helen at the end of her eponymous play is given a similar assurance by the Dioscuri but, again, it does not occur on stage.[159] In *Philoctetes*, as we have seen, Heracles' prior apotheosis is an implied model for Philoctetes' future, which will, in fact, never eventuate, on stage or otherwise. The closest to an onstage apotheosis is Helen in *Orestes* when she appears with Apollo during the *deus ex machina* scene on her way to rejoin Castor and Pollux.[160] She is entirely silent in this scene, however (a fact which itself casts some doubt over her appearance on the *mēchanē* at all), and though the epiphany does discuss Helen's future divine status, Apollo is overwhelmingly concerned with Orestes' fate following the matricide. While this does not strictly rule out the

[155] For example, see Knox 1979, 303: 'This is a place reserved in Attic tragedy for the gods'; Meagher 1989, 123: 'Her final theophany reveals her acquired inhumanity'; Segal 1996, 22: 'quasi-divine power'; Mastronarde 2002b, 342: 'the scenic arrangement raises Medea to a quasi-divine status'; Griffiths 2006, 77: 'This spatial arrangement makes it clear that Medea is no longer a mortal'; Konstan 2007; Vasillopulos 2014, 44 'Medea as a reluctant divinity'.

[156] See, for example, Knox 1979; McDermott 1989; Kovacs 1993; Segal 1996; Mastronarde, 2002, 372–3.

[157] Knox 1979, 304. [158] Eur. *Andr.* 1256. [159] Eur. *Hel.* 1666–9.

[160] Eur. *Or.* 1629–37.

possibility that Euripides pioneered the *mēchanē* for apotheosis in *Medea*, there are, I think, more compelling readings.

Maurice Cunningham, in an early article, offers a sophisticated interpretation of Medea's *ex machina* scene, following a generally laudable methodology which places emphasis on sight as the main conveyer of meaning in ancient drama. Further, he is nuanced in what he means when he says that putting Medea on the *mēchanē* makes her a *theos*, noting that this does not, contrary to our modern religious assumptions, necessarily suggest the idea of good but rather of overwhelming power without responsibility.[161] Most importantly, Cunningham's argument is that Medea has suffered a loss of humanity but, critically, she has not been fortunate enough to become a goddess. Cunningham rightly argues that Euripides offers an image of the woman converted into 'something of the awful, implacable, inhuman character of a *theos*', but that this remains a visual metaphor and that the play ultimately seeks to show that Medea has *not* truly become divine.[162] She is, as we know, not off to Olympus but is going to go to Athens to live with Aegeus.[163] I would add to Cunningham's argument that Aegeus' already minor role in the play would be completely redundant if Medea's final appearance were a true apotheosis for in that case, she would not need a Greek city to offer her asylum after the murders.

Whether or not we accept the notion that Medea becomes divine at the end of the play, the mere fact that the question of her divinity can be debated ultimately depends on the *mēchanē*'s potential for creating alternative stage spaces and, foremost among these in Greek tragedy, are the frequent links made with Olympus. In a way, then, this 'anomalous use' in the *Medea* justifies our current exploration of the *deus ex machina* as an underappreciated form of epiphany, even if this does not mean that she was presented as a divine figure. On the contrary, the choice of staging brings into relief how, though she might try to act like one, Medea is *not* a goddess. Her imperatives do not have the same force as those of a divinity who appears on the *mēchanē* epiphanically, for example.

[161] Cunningham 1954, 158. [162] Cunningham 1954, 159–60. [163] Eur. *Med*. 1385.

While 'Cease your toil!' (παῦσαι πόνου τοῦδ')[164] is a familiar divine command from on high, the later imperatives 'Go home and bury your wife!' (στεῖχε πρὸς οἴκους καὶ θάπτ' ἄλοχον)[165] are more the embittered barks of a former lover than they are divine orders. If Orestes uses the roof space as his arena for 'playing god' in *Orestes*, *Medea* takes this notion even further in having Medea on the *mēchanē* try to do the same. Ultimately, however, the point to be made is that divinity is not merely about the space you inhabit or the commands that you hurl. The crane is the perfect tool for this kind of pointed commentary on the nature of human and divine thanks to its ability for suspension: it literally holds up the character to the audience for their contemplation in an area of theatrical space that is neither the human realm, visible below, nor the unseeable realm of Olympus. In the conflation of the *mēchanē*'s spatial and ontological functions we see, as in *Heracles*, the way that the 'space between' (or *metaxy*) is an integral feature of this object as a religious medium.

