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## THE SYMBOLISM OF SPACE IN EURIPIDEAN CHORAL FANTASY ( *HIPP.* 732–75, *MED.* 824–65, *BACCH.* 370–433)

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## THE SYMBOLISM OF SPACE IN EURIPIDEAN CHORAL FANTASY (*HIPP.* 732–75, *MED.* 824–65, *BACCH.* 370–433)\*

The ‘escape fantasy’ is a typical feature of Euripidean choruses. In response to the terrible events of the play, the Chorus envisage an alternative location of peace and beauty.<sup>1</sup> These passages have an obvious function in manipulating the mood of the audience: the sense of impending doom is heightened by contrasting the unfolding horror on stage with an idyllic fantasy world. As such, they are similar to the technique Sophocles uses of preceding disaster with a wildly optimistic ode.<sup>2</sup> To cease our analysis of the escape ode at this level, however, is to reduce its role to an essentially decorative one. If the purpose of these passages is simply to set up an attractive fantasy, their details become irrelevant: at most, they provide a general contrast with the tone of the onstage action.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I will examine three escape fantasies which tend to suffer from this treatment: *Hippolytus* 732–75, *Medea* 824–65, and *Bacchae* 370–433. In these odes, the content of the choral fantasy is frequently disregarded. Scholars tend to regard them as fulfilling an aesthetic rather than a thematic function, and so make little effort to look any deeper. Once we treat the content of the fantasy seriously, however, it can cast new light on our understanding of the plays. In the passages I will treat here, a sustained engagement with the imagery of the fantasy reveals not only that it is linked to the rest of the play but that it carries out important interpretative work. These fantasies are not just escapism: they give us insight into some of the plays’ most central issues.

To connect the idealized locations with the action onstage, Euripides draws on the connotations that space holds in Greek thought. As we shall see, space is symbolically charged, and the locations the odes describe are overlaid with a deeper significance. In the cases I will examine, the Choruses describe their idealized locations in terms which draw on a common poetic topos: describing the wilderness in erotic terms. The location of an idealized meadow (*locus amoenus*) is frequently used in Greek poetry to evoke an ambience of eroticism. Yet the presence of *locus amoenus* imagery sits oddly with the contexts of these odes. When we read the odes in the light of this symbolism, however, we find that it is this apparently misplaced *locus amoenus* imagery which enables us to understand their wider purpose in the plays.

In the cases that I will discuss, the erotic implications of the odes enhance our interpretation of how Aphrodite and sexual desire are presented. While the presence of erotic motifs has been noted in these odes, most scholars resist connecting the

\* I would like to thank Bill Allan, Judith Mossman and the anonymous reader for their invaluable feedback, without which this paper would be much the poorer.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. *Bacch.* 370–433; *Hel.* 1451–1511; *Hipp.* 732–75; *IT* 1089–1152; *Med.* 824–65. *Ion* 1074–89 and *Tro.* 197–229 share certain characteristics with these escape fantasies, though less unambiguously belong to the same category.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Soph. Ant.* 1115–54; *Aj.* 693–718; *Trach.* 633–62.

<sup>3</sup> A welcome break from this trend is R. Padel, ‘“Imagery of the elsewhere”: two choral odes of Euripides’, *CQ* NS 24.2 (1974): 227–41, who analyses the escape fantasies in *Hippolytus* and *Helen*.

Aphrodite of the odes to ideas about sexuality in the play. They therefore read the *locus amoenus* as representing a fantasy ideal: a tamed and pleasant version of Aphrodite, representing grace and poetry rather than passion and sexuality.<sup>4</sup> But when we read these passages in the light of their lyric prototypes, the sexual nature of the imagery becomes more apparent. In all the plays, *locus amoenus* imagery is linked to and enhances the themes of the play. This strand of imagery is the key to connecting the ideal location with the 'real world' of the play. In all three cases a contrast is drawn between the perfect world of the escape fantasy and the complicated nature of the onstage action. Thus in *Hippolytus* the tranquil wedding garden of Zeus and Hera stands in opposition to the terrifying force of Eros elsewhere in the play, while in *Medea* the positive erotic associations of the *locus amoenus* form a contrast with the destructive presentation of Medea's love for Jason. In the case of *Bacchae*, the Chorus's use of erotic language underpins their wish to be allowed to perform Dionysiac worship and is set against Pentheus' intolerance of their activities. Yet as we shall see, the ideal nature of the escape location can also be undermined, to create an ironic effect. In addition, the *locus amoenus* imagery provides us with a mechanism for interpreting important themes in each play: the role of sexuality in human life (*Hippolytus*); the prospect of Medea's escape (*Medea*); the true nature of Dionysiac worship (*Bacchae*). The fact that the *locus amoenus* is a *topos* familiar to the audience from other poetic forms makes it an effective device, for Euripides can exploit the audience's preconceptions about the symbolism of *locus amoenus* imagery in order to highlight what is significant about its uses in the tragedies.

#### EXPLORING THE *LOCUS AMOENUS*

In order to analyse Euripides' use of the motif, we must first examine the *topos* in its own right, and explore its existence in other poetic genres. I should clarify that, while the Latin term *locus amoenus* can refer to any pleasant rural location, for the purposes of this article I use it specifically to refer to the eroticized 'meadow of love' of Greek poetry, found in a wide range of poetic forms and genres.<sup>5</sup> Certain features of the *locus amoenus* are standard: it is a meadow (κήπος or λειμῶν), it is shady, well watered, fertile and cooled by gentle breezes. The meadow is conceptualized as existing between the harsh wilderness of the mountains and the 'tamed' nature of cultivated land. As such, it occupies a liminal space, incorporating fertility without the regulation imposed by agriculture. Its vegetation is that of the wilderness rather than the community: it produces grass, and wild fruit and flowers, in place of grain. The meadow thus symbolizes sexuality without the regulation imposed by socialization: the perfect location for seduction. The meadow is virginal but it is not chaste: it represents virginity only in so far as it is about to be lost.<sup>6</sup> The image of a young girl alone in a flowery meadow, therefore, becomes the archetypal way of beginning a

<sup>4</sup> e.g. R.P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus: An Interpretation of the Bacchae* (Cambridge, 1948), 91; C.P. Segal, *Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' Bacchae* (Princeton, 1982), 312 on *Bacchae*; P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Ithaca, 1980), 116–17 on *Medea*.

<sup>5</sup> P. Haß, *Der locus amoenus in der antiken Literatur: zu Theorie und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs* (Bamberg, 1998) offers an exhaustive analysis of *locus amoenus* imagery in both Greek and Latin literature.

<sup>6</sup> This strand of Greek thought is well known. For further discussion, see J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London, 1983), 135–42; C.P. Segal, *Tragedy and Civilization: an Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 27–9.

story involving seduction, and is used as such throughout our literary sources (see below).

Setting a sexual fantasy in an idealized wilderness location not only allows the poet to draw on the symbolism of natural language, but also presents the seduction as safe, removed from the hazards and opprobrium a real-life seducer would face.<sup>7</sup> An archaic law, ascribed to Solon, defined those women who fell outside the law's protection (and so with whom a man could safely copulate) as 'those who sit in a brothel, or those who walk to and fro in the open'.<sup>8</sup> The importance of space in defining female availability may explain why mythological seductions are so rarely set in the home, and where they are (e.g. Paris and Helen) the focus of the moral opprobrium is as much around breach of hospitality as the seduction itself. Thus, by locating sexual activity in the meadow, the poet reduces possible accusations of inappropriate behaviour, as well as tying into the symbolic function of natural imagery.<sup>9</sup>

The use of this imagery in poetry dates back as far as our earliest texts. One obvious prototype is the *Hieros Gamos* in the *Iliad* (14.294–351). Zeus and Hera are the archetypal married couple, but the scene is cast as one of seduction rather than married love. Hera borrows Aphrodite's band to seduce Zeus; he comments that his desire is as strong as when their sexual activity was illicit and hidden (295–6), and compares it to his feelings for other females whom he has seduced (315–28). The imagery of seduction is completed by Zeus' rejection of Hera's request that they make love in their marital bedchamber, instead choosing the wilderness (337–45). The imagery surrounding the sex act links human sexuality to natural flourishing: the earth puts forth grass and wild flowers, and the lovers are surrounded by dewy moisture (346–51). Another prototype is the rape of Persephone, who is abducted while gathering flowers in an isolated meadow (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 2–16). Persephone's presence in the meadow hints at her readiness for marriage, as exemplified by flower-picking festivals across Greece for girls on the brink of marriage.<sup>10</sup> The association of flower picking with sexual ripeness is made particularly clear in the *Hymn* by the detail that it is the narcissus which Persephone picks which is trans-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Deacy, 'The vulnerability of Athena: *parthenoi* and rape in Greek myth', in S. Deacy and K.F. Pierce (edd.), *Rape in Antiquity* (London, 1997), 43–63, at 44–5; M.R. Lefkowitz, 'Seduction and rape in Greek myth', in A.E. Laiou (ed.), *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies* (Washington, DC, 1993), 17–37.

<sup>8</sup> *Dem.* 59.67; cf. *Lys.* 10.19, *Plu. Sol.* 23.1. *Men. fr.* 546 and *Xen. Oec.* 7.30 offer a similar perspective. See D. Ogden, 'Rape, adultery and the protection of bloodlines in classical Athens', in Deacy and Pierce (n. 7), 25–35 and R. Omitowoju, *Rape and the Politics of Consent in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2002) for the legal situation on rape and adultery. For female space, see Vernant (n. 6), 135–42 and J.N. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London, 1997), 73–8. Tragedy is of course something of an exception to the normal rules defining female space: cf. P.E. Easterling, 'Women in tragic space', *BICS* 34 (1987), 15–26. Nevertheless, we sometimes find a nod to reality when tragic females feel the need to justify their presence outside the house: e.g. *Eur. IA* 678–9; *Med.* 214–15; *Phoen.* 1275–7. For the conventions surrounding rape in tragedy, see A.H. Sommerstein, 'Rape and consent in Athenian tragedy', in D.L. Cairns and V. Liapis (edd.), *Dionysalexandros: Essays on Aeschylus and his Fellow Tragedians in Honour of Alexander F. Garvie* (Swansea, 2006), 233–51.

<sup>9</sup> It is noticeable that in poetry (particularly iambic) where the erotic encounter is portrayed as sordid and slightly comic rather than idealized, a different location outside the *oikos* is chosen: e.g. *Hippon.* 84 W is set on the floor of a house; *Archil.* 36 W outside but by a wall; *Ar. Thesm.* 489–9 by the altar outside the door to the house.

<sup>10</sup> See Strabo 6.1.5.33–8; Pollux 1.37; Paus. 2.35.5; Schol. *Ar. Ran.* 344 = *Soph. fr.* 89. For Persephone and the *Homeric Hymn*, see H.P. Foley (ed.), *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary and Interpretative Essays* (Princeton, 1994), 33–4.

formed into the gateway to Hades through which she is snatched (16–18). Persephone is only one in a series of mythological heroines abducted from a flowery meadow: Europa and Oreithyia, for example, suffer similar fates. The flower-picking motif, with Persephone as its exemplar, is deployed by later poets to encourage audiences to compare seduction scenes to their poetic archetype. For example, Theocritus presents Galatea as picking flowers when she is spotted by Polyphemus (11.25–7), thus enhancing the humour of the monstrous Cyclops participating in a typical seduction scene. Euripides portrays Creusa as picking flowers when she is raped by Apollo (*Ion* 887–96), thus implicitly contrasting the traditional motif of divine rape with the horrific way it is presented in this play.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Euripides presents his Helen as picking flowers when she is abducted by Hermes (*Hel.* 244–9), thus encouraging us to view her as a Persephone-like *parthenos* rather than the married woman she really is.<sup>12</sup>

As well as early hexameter, we find the motif in iambic and lyric, where it is particularly suited to erotic song. Archilochus' Cologne Epode (fr. 196a W) is set in an eroticized wilderness, where the imagery of natural fertility is allowed to blur into that associated with the erotic: Neobule's sexuality is called her 'flower' (*ἄνθος*, 27), and is described as 'over-ripe' (*πέπειρα*, 26), while the other girl's body is called the 'grassy gardens' (*σχήσω γὰρ ἐς προη[φόρους κ]ήπους*, 23–4). Sappho uses the motif particularly richly; indeed Demetrius goes as far as to associate it with all her poetry.<sup>13</sup> Her most extended treatment is in fr. 2 V, where she draws on the imagery to describe a shrine of Aphrodite: it has cool springs (*ἐν δ' ὕδωρ ψύχρον*, 5), gentle breezes (*αἶ δ' ἄηται | μέλλιχα πνέουσιν*, 10–11) and is filled with roses (associated with Eros) and apples, a fruit with strong erotic connections (*κελάδει δι' ὕσδων | μαλίνων, βρόδοισι δὲ παῖς ὁ χάρος | ἐσκίαστ'*, 5–7).<sup>14</sup>

Ibycus uses the imagery in his description of the garden of the Virgins (*Παρθένοι*) (fr. 286 *PMGF*). After setting up the image of the peaceful garden, filled with fruit, flowing water, shade and flowers, the singer contrasts it with his own experience of *eros* (*ἐμοὶ δ' ἔρος | οὐδεμίαν κατάκοιτος ὦραν*, 6–7). The speaker draws on other *topoi* of erotic poetry to describe his own emotions: cool water is replaced by fire, and gentle breezes by storm winds (7–10). Here the audience's knowledge of the erotic nature of the *locus amoenus* enables them to realize that what is being described is two opposed aspects of *eros*. Finally, we find the motif frequently exploited in tragedy: two obvious (and non-controversial) examples are Deianira's 'garden of youth' speech

<sup>11</sup> Cf. K.H. Lee (ed.), *Euripides: Ion* (Warminster, 1997) on 888–90; J. Larue, 'Creusa's monody: *Ion* 859–922', *TAPhA* 94 (1963), 126–36.

<sup>12</sup> For Helen and Persephone, see W. Allan (ed.), *Euripides: Helen* (Cambridge, 2008) on 244–9; H.P. Foley, 'Anodos dramas: Euripides' *Alcestis* and *Helen*', in R. Hexter and D. Selden (edd.), *Innovations of Antiquity* (New York, 1992), 133–60; B. Zweig, 'Euripides' *Helen* and female rites of passage', in M.W. Padilla (ed.), *Rites of Passage in Ancient Greece: Literature, Religion, Society* (Lewisburg, Pa., 1999).

<sup>13</sup> *εἰσὶν δὲ αἱ μὲν ἐν τοῖς πράγμασι χάριτες, οἷον νυμφαῖοι κῆποι, ὕμεναῖοι, ἔρωτες, ὄλη Σαπφούς ποιήσις* ('Sometimes charm is in the subject itself, such as gardens of the nymphs, wedding songs, love affairs, all Sappho's poetry'), *On Style* 132

<sup>14</sup> The Greek word *μῆλον* can in fact refer to any tree-fruit (e.g. quince, pomegranate). A few examples of the fruit's erotic connotations are its use in erotic spells (see C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 69–80); its association with Aphrodite (Plut. *Mor.* 138D; Artem. 1.73; Paus. 2.10.5; Ovid *Met.* 10.644–8); the tradition of the bride eating a quince on arrival at the groom's house (Plut. *Sol.* 20.3); Persephone's acceptance of a pomegranate seed which finalizes her status as the bride of Hades (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 371–4). J. Trumppf, 'Kydonische Äpfel', *Hermes* 88 (1960), 14–22 discusses apples as a motif in early Greek erotic poetry.