Medea's humanity is not the only noteworthy element to this play's use of the *mēchanē*. The deployment of the machine is also unique in that it subverts a clear expectation set up by Euripides; at just the moment when the audience expects Medea's dead children to appear on the *ekkyklēma*, the corpses instead appear aloft with their murderer mother.[166] This makes the use of the *mēchanē* in this play – especially the way that the crane extends scenic space and imbues it with meaning – an even stronger way of achieving theatrical surprise than in other plays. The audience, whose gaze is firmly directed down into the orchestra, waiting to see the corpses of the dead children break through the doors of the *skēnē* on a rolling platform – and no doubt wondering how on earth Medea will make her escape from the house – suddenly and unexpectedly has a novel spatial dimension imposed upon them. Bearings need to be readjusted, as do the expectations of what this intervention means. The very first thing Medea does atop the *mēchanē* is draw firm attention to the way that she is not physically where the characters in the play, and the audience in

[164] Eur. *Med*. 1319. [165] Eur. *Med*. 1394.
[166] Collinge 1962, 171; Mastronarde 2002b, 372; Rehm 2002, 254; Taplin 2007, 119.

turn, expect her to be. She does this by asking why the gates to the house are being rattled to look for her.[167] 'Look!' she may as well have called out, 'I'm up here, not down there where you're looking!'.

Medea's appearance *ex machina* not only emphasises the peculiar place she finds herself, but also, through repetition of the notion that she is out of touch, stresses the physical remoteness which the *mēchanē* offers her: 'But your hand can never touch me: such is the chariot Helios my grandfather has given me to ward off a hostile hand.' (χειρὶ δ' οὐ ψαύσεις ποτέ· τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς Ἥλιος πατὴρ δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἕρυμα πολεμίας χερός.)[168] This denial of haptic contact in the context of the *deus ex machina* is seen in other tragedies too, and usually stresses the distinct ontology of the divine. Here, however, the *mēchanē*'s height put Medea quite literally out of reach of punishment at the hands of Jason and Creon. The space which the *mēchanē* creates is not, as in other plays, a channel or passage between realms of human and divine but should instead be considered a moral and ideological free zone where Medea can, controversially, justify the infanticide that she has committed in terms of the unfairness that she herself experienced at the hands of Jason. Medea's engagement with Jason from atop the *mēchanē* is far more protracted an interaction than any other extant *ex machina* deity in other plays. Whatever one may make of Euripides' view on the many issues that come up in the final exchange between the couple – Greek versus barbarian values, the role of men and women in society, divine justice, sexual politics, grief and vengeance, the sanctity of marriage and of vows – the *mēchanē* allows for the discussion to be staged after the infanticide without Medea's life being at risk, and thus without Jason's power over Medea rendering the whole scene moot. Instead, she is afforded some power of her own by being able to deny Jason the final contact with his children that he desires.[169] The extension and definitive rupture of space which this *ex machina* facilitates adds another dimension to the explorations of space discussed earlier in this chapter. While the *mēchanē* supporting Iris and Lyssa in *Heracles* also creates isolated space,

[167] Eur. *Med.* 1317–18. [168] Eur. *Med.* 1320–2. [169] Eur. *Med.* 1403–4.

connections are explicitly drawn back up to Olympus, and down to the action on stage.

Another unusual feature of the *mēchanē* in *Medea* is the appearance of the corpses of her children in the chariot of Helios with Medea.[170] We should probably not imagine a full-blown chariot suspended on the crane but rather the crane decorated in some way or another to represent a chariot.[171] Medea's reliance on the divine chariot of her grandfather is poignant. Had he wanted to, Euripides could presumably have had Medea whisk herself away using either her own magic or some unspecified divine influence of Helios.[172] Invocations are made to Helios at various points in the play both by Medea and by the chorus.[173] Medea's escape was visually unique in that she and the corpses of her children were not suspended, giving an impression of unattachment as was probably the case in other *ex machina* interventions. Instead, the protagonist relies on the magical chariot made by divine *technē* (Hephaistos' according to later traditions)[174] as an external mechanism with her guiding deity in absentia. Medea is presented not as divine, but as having access to a divine instrument. In this she resembles Achilles equipped with arms forged by Hephaistos, Perseus with the shield of Athena, or Cassandra who received the gift of prophecy from Apollo. Compared to the other plays we have discussed so far in this section, *Medea* re-characterises the *mēchanē* from a mechanism used by the divine for epiphanic intervention to a divine creation

[170] Eur. *Med*. 1320–1.