(Soph. *Trach.* 144–50), and Aphrodite's speech on the nature of love in Aeschylus' fragmentary *Danaids* (Aesch. fr. 44).<sup>15</sup>

The *locus amoenus* is thus a common motif, and is found in a range of poetic forms. However, at its root it is more than simply a poetic *topos*: the assimilation of human and natural fertility is bound into Greek thought and ritual at a more fundamental level, and we find a host of metaphors expressing this.<sup>16</sup> The presence of the metaphor in the words of the betrothal ceremony indicates quite how standard it was: the bride is given 'for the ploughing of legitimate children' (ἐπ' ἀρότῳ γνησίῳν παίδων).<sup>17</sup> The idea is further incorporated into the ritual of the wedding ceremony, where a young boy crowned with thorns represents the rejected life of the *parthenos*, while the bride herself carries a vessel for roasting barley.<sup>18</sup> The metaphor also derives from the importance of space in Greek perceptions about women: since women were defined by the physical space they occupied, the locations women are found in take on sexualized overtones. Thus, the *locus amoenus* in poetry develops a commonplace of language into a more elaborate piece of free-standing imagery.

This helps to explain why the imagery is so widespread, for it was not perceived as bound into a particular poetic genre. The audience's familiarity with the motif means that from an early date the poets presuppose a knowledge of it, and play with the imagery to create effects. Thus, Ibycus' use of the imagery requires that the audience recognize the language applied to the apparently virginal garden to be actually sexual, in order to connect the two apparently irreconcilable halves of the poem. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* uses the *topos* to bring out the humour of Aphrodite's seduction of Anchises. While Anchises perceives himself to be playing the traditional male role in a *locus amoenus* scene, the audience realizes that the power balance is reversed in this case. Aphrodite appears before him alone, in the form of a 'maiden not yet broken in' (παρθένος ἀδμήτη, 82) and claims to have been abducted from her group of playmates (119–21), but it is in fact Anchises who is isolated and vulnerable, as he is wandering alone in the wilderness, abandoned by his companions (76–80). Anchises is seized by *eros*, but rather than the usual pattern where the man makes sexual advances and the woman demurs, he treats her with caution, and it is Aphrodite who first introduces the possibility of sex, by suggesting they should marry. It is only after this encouragement that both parties revert back to normal gender roles, with Anchises suggesting they have sex immediately, and Aphrodite appearing chaste and modest (150–5). Meadow imagery is thus an effective poetic tool, and from our earliest examples we find the poets experimenting with how it can be deployed. The shared awareness of the imagery creates a complicity between poet and audience, and the poet can exploit this to create sophisticated effects.

<sup>15</sup> Deianira expresses her fear for Heracles by contrasting the innocent and protected life of the young girl (compared to a plant growing in a sheltered garden) to the responsibilities faced by the married woman. The *Danaids* fragment comes from Aphrodite's defence of her powers, and describes love as the force underpinning the natural order, explaining earth, sky, rain and natural growth as motivated by *eros*.

<sup>16</sup> See J.J. Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1990), 181–3; A. Carson, 'Putting her in her place: woman, dirt and desire', in D.M. Halperin, J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin (edd.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, 1990), 135–70, at 144.

<sup>17</sup> This wording is found at Men. *Pk.* 435–6 and Luc. *Tim.* 17. However, the description of marriage as ploughing is found earlier in Greek literature: e.g. Aesch. *Eum.* 658–61; Soph. *Ant.* 569; Eur. *Phoen.* 18.

<sup>18</sup> Pollux 1.246, 3.37–8; Zenobius 3.99; *Suda* ε 3971 = ii.491.20 Adler; Harpokration s.v. λικυφόρος. See Carson (n. 16), 152–3.



TWO MEADOWS: *HIPPOLYTUS* 732–75

The second stasimon of the *Hippolytus* (732–75) is an archetypal example of the Euripidean escape fantasy. It is located immediately after one of the play's most emotionally intense moments: Phaedra, betrayed by her Nurse and abused by Hippolytus, has announced her resolve to kill herself and left the stage to do so. The Chorus respond to this horror by envisaging an alternative location of peace and beauty, and wish that they could go there, imagining flying away like birds (732–41). The ode's most obvious function is in contrasting the Chorus's fantastical vision with the grim realities we see onstage: the wish for divine transformation merely highlights the Chorus's inability to escape, while the harmony of the divine garden emphasizes the brutality of the interactions between the mortal characters. As Ruth Padel notes in her discussion of the ode, this contrast is created within the details of the ode's language.<sup>19</sup> Thus, for example, the imaginary flight of the Chorus is echoed by the 'wings' of the ship that bring Phaedra to Athens (λευκόπτερε Κρησία | πορθμύς, 752–3). Each journey culminates in a wedding, but the harmonious marriage of Zeus is set against the destructive marriage of Phaedra, described in terms of evil and disease which contrast with the idealized language of the ode's first half.

Upon closer examination, however, the ode's relevance goes beyond simply creating a contrasting set of moods, and it is an exploration of the *locus amoenus* motif that unlocks its thematic significance. The ideal destination that the Chorus imagine for their escape is the garden of the Hesperides, which they describe in terms which evoke the lyric *topos* of the erotic meadow:

Ἐσπερίδων δ' ἐπὶ μηλόσπορον ἄκτάν  
 ἀνύσαιμι τὰν αἰοιδῶν,  
 ἴν' ὁ πορφυρέας πον-  
 τομέδων λίμνας  
 ναύταις οὐκέθ' ὄδῶν νέμει,  
 σεμνὸν τέρμονα κυρῶν  
 οὐρανοῦ, τὸν Ἄτλας ἔχει,  
 κρηναί τ' ἀμβρόσιαι χέον-  
 ται Ζηνὸς παρὰ κοίταις,  
 ἴν' ὀλβιόδωρος αὔξει ζαθέα  
 χθλῶν εὐδαιμονίαν θεοῖς.

(742–51)

I wish I might get to the apple-bearing shore of those singers the Hesperides, where the lord of the sea no longer allows sailors passage over the purple waves, fixing the holy boundary of the sky, which Atlas holds. Immortal streams flow beside the marriage bed of Zeus, where the sacred earth, giver of richness, increases the prosperity of the gods.

The description of the garden emphasizes the natural fertility of the earth (ὀλβιόδωρος, 750) and the gentle streams that flow through it (κρηναί τ' ἀμβρόσιαι, 748). The relevance of the erotic meadow is highlighted by presenting the garden as the location for the *Hieros Gamos*, thus alluding to the mythological prototype for the sexual symbolism of nature imagery.<sup>20</sup> The apples of the Hesperides thus take on a further resonance, for, as we have seen, apples symbolize the erotic and are a common motif in the *locus amoenus*. In this case the fruit's sexual connotations are enhanced by their relevance to the myth of the *Hieros Gamos*, since the apples of the Hesperides

<sup>19</sup> Padel (n. 3), 227–35.

<sup>20</sup> See M.R. Halleran (ed.), *Euripides: Hippolytus* (Warminster, 1995) on 748–51.

were the wedding gift of Gê to Zeus and Hera.<sup>21</sup> The Chorus's fantasy, therefore, is a return to the original model for sexual union: a natural and uncomplicated form of sexuality. Zeus himself represents an alternative form of divine power, for he stands above the partisan conflicts of other deities in tragedy, and unlike the other immortals we see in *Hippolytus*, does not become embroiled in human affairs. Thus, the Chorus's desire to escape to the wedding garden implies a desire to normalize gender relations and reminds the audience that sexuality can be a positive force instead of the destructive one it has become in the play.

The *locus amoenus* as a symbol within the second stasimon, then, picks up on the theme of troubled sexuality which runs throughout the play. The Chorus's depiction of an idealized form of sexual union here forms a contrast with their previous ode, which describes *eros* as a threatening and violent force (525–64).<sup>22</sup> In place of a mythological *exemplum* demonstrating the harmonious effects of sexual union, we are given stories of its destructive effects: the sacking of Oechalia because of Heracles' desire for Iole (545–54) and the death of Semele because of her affair with Zeus (559–62). Similarly, in place of the cool streams of the *locus amoenus* we find fire and smoke (530–2, 551), and in place of tranquil breezes, stormy blasts (563). As in the Ibycus fragment discussed above, two sets of *topoi* associated with sexuality are set in contrast: the play's action demonstrates the enactment of one set, while leading its audience to question whether the other exists outside of the fantasy world that the Chorus create.

The *locus amoenus* imagery further gains in significance through its echoing of similar language earlier in the play. In particular, the image of the sheltered garden of the Hesperides mirrors Hippolytus' own description of an untouched meadow to convey his devotion to Artemis (73–81). As various commentators have noted, Euripides here evokes the *locus amoenus* in order to undermine it, for Hippolytus' understanding of the symbolic nature of the wilderness lies in contrast to the poetic tradition.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the *locus amoenus* is usually a location for seduction, Hippolytus attempts to turn it into a place of chastity, debarring entry to those who are not *sôphrôn* (78–81). Yet the meadow's erotic nature is highlighted by the presence of the bee: a symbol of Aphrodite elsewhere in the play (564).<sup>24</sup> Hippolytus' attempt to appropriate the *locus amoenus* for his own ends thus symbolizes his dangerous misunderstanding of the nature of Aphrodite. The mention of Phaethon's death in the opening of the second stasimon (738–41), also as a result of a chariot accident, prepares us for the punishment that awaits Hippolytus because of this.

In contrast, the Chorus's vision of the garden of the Hesperides presents a model of the wilderness which is both protected and sexual: chaste in order to ensure that the loss of chastity occurs correctly. The meadow is guarded both by the Hesperides themselves and by the Lord of the Sea who denies passage to sailors (744–5), thus placing the garden outside the reach of ordinary mortals. Nevertheless, the garden's

<sup>21</sup> *FGrH* 3F16: see W.S. Barrett (ed.), *Euripides: Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964) on 742–3.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Halleran (n. 20) on 525–64.

<sup>23</sup> See C.P. Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow: Art, Gender, and Commemoration in Alcestis, Hippolytus, and Hecuba* (Durham, NC, 1993), 140; J.M. Bremer, 'The meadow of love and two passages in Euripides' *Hippolytus*', *Mnemosyne* 28 (1975), 268–80; G.B. Walsh, *The Varieties of Enchantment: Early Greek Views of the Nature and Function of Poetry* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 121–3; L.A. Swift, 'Mixed choruses and marriage songs: a new interpretation of the third stasimon of the *Hippolytos*', *JHS* 126 (2006), 125–40, at 127–9.

<sup>24</sup> See Halleran (n. 20) on 115. Sapph. fr. 146 V provides some evidence for bees as an erotic image.



role in commemorating the union of Zeus and Hera also confirms its erotic status. Whereas Hippolytus' concept of the meadow is that of eternal chastity, the garden of the Hesperides reminds us that the *locus amoenus* is protected to allow a positive form of sexuality, not to deny it altogether. Thus, the protection of the garden is reminiscent of the imagery which Sappho and Catullus apply to brides on their wedding day: a fruit or flower protected from the reach of grasping hands, but ultimately accessible to the right picker (Sapph. fr. 104ab V; Catul. 62.39–47).

The escape fantasy of *Hippolytus*, then, picks up on the way that wilderness imagery is used elsewhere in the play, and in doing so invites us to draw conclusions from the comparison. The idealized nature of the *locus amoenus* that they describe stands in stark contrast with our experience of *eros* in the play: the fantastical nature of the ideal is shown up by the dysfunctional sexuality which the play presents. However, the contrast with Hippolytus' meadow points to a more positive reading, reminding the audience of a better model for sexual relationships. The Chorus's desire to escape is rooted in a desire to return to a harmonious and balanced form of sexual relations, encapsulated by the image of the sheltered yet erotic garden. The wedding of Zeus and Hera suggests divine sanction and support for human sexuality in a play where Aphrodite is elsewhere presented as a terrifying force. *Hippolytus* presents us with two opposed yet equally inappropriate forms of sexual behaviour: Hippolytus' excessive chastity and Phaedra's excessive lust. Yet the Chorus points to the possibility of a way of managing sexuality that lies between these dangerous extremes, and which will incur the blessing rather than the wrath of the gods. The fantastical and exotic nature of the meadow they describe reminds us that this vision is an impossibility within the malfunctioning tragic world. However, the audience's awareness of the imagery from the pre-tragic tradition also highlights the gap between the world of tragedy and the audience's own world, where the *locus amoenus* imagery is a normal way to describe human sexuality. Thus, the Chorus's escape fantasy reminds the audience of the existence of an alternative model of sexual behaviour, enshrined in the myth, ritual, and poetry familiar to them from everyday life. Within *Hippolytus*, such ideals may seem naive optimism, and the destructive sexuality of the play indeed encourages us to consider the difficulty of achieving a harmonious form of *eros*. Nevertheless, the second stasimon also points to the possibility of this balance and harmony in ritual and poetry elsewhere, thus providing a positive *exemplum* which stands in contrast to the negative lessons we learn from the play's characters.

#### VIRTUOUS APHRODITE?: *MEDEA* 824–65

If the second stasimon of *Hippolytus* is an archetypal escape ode, the third stasimon of *Medea* (824–65) represents a twist on the theme. In functional terms the ode is an escape fantasy: the Chorus imagine an idealized location and set it in contrast with the events of the play, using this as a device to criticize Medea's actions. However, rather than describing a distant and fantastical location, the Chorus idealize Athens, a city which is not only central to the audience's real-life experience but also directly connected to the action of the play.<sup>25</sup> The Athens ode thus undercuts the usual

<sup>25</sup> Scholarly unease as to whether the ode is relevant has been largely put to rest, following various demonstrations of its function in the play as a whole: cf. e.g. H. Musurillo, 'Euripides' *Medea*: a reconsideration', *AJPh* 87.1 (1966), 52–74, at 60–1; J.R. Dunkle, 'The Aegeus episode and the theme of Euripides' *Medea*', *TAPhA* 100 (1969), 97–107; P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Ithaca, 1980), 116–17; G.W. Most, 'Two problems in the third stasimon of Euripides' *Medea*', *CPh* 94.1 (1999), 20–35, at 20–1.

convention that the fantasy location should be unattainable, for while the Chorus present the city as an idealized dream, we have already seen Medea prepare her escape route to Athens, and we know that her criminal behaviour will be no obstacle to her acceptance in the peaceful city the Chorus praise so highly. The ode, then, gestures towards its own status as an escape fantasy and thus enhances the worrying tension created by our awareness of Medea's escape.

The Athens ode is much discussed, but its use of lyric *topoi* is consistently overlooked; upon closer examination, however, imagery of the *locus amoenus* here too lies at the heart of the ode's thematic function.<sup>26</sup> The ode opens with praise of Athens in familiar terms: an allusion to the foundation myth of the Erechtheid house with emphasis on the autochthony on which the Athenians prided themselves (824–6), followed by praise of Athens' *sophia* and her special link with the Muses (826–34). The mention of the Muses is a commonplace of praise, but in view of the clustering of *locus amoenus* imagery that follows, it also alerts the audience to the pre-existing poetic tradition, encouraging them to connect what they hear with their knowledge of similar motifs elsewhere. This is further suggested by the use of *ἀβρώς* to describe the Athenians (830): a word often associated with sexual desirability and a favourite word of Sappho who is, as we have seen, particularly connected to the *locus amoenus*.<sup>27</sup> These clues thus act as markers to prepare us for the build-up of the imagery in the first antistrophe:

τοῦ καλλινάου τ' ἐπὶ Κηφισοῦ ῥοαῖς  
τὰν Κύπριν κλήζουσιν ἀφυσσαμέναν  
χώρας καταπνεύσαι μετρίας ἀνέμων  
ἡδυπνόους αὔρας· αἰεὶ δ' ἐπιβαλλομένην  
χαίταισιν εὐώδη ῥοδέων πλόκον ἀνθέων  
τᾷ Σοφίᾳ παρέδρους πέμπειν Ἴρωτας,  
παντοίας ἀρετᾶς ξυνεργούς. (835–45)

The story goes that Aphrodite, as she was drawing water from the stream of the beautiful Cephissus, blew gentle sweet-smelling breezes upon the land. Always wearing a fragrant garland of roses on her hair, she sent the Loves to sit beside Wisdom, to work together in every form of excellence.