[171] Though there is no explicit description in the play, an anonymous hypothesis and two scholia (1317, 1320) testify that Medea is riding a chariot drawn by winged serpents. See Page 1938, xxvii; Cunningham 1954, 152; Lamari 2017, 146. This is then picked up by later ancient writers and has prompted further scholarly commentary since the publication in the 1980s of South Italian vases from around 400 BCE which appear to show such serpent-drawn chariots. These vases differ from Euripides' treatment of the scene, however, in lacking the corpses of the children inside the chariot (Mastronarde 2002b, 377–8; Taplin 2007, 114, 117–25; LIMC s.v. *Medeia* 35–9).

[172] On the relative restraint in the use of Medea's magic by Euripides, see Mastronarde 2002b, 24–5.

[173] Eur. *Med*. 406, 746, 752, 764, 954 (Medea), 1251–60 (Chorus). Helios had no cult in classical Greece except in Rhodes but there is nothing un-Greek in Medea's invocations to Helios in this play. See Mastronarde 2002b, 24.

[174] Ovid *Met*. 2.104.

and tool of the gods which can be lent to humans as needed or deserved.

Medea's appearance *ex machina* in Helios' chariot also introduces imagery of East and West and focalises the audience's attention on transitions between these realms. When the theme of Medea as barbarian has been studied, the *mēchanē* usually fits into the picture only as a space fit for an 'other': a woman, a witch, and a barbarian.[175] In this vein, Denys Page long ago argued that it was because Medea was not Greek that she could kill her children and escape in a magic chariot.[176] Medea's foreignness is certainly a key theme in the play: she sets herself up as a foreigner in contrast to the Corinthian women of the chorus whom she addresses early on;[177] she calls herself a *barbaros*;[178] Jason repeatedly calls attention to her non-Greek ethnicity.[179] Further, however, frequent allusions are made to the crossing of the boundary that divides the world of Medea from Greece.[180] Rather than simply being 'allowed' aloft on the *mēchanē* because she is 'other', we should see the *mēchanē* as part of the thematisation of East–West in the play and its emphasis on *transitioning* across boundaries. The nurse begins the play's prologue in the following way:

> Εἴθ' ὤφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος
> Κόλχων ἐς αἶαν κυανέας Συμπληγάδας,
> μηδ' ἐν νάπαισι Πηλίου πεσεῖν ποτε
> τμηθεῖσα πεύκη, μηδ' ἐρετμῶσαι χέρας
> ἀνδρῶν ἀριστέων οἳ τὸ πάγχρυσον δέρος
> Πελίᾳ μετῆλθον.

If only the Argo's hull had not flown through the land of Colchis into the dark-blue Symplegades! If only the pine trees had never been felled in the glens of Mount Pelion and furnished with oars the hands of the great men who at Pelias' command set forth in quest of the Golden Fleece![181]

Full of desperation in her contrary-to-fact wish, the nurse expresses a desire first, that the Argo had never made its voyage to Colchis and the Symplegades, and second, that the ship had

[175] For a summary of the scholarship on this issue, see Mastronarde 2002b, 22–8.
[176] Page 1938, xxi. [177] Eur. *Med*. 222–6, 255–8. [178] Eur. *Med*. 591.
[179] Eur. *Med*. 536–7, 1330–1, 1339. [180] Eur. *Med*. 2, 210–12, 431–5, 1262–4.
[181] Eur. *Med*. 1–6.