Again we find the features of the erotic meadow: a place associated with Aphrodite and marked by flowing water, gentle breezes, and flowers. The language is conventional for describing a shrine of Aphrodite, yet it is striking that Euripides uses it in an ode whose function is to praise the *polis* of Athens and considers it important enough that he devotes an entire stanza (half of the description of Athens) to it. It seems likely, therefore, that *locus amoenus* imagery and what it symbolizes is central to how we should interpret the ode, as well as to the play's concept of Athens more broadly.

As we saw in *Hippolytus*, the presence of *locus amoenus* imagery invites the audience to understand the passage as a comment on good and bad models of sexuality. Here the connection is made explicit by the ode's association of Athens with Aphrodite. Aphrodite is presented as integrally connected to the city: her presence in

<sup>26</sup> Pucci (n. 25) does refer to the *locus amoenus* in his discussion of the ode, but his definition of such imagery omits its essentially sexual nature. He emphasizes the virginal nature of the garden (enhanced by the autochthonous origins of the Athenians), but, as we have seen, the lyric prototypes for the *locus amoenus* stress that the garden is only virginal in the sense of virginity which cannot last.

<sup>27</sup> *ἀβρός* (in various forms) appears at Sapph. frs. 2.14, 44.7, 58.25, 100.1, 128.1, 140a.1 V.

the ode is couched in terms reminiscent of an aetiology or foundation myth, as the Chorus suggest that the goddess's special care for the city is a well-known story (κληίζουσιν, 836). As in *Hippolytus*, we find a contrast between the harmonious Aphrodite of the Athens ode and the presentation of sexual desire elsewhere in the play.<sup>28</sup> *Eros* is blamed for the destructive events of the play: it is Medea's passion for Jason which drives her to leave her home and to commit murders on his behalf (6–10, 433–5, 483–7), while it is the corruption of this passion into hatred that leads to the play's horrifying conclusion. Indeed, Jason goes as far as to outrageously deny all credit to Medea for her past actions, instead attributing them to the motivating power of sexual desire (527–31). Moreover, like *Hippolytus*, the ode which precedes the escape fantasy presents a vision of Aphrodite more grounded in the world of the play, presenting the terrifying power of *eros* (627–62). The Chorus begin by expressing their concern about the dangers of excessive passion (626–30). They acknowledge the possibility of a beneficent Aphrodite (εἰ δ' ἄλις ἔλθοι | Κύπρις, οὐκ ἄλλα θεὸς εὐχάρις οὕτω, 630–1), but speak of the goddess with fear, portraying her as an archer whose arrows they pray to avoid:

μήποτ', ὦ δέσποινα, ἐπ' ἐμοὶ χρυσέων τόξων ἀφείρης  
 ἰμέρωι χρίσασ' ἄφυκτον οἰστόν. (633–4)

Mistress, never launch the inescapable arrow from your golden bow, smeared with desire, against me.

Far from being a kindly goddess, Aphrodite is here portrayed as mankind's dangerous opponent; the image of anointing the arrow with desire enhances this sense of menace, implying that sexual passion is a form of poison. The Chorus refer to civic and social virtues (*eudoxia* 628, *aretē* 629, *sôphrosynē* 635) in order to emphasize the contrast between these values and the effects of passion: instead, Aphrodite is called *δευά* and her powers associated with anger and strife (637–40).

This picture of the socially disruptive aspects of Aphrodite stands in opposition to her portrayal in the Athens ode as a civic goddess associated with peace and harmony. Indeed, the Athens ode overtly challenges the Chorus's earlier statements about Aphrodite. Far from being the enemy of *sôphrosynē*, sexual desire is now presented as working in harmony with *Sophia*, and the Erotes produce *aretē* instead of precluding it (844–5).<sup>29</sup> The *topos* of the escape ode might lead us to interpret this passage as creating a contrast between ideal fantasy and the bleak 'reality' of the play: in other words, presenting a kindly Aphrodite in order to highlight the failure of the tragic world. However, this reading is undercut by our knowledge of Medea's future escape. The Chorus indeed draw this contrast between 'real' and ideal, asserting that Medea's child killing will debar her from finding sanctuary in Athens (846–50), but their confidence is designed to jar with our own knowledge of the myth.<sup>30</sup> The conven-

<sup>28</sup> Pucci (n. 25), 116–17 argues against connecting the Aphrodite of the ode with the Aphrodite elsewhere in the play. However, it seems unlikely that the ode would create such a strong contrast between the two Aphrodites without intending a comparison. As I will argue, connecting the two in fact leads to a richer interpretation.

<sup>29</sup> See G.O. Hutchinson, *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Commentary on Selected Larger Pieces* (Oxford, 2001) on 629.

<sup>30</sup> A connection with Medea's later Athenian activities was first suggested by U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, 'Exkurse zu Euripides' Medeia', *Hermes* 15 (1880), 481–523. However, scholars have frequently analysed the Aegaeus scene in the light of the play alone, e.g. Dunkle (n. 25). The myth of Medea in Athens is found in Apollod. 1.9.28; *Epit.* 1.4–6; Paus.

tional nature of the escape ode is thus used to highlight the disconcerting nature of Medea's escape: our worries about Medea getting away with child killing are highlighted by the poetic device by which we expect the escape ode to represent an unattainable fantasy. The *locus amoenus* imagery presents Athens as a place of balance and harmony in sexual relations, as desired by the Chorus in their previous ode. Yet Medea, who represents the destructive power of unbridled *eros*, will be welcomed into this community.

The association of Athens and the erotic through the *locus amoenus* language also reminds us of Medea's future marriage to Aegeus which will nearly result in the murder of Theseus.<sup>31</sup> The future relationship between Medea and Aegeus is hinted at in the scene between them: we see Aegeus drawn to Medea, whose offer to cure his childlessness (713–18) carries ironic overtones.<sup>32</sup> The sexual innuendo of the oracle given to Aegeus (679–81) sets a tone of *double entendre* between the two characters. Aegeus' invitation that Medea will not only find refuge in Athens but will be installed in his own house (727–8) again creates a *frisson*, hinting at Medea's future status as his partner and mother of his child. To an Athenian audience, these hints must have been disturbing, for they represent a dark moment in Athenian history. Whereas tragedy usually portrays Athens as a saviour city which can provide refuge and salvation for the suffering heroes of other states (e.g. Aesch. *Eum*; Soph. *OC*; Eur. *Or.*), *Medea* presents a twist on this theme, showing the city's generous impulses manipulated. Aegeus' generosity is an attribute the Athenians pride themselves on, but here we are reminded that such generosity does not come without a risk, and that it can turn out to be misguided: the cost (Theseus' attempted murder) is nearly disastrous for Athens' future.

In this light the significance of the *locus amoenus* imagery becomes clearer. The imagery's erotic overtones direct us to perceiving Athens in sexual terms, and thus hint at Medea's own marriage there. Indeed, the idealized nature of the language reminds us that Athens will be a place of refuge for Medea, and a corrective to the turmoil caused by her own dysfunctional marriage to Jason. However, from the audience's perspective the *locus amoenus* comes to take on new and disturbing connotations, for Medea's marriage to Aegeus will not be the joyous and tranquil affair implied by the imagery and will be closer to the destructive *eros* of the second stasimon than the socially integrated *eros* of the third. This is enhanced by the Chorus's disbelief that Medea will achieve her escape (846–50), which plays not only on their idealization of Athens but on the conventions of the escape fantasy. Whereas in *Hippolytus* the *locus amoenus* acted as a reminder of a better world outside the horrors of the play, albeit unattainable to the characters within it, the *locus amoenus* in *Medea* achieves the opposite effect. The reality of Medea's escape brings the world of the *locus amoenus* into the world of the play, and thus raises the question as to whether the idealized vision is sustainable given what we have seen. While the Athens ode tries to set the two visions of *eros* in opposition, the audience's knowledge of the

2.3.7–8; Plut. *Thes.* 12; Diod. Sic. 4.55–6; Ovid *Met.* 7.402–24. See C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Myths in images: Theseus and Medea as a case study', in L. Edmunds (ed.), *Approaches to Greek Myth* (Baltimore, 1990), 393–445, for the iconographic tradition.

<sup>31</sup> P. Sfyroeras, 'The ironies of salvation: the Aigeus scene in Euripides' *Medea*', *CJ* 90.2 (1994), 126–30, gives a detailed account of how Medea's future relationship with Aegeus is foreshadowed in the play. T.V. Buttrey, 'Accident and design in Euripides' *Medea*', *AJPh* 79.1 (1958), 1–17, however, doubts how well known a connection between Medea and Aegeus would have been.

myth in fact conflates them, and thus acknowledges the naivety of the Chorus's vision. It is the pre-tragic *topos* of the *locus amoenus* that makes this connection possible, because of the associations it triggers in the minds of the audience.

#### REVERSING THE *RITE DE PASSAGE*: BACCHANTS ON CYPRUS

Space and its symbolism is integral to *Bacchae*, a play in which the wilderness is central to the action. Nevertheless, the wilderness in *Bacchae* at first sight appears antithetical to the *locus amoenus*: a place of pines and mountains rather than streams and wildflowers, and a place of chaste religiosity rather than sexual initiation. Nevertheless, *locus amoenus* imagery is in fact present in the play, and its symbolism is once more unlocked through an examination of the escape fantasy.

The escape fantasy of *Bacchae* is embedded in the heart of the first stasimon, an ode describing the nature of Dionysus. The Chorus begin the ode with moralizing *gnōmai*, praising piety and criticizing Pentheus' arrogance. After setting out how humans should relate to the gods, they go on to explain the true nature of Dionysiac worship. This is embodied in the wish to go to a location where they can safely perform their rites:

ἰκοίμαν ποτὶ Κύπρον,  
 νᾶσον τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας,  
 ἔν' οἱ θελξίφρονες νέμον-  
 ται θνατοῖσιν Ἔρωτες,  
 Πάφον θ' ἄν ἑκατόστομοι  
 βαρβάρου ποταμοῦ ῥοαὶ  
 καρπίζουσιν ἄνομβροι.  
 οὐδ' ἄ' καλλιστενομένα  
 Πιερίᾳ μούσειος ἔδρα,  
 σεμνὰ κλειτὸς Ὀλύμπου  
 ἐκεῖσ' ἄγε με, Βρόμιε Βρόμιε,  
 πρόβακχ' εὖτε δαῖμον.  
 ἐκεῖ Χάριτες, ἐκεῖ δὲ Πόθος, ἐκεῖ δὲ βᾶκ-  
 χαις θέμις ὀργιάζειν. (402–16)

I wish I might go to Cyprus, Aphrodite's island, where the Loves who charm mortal minds dwell, to Paphos, that place which is made fertile by the hundred-mouthed streams of the barbarian river which no rain feeds. And to Pieria, the most lovely seat of the Muses, the holy slope of Olympus. Lead me there, Bromios, Bromios, bacchant-leading god of the holy cry. The Graces are there, and Desire too, and there it is lawful for the Bacchae to perform their rituals.<sup>33</sup>

The Chorus's wish to go to Cyprus has baffled some commentators: it is usually explained as either symbolizing a distant and exotic location, or as representing a glance eastwards, to the Chorus's origins.<sup>34</sup> Aphrodite's presence is noted but often

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Sfyroeras (n. 31), 128. D. Gilula, 'On the oracle given to Aegeus (Eur. *Med.* 679, 681)', *SCI* 6.2 (1981), 14–18 argues that Aegeus' childlessness was a Euripidean innovation, in which case the importance of his meeting with Medea is enhanced.

<sup>33</sup> I give the OCT. E.R. Dodds (ed.), *Euripides: Bacchae* (Oxford, 1944), on 406–8 notes the problems with reading Paphos, and other commentators follow Reiske in emending it to Pharos. See K. O'Nolan, 'A note on the *Bacchae*', *CR* 8.3 (1958), 204–6; H. Musurillo, 'Euripides and Dionysiac piety (*Bacchae* 370–433)', *TAPhA* 97 (1966), 299–309, at 303 n. 8.

<sup>34</sup> e.g. C.W. Willink, 'Some problems of text and interpretation in the *Bacchae*', *CQ* NS 16.2 (1966), 220–42, who states simply (222 n. 4) 'Cyprus and Egypt are romantically distant and offer attractions to devotees of ecstatic religion, especially to orientals like the Chorus – more we need not look for'.

dismissed. The fantasy location here is frequently interpreted as forming a counterpoint to the action of the play: an ideal world where love, beauty and poetry join to create a peaceful whole.<sup>35</sup> In this context Aphrodite is to be read as a symbol of grace and beauty, rather than as the goddess of sexual desire.<sup>36</sup>

However, this way of reading the passage overlooks the sexualized nature of the description. The Chorus clearly explain that their reason for wanting to go to Cyprus is because of its connection with Aphrodite. The island is then described in terms which recall the erotic meadow: a place belonging to Aphrodite and the Erotes, fertilized by running water. The evocation of Pieria and the Muses at the end of a classic *locus amoenus* description is perhaps a self-conscious device, aimed to trigger awareness of the poetic tradition of the erotic meadow suggested by the description. Pieria is also aligned with the lush fertility of the *locus amoenus*, and is called the home of Pothos (desire) and the Graces, goddesses also associated with marriage.<sup>37</sup> The meadow is linked to the play by the claim that it is the appropriate place for the Bacchantes to perform their rituals. Thus the places named as suitable for Dionysiac rites all contain sexualized elements.

The imagery here therefore ties in with one of the play's central disputes: namely whether the Dionysiac rituals themselves contain sexual elements. Pentheus believes the rites on Cithaeron to be sexual ones. His suspicion of the Bacchantes is founded on his theory that Dionysiac religion encourages promiscuity, a charge he makes throughout the play (222–3, 236–8, 260–2, 353–4, 487, 957–8). It is easy to dismiss this as unfounded prurience, given the chaste way that the rites are in fact described: the Messenger explicitly tells Pentheus he is mistaken, for the women are sleeping decorously, not drinking or having sex (685–8). Scholars therefore frequently interpret Pentheus' accusations as revealing more about his own nature than about Dionysus': it is his obsession with sex which draws him to the rites, and leads to his downfall.<sup>38</sup>

The presence of sexualized imagery in the escape fantasy, however, suggests that on some level Pentheus' allegations should be taken seriously. The first stasimon acts as a programmatic statement by the Bacchantes on the nature of Dionysiac worship, and what it means to honour the god. Thus the presence of erotic imagery is important, and should not be dismissed as simply aesthetic. As we shall see, the imagery in the first stasimon is evoked elsewhere in the play, in conjunction with the Bacchantes' location and activities. So, we cannot simply interpret the sexual imagery of the first stasimon as a fantasy, or read it as a different version of sexuality to Pentheus' suspicions. Rather, the escape fantasy is linked directly to the play's concerns, and this connection is strengthened by the direct linguistic and imagistic

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Segal (n. 4), 312, who interprets the ode as an escape 'to a happier and simpler world'.

<sup>36</sup> An exception is A.W. Verrall, 'On the problem of the *Bacchae*', *CR* 8.3 (1894), 85–9, who recognizes the significance of Aphrodite and is extremely concerned by the light this casts on the nature of the Bacchantes' activities: 'If Pentheus had heard them, what could he say but that in their own despite, forced out of their hypocrisy by the pressure of their genuine feelings, they had confessed the very substance of his charge?' (87). While Verrall's proposed emendation of the punctuation to make the Bacchantes criticize the wish to go to Cyprus rather than express it has been generally (and rightly) disregarded, he is right to note the essential conflict brought out between this passage and the 'chaste' representation of the Bacchantes elsewhere.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. schol. Eur. *Hipp.* 1147. E. Bushala, 'Συζύγιοι Χάριτες: *Hippolytus* 1147', *TAPhA* 100 (1969), 23–9 at 25 n. 7 gives an extensive list of evidence for the association between the Charites and love and marriage in ancient literature.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Dodds (n. 33) on 222, who cites Wilamowitz and Zielinski; Winnington-Ingram (n. 4), 91; S. Mills, *Euripides: Hippolytus* (London, 2002), 60.



echoes we find throughout the play. As many scholars have noted, Dionysus' ability to undo the normal ties of human society poses a threat to the civilized community. This threat is partly expressed by the sexualized nature of the language applied to the women and to Dionysiac ritual. Though the women are, in literal terms, chaste, the evocation of the *locus amoenus* encourages us to view their activities within the framework of the sexual norms expressed in poetry.