never been constructed at all. Successfully crossing the Symplegades or 'Clashing Rocks' constituted the first of the triumphs of the Argonautic expedition which eventually led to the capture of the Golden Fleece. As well as introducing relevant history to contextualise the story and showing the emotional state of the situation Medea finds herself in, the play begins with an image of violent rocks which spontaneously clash together and a description that plunges us into an unknown location from which, according to the nurse's stitching together of the story, Medea has been brought to Corinth into her current plight. The Chorus pick up the image of the Symplegades again in the fifth stasimon in a periphrastic reference to Medea: 'you who left behind the inhospitable strait where the dark blue Symplegades clash' (κυανεᾶν λιποῦσα Συμπληγάδων πετρᾶν ἀξενωτάταν ἐσβολάν).[182] The Symplegades were in origin a mythical obstacle to traverse from the everyday world to a distant magical realm.[183] At the same time, these rocks also guarded the entrance to the Black Sea and prevented the passage between East and West, at least until Jason's ruse, thanks to Phineus' advice. The Symplegades thus serve to remind the audience of Medea's foreignness and, further, draw attention to the way that her origins are bound up with the transgression of boundaries: East and West, human and supernatural.

The second part of the nurse's wish forefronts how crossing this boundary was achieved by a man-made vessel, the Argo, whose hull as much as oars were constructed out of pinewood by the hands of great men. The play will end with the image of Medea spontaneously transported to Athens and a new phase of life on Helios' winged chariot. Jason foreshadows Medea's true means of escape when he says that 'she will have to hide herself beneath the earth or soar aloft to heaven' (δεῖ γάρ νιν ἤτοι γῆς γε κρυφθῆναι κάτω ἢ πτηνὸν ἆραι σῶμ᾽ ἐς αἰθέρος βάθος).[184] In the actual *ex machina* moment, there is no need to mention the specific construction of the chariot since instead the deployment of

[182] Eur. *Med*. 1263–4.
[183] Heubeck and Hoekstra 1989, 121 commentary on Odyssey 12.55–72 (with further bibliography); Mastronarde 2002b, 162.
[184] Eur. *Med*. 1296–7.

the *mēchanē* enables the audience to visualise the parallel themselves. The play's bookends are telling. *Medea* starts by describing the Argo's travels to Colchis through the metaphor of flight (*diaptasthai*) and, although Mastronarde notes that such an image for the propulsion of a ship is traditional,[185] this does not stand in the way of the image of the metaphorically winged vehicle being picked up in the form of the chariot *ex machina* at the end of the play. The Symplegades and the Argo 'flying' through the rocks are the point of origin for the play, the chronological beginning of the Argonautic expedition, the geographical border of East and West, and the mythical boundary between the everyday and the supernatural. This frames the fact that Medea was forced to leave her home in Colchis – the territory at the eastern extreme of the Black Sea – and has ended up exiled westwards in Corinth where she now finds herself, distraught. *Medea* then closes with the chariot of the Sun God – in which Helios is known to traverse East to West daily – transporting Medea out of Corinth to Athens, where she will find asylum and a(nother) new beginning. The image of the Symplegades, then, introduces the themes of East and West (or Greek and Barbarian) and mortal and supernatural, as well as emphasising the passages between these apparently somewhat malleable concepts. That the Argo was built in order to traverse this boundary speaks directly to Medea's escape specifically upon Helios' chariot, upon the *mēchanē*. These are not just metaphors. Vehicles offer a set of 'cultural techniques' for navigating the relationship between ontological realms in ancient Greek literature and thought more broadly: from Hades' chariot and psychopomp Charon's boat to the chariot of Plato's *Phaedrus*, for example. In Kittlerian terms, media are here providing the models for theological concepts and, crucially, Euripides makes sure to count the *mēchanē* within this set of cultural techniques.[186]

The play ends with an altered version of the choral anapaests that we have seen bring *Helen* and *Bacchae* to a close.[187] The first

[185] Mastronarde 2002b, 161–2.
[186] 'We knew nothing about our senses until media provided models and metaphors' or the idea that technological media are integral to development of abstract cultural concepts; see Kittler 2010, especially 34–5.
[187] Eur. *Med*. 1415–19.

line is πολλῶν ταμίας Ζεὺς ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ instead of the usual πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων. This subtle shift changes the preoccupation from a general concern about divine form, to a specific comment on Zeus as dispenser. Ordinarily, as we have seen, the first line of the formula is key in referring explicitly to the *deus ex machina* as a specific form of divine epiphany into the human realm, but here, since Medea's placement on the *mēchanē* is not epiphanic as in the other plays, Euripides deploys a first line that emphasises the role of Zeus instead.[188]

[188] Compare Kovacs 1993, 65–7.