We in fact find a reflection of this imagery elsewhere in the first stasimon, when the Chorus describe Dionysus' realm:

ὅς τ' ἀδ' ἔχει,  
 θιασεύειν τε χοροῖς  
 μετὰ τ' ἀλλοῦ γελάσαι  
 ἀποπαῦσαι τε μερίμνας  
 ὅπότεν βότρυος ἔλθῃ  
 γάνος ἐν δαιτὶ θεῶν, κισ-  
 σοφόροις δ' ἐν θαλαίαις ἀν-  
 δράσι κρατήρ ὕπνον ἀμ-  
 φιβάλλῃ.

(378–85)

These are his powers: to dance in the holy band, to laugh along to the *aulos*, to put a stop to cares, whenever the bright joy of the grape comes to the feast of the gods, and in ivy-wearing festivities the mixing bowl casts sleep over men.

The language is strongly suggestive of the symposium, an appropriate milieu for the worship of Dionysus, but also one associated with the erotic. The playing of the *aulos* suggests the performance of elegiac or iambic song; the ode also suggests communal drinking focused on the *kratêr* (mixing bowl), and wearing of garlands (appropriately made of ivy). Strikingly, the phrase used of the scene is linguistically close to the description Pentheus gave of his suspicions about Bacchic rites in the immediately preceding scene:

γυναιξὶ γὰρ  
 ὅπου βότρυος ἐν δαιτὶ γίγνεται γάνος,  
 οὐχ ὕγιές οὐδὲν ἔτι λέγω τῶν ὀργίων.

(260–2)

For when the bright joy of the grape is in the feast of women, I say there is nothing holy about the rites.

Seaford notes this similarity in his commentary, and suggests that the replacement of women by men in the choral ode is a veiled rebuke of Pentheus, and an indication of the actual chastity of the Bacchae.<sup>39</sup> However, the force of ἀνδράσι in the ode is its contrast with θεῶν, rather than as a comparison between men and women. It makes more sense to see the parallel between the two passages as further engagement with Pentheus' position. Pentheus is of course not literally correct: the Bacchantes in the play are chaste and their rites are religious, not debauched. However, the subtle links between his (apparently unfounded) fears and the Bacchantes' own description of Dionysiac religion suggests that sexuality is central to the threat Dionysus poses to the state. This threat should not be understood as the literal corruption of women; rather it is a way of undermining the spatial and social constraints which define women, and which are, as we have seen, strongly linked to sex roles.

<sup>39</sup> R. Seaford (ed.), *Euripides: Bacchae* (Warminster, 1996), on 383.

The Chorus themselves draw on this strand of imagery again in the third stasimon, where the joyful Bacchant is likened to a fawn playing:

ἀρ' ἐν παννυχίους κοροῖς  
 θήσω ποτὲ λευκὸν  
 πόδ' ἀναβακχεύουσα, δέραν  
 αἰθέρ' ἐς δροσερὸν ρίπτουσ',  
 ὡς νεβρὸς χλοεραῖς ἐμπαί-  
 ζουσα λείμακος ἡδοναῖς,  
 ἀνικ' ἂν φοβεράν φύγῃ  
 θήραν ἕξω φυλακᾶς  
 εὐπλέκτων ὑπὲρ ἀρκύων,  
 θωῦσσαν δὲ κυναγέτας  
 συντείνῃ δράμημα κυνῶν,  
 μόχθοις δ' ὠκυδρόμοις ἀελ-  
 λὰς θρώσκη πεδίον  
 παραποτάμιον, ἡδομένα  
 βροτῶν ἐρημίαις σκιαρο-  
 κόμοιό τ' ἔρρεσιν ὕλας.

(862–76)

Shall I put my white foot to Bacchic dancing in the all-night choruses, and toss back my throat to the dewy air, like a fawn playing in the green pleasure of the meadow when it escapes the frightening hunt, over the woven nets? The hunter stretches his dogs to a run; the fawn leaps, swift as a storm, with a quick burst of running, to the plain by the river, and rejoices in the wilderness with no men, and in the shoots of the shady leaves of the forest.

Comparing a woman to a fawn is a common poetic device, but one normally used of *parthenoi*; the point of comparison is usually the youthfulness and vulnerability of the girl.<sup>40</sup> The fawn is located in a secret wilderness, whose lushness is brought out by the striking metaphor *χλοεραῖς ... ἡδοναῖς* (866–7). Again we see shared features with the *locus amoenus*: flowing water, shade, foliage, as well as the isolation from human activity we find in other descriptions of erotic meadows. By following Dionysus, the Bacchant has literally removed themselves from the city to the wilderness; Dionysus himself highlights this transition, describing the rocks where the women are seated as ‘roofless’ (*ἀνόροφος*, 38).<sup>41</sup>

But their movement also tracks a more figurative transition, for by removing themselves from the cultivated land of the city into the pre-sexual world of the mountains, they have regressed to the world of the young girl.<sup>42</sup> The immaturity of the Bacchant is first suggested at the end of the choral *parodos*, where the Bacchant is described as a foal with its mother (*πῶλος ὅπως ἄμα μητέρι | φορβάδι*, 165–6). The description of the fawn in the third stasimon expresses the effect of this reversal of the *rite de passage*: like a *parthenos*, the Bacchant has access to this secret world, which is not accessible to the world of civilization. However, whereas the *parthenos* can be ‘tamed’ and integrated into civilized society, the Bacchant represents a serious threat. Having passed once already through the transition, it is not clear how she can

<sup>40</sup> e.g. Anac. fr. 408 *PMG*; Archil. 196a W.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Seaford (n. 39), also on 33, where the women are described as ‘having a home on the mountain’ (*ὄρος δ' οἰκοῦσι*).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986), 30; Segal (n. 4), 59–60 and 95. R. Seaford, ‘Dionysiac drama and the Dionysiac mysteries’, *CQ* 31.2 (1981), 252–75, at 264 also notes the parallels between the Bacchant’s activity and transition ritual.

successfully be reintegrated, since the usual strategy of taming has been demonstrated to be ineffectual.<sup>43</sup>

The Chorus is itself a group of Bacchantes. Its description of Dionysiac rites to some extent recreates those rites, as the audience watches a choral group singing and dancing in honour of the god. Thus, the language used by the Chorus becomes woven into the play's concept of what it means to praise Dionysus. However, for the effects the Bacchantes have on the community, we must look to the descriptions of the Theban Bacchantes, in the speeches of the two Messengers who have seen them on the mountain. The scholarly norm is to regard these two groups as separate and opposed, representing different aspects of Dionysiac worship.<sup>44</sup> However, the filter of the *locus amoenus* undermines these expectations, for here too we see sexual imagery interwoven with the Messengers' overt emphasis on chastity. The leaking of the *locus amoenus* imagery into the Messengers' presentation of the Bacchantes undermines their denial of the rites' sexual nature. Moreover, it undermines the apparent distinctions between the two groups of Bacchantes, thus encouraging the audience to see both dark and light elements as part of an integrated whole. If the Chorus represent the theology and concepts of the new cult, the Theban Bacchantes show it operating in practice, and the shared imagery highlights the continuity between the two.

The First Messenger refutes Pentheus' suspicions that Bacchantes behave promiscuously, instead describing their self-restraint (685–8). Nevertheless, there are lyric echoes in the language that he uses, which suggest eroticism. The Bacchantes let their hair down over their shoulders (*καθείσαν εἰς ὤμους κόμης*, 695), which as an erotic image is paralleled by Archilochus fr. 31 W: 'her hair shaded her shoulders' (*ἡ δέ οἱ κόμη | ὤμους κατεσκίαζε*). The earth's magical production of water, wine, milk and honey (704–11, also 142–3) emphasizes Dionysus' links with natural fertility and growth, and is reminiscent of the production of flowers in *Iliad* 14.<sup>45</sup> The Bacchantes make garlands out of the wild vegetation they touch (*ἐπὶ δ' ἔθεντο κισσίνους | στεφάνους δρυός τε μιλакός τ' ἀνθεσφόρου*, 702–3). Once again the lyric motif is given a Dionysiac touch: rather than picking flowers, the Bacchantes pick ivy, oak and bryony, plants associated with the god.<sup>46</sup> Garlands can symbolize both the world of ritual and that of the erotic, since they are used both in the symposium and in religious ceremonies. Thus the presence of garlands assists the audience to link the two meanings that the wilderness holds in the play: firstly, it acts as an erotic symbol to indicate sexual inexperience; secondly, it holds a cultic significance, representing Dionysus' ability to undo social bonds, and a return to a pre-civilized state.

<sup>43</sup> The finality of sexual transition is one of the main motifs in the imagery which describes it, as highlighted by the portrayal of marriage as a form of death. See R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, 1994); R.A. Seaford, 'The tragic wedding', *JHS* 107 (1987), 106–30; I. Jenkins, 'Is there life after marriage? A study of the abduction motif in vase paintings of the Athenian wedding ceremony', *BICS* 30 (1983), 137–45; J. Redfield, 'Notes on the Greek wedding', *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 181–201, at 188–90.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. Segal (n. 4), 242–7; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. P. Bing (Berkeley, 1983), 174–9.

<sup>45</sup> See Dodds (n. 33), xi–xii on Dionysus' links with natural growth. The Bacchant's ability to magically draw out these liquids when possessed is also referred to by Pl. *Ion* 534A; Aeschin. *Socrat.* fr. 11. See Seaford (n. 39), on 142–3 for other parallels.

<sup>46</sup> For the ritual significance of these plants, see Dodds (n. 33) on 81 and 109–10. For garlands as an erotic motif, see Sapph. frs. 81, 92, 94 V.

The imagery recurs in the Second Messenger's speech, as he describes the Bacchant's peaceful activities shortly before the horror of Pentheus' death. Again they are in an idealized rural setting, whose isolation is emphasized (*ἦν δ' ἄγκος ἀμφίκριμμον*, 1051). As well as peaceful, it is fertile, well watered (*ὔδασι διάβροχον*, 1051) and shady (*πεύκαισι συσκιάζον*, 1052). The Bacchant's are again making garlands, and are described as fillies loosed from the yoke (*ἐκλιποῦσαι ποικίλ' ὡς πῶλοι ζυγά*, 1056). We once more find parthenaic imagery applied to the Bacchant's, for the use of the word *πῶλος* (colt or filly) to describe a *parthenos* is a commonplace of Greek poetry.<sup>47</sup> The fact that these fillies are loosed, however, is significant. Yoking is conceptualized as equivalent to marriage, and unmarried girls are typically *πῶλοι* who have not yet been yoked or broken in. Many of the Bacchant's, however, are married women who have left their husbands and children. Thus, the unyoking of the filly symbolizes the Bacchant's return to a premarital state, also encapsulated in their return to the wilderness.<sup>48</sup>

The seeping of *locus amoenus* imagery from the choral lyric into the language applied to the 'real' Bacchant's on Mount Cithaeron thus helps to crystallize the difficulties that Dionysus poses to a community, and further explains Pentheus' hostility to the cult. The use of the *locus amoenus* imagery involves applying the imagery associated with female transition to women who have already passed to the other side. This transition becomes transgression, as the flow of the *rite de passage* is reversed, and the Bacchant's attempt the journey backwards through the human life cycle. This form of transgression may be sanctioned by Dionysus, but this does not mean it is safe, any more than the ritualized violence in the *oreibasia* can be prevented from having horrific 'real life' consequences at the end of the play. Dionysus in full force is correctly perceived by Pentheus to be a threat to the community, and the audience is left with the need to reconcile the full power of the god through ritual, and to strike a balance which allows the natural stages of transition to continue undisturbed.

Upon analysis, then, the erotic nature of space, and the significance of the wilderness, runs throughout the play. Euripides draws on the associations of the wilderness in poetry to underline the threat that the Bacchant's pose to society. The Bacchant's in a very literal sense are returning to the wilderness, and physically leaving the spaces where women are meant to remain. However, by abdicating her social responsibilities to her *oikos*, the Bacchant is also figuratively leaving civilized life, and returning to the 'untamed' life of the *parthenos*. Thus gender roles and categories become symbolic, and are used to represent the organizing division of society, which is threatened by a religion such as Dionysiac worship. The breakdown of these social codes is highlighted elsewhere in the descriptions of the Bacchant's: for example, the mixing of normally distinct social groups defined by age and status (694), or the suckling of wild animals in place of human babies (699–702). The erotic imagery in the Chorus's escape fantasy alerts us to these ideas early in the play, while the use of this imagery elsewhere encourages us to view it as a filter for understanding the play's presentation of the Bacchant's. Thus, far from presenting the two groups of Bacchant's as fundamentally separate, the *locus amoenus* imagery instead encourages us to connect them, and to recognize in the Chorus's vision of Dionysiac worship the underlying reasons for Pentheus' distrust of the new cult.

<sup>47</sup> e.g. Anac. fr. 417 *PMG*; Eur. *Hec.* 142; *Hipp.* 546; *Andr.* 621.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Segal (n. 4), 95; Seaford (n. 39), on 1056.

## CONCLUSION

Fortunately, it is now the scholarly norm to try to connect the content of difficult choral odes to their wider contexts, rather than to dismiss them as *embolima*.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the escape ode particularly risks missing out on serious analysis, since it is easy to assume no connection can be intended. If the point of setting up a fantasy is to suggest a contrast with the events on stage, why should we seek any deeper meaning to the idealized locations where the Chorus wish to be? This article has attempted to show that the connection between the ideal and the 'real' location can be an important aspect of the odes. In the odes I have examined, the Chorus draws on the imagery of the *locus amoenus* to express what is missing from the situation onstage, and to explore the possibility of an alternative and more positive model.

In the case of *Hippolytus*, the *locus amoenus* represents an idealized form of sexual relations, which stands in contrast to the dysfunctional sexuality presented in the play. The fantastical nature of the Chorus's vision suggests the impossibility of achieving such harmony, and seems to imply a naivety in the lyric *topos*. Yet the meadow of the Chorus's ode reminds us of Hippolytus' earlier vision of a meadow, and his fundamental misunderstanding of sexuality that this imagery implied. Thus the Chorus's ode becomes not an unattainable fantasy but a corrective, reasserting the possibility of sexuality as a harmonious force in human life. Moreover, the *locus amoenus* imagery highlights the reasons which underlie the play's disastrous action but also acts as compensation for the destructive *eros* of the rest of the play. The stark contrast with the world of the play is thus poignant but ultimately affirming, for while such an escape is impossible for the characters themselves, the audience is reminded of an alternative model, enshrined in the *topos* of the *locus amoenus*.

In *Medea*, the *locus amoenus* also symbolizes a new relationship with Aphrodite and *eros*, which the play has thus far been unable to achieve. The Chorus imagine a form of sexual desire which is not destructive but positive: a civic rather than anarchic force. Within the broader scope of the myth, however, this achieves an ironic effect. Normally, the destructive capacity of *eros* can be avoided by incorporating it within the institution of marriage, hinted at by the hymeneal associations of the *locus amoenus*. In the case of *Medea*, however, the eroticization of Athens hints at her marriage to Aegeus, which an Athenian audience will recognize as a negative event, and a further source of destructiveness. The ode thus achieves irony on two levels: firstly, the audience recognizes the naivety of the Chorus's trust that Athens can never incorporate *Medea*; secondly the *locus amoenus* imagery hints at *Medea*'s future career, and thus reminds us that she will be an unsettling force even in Athens. The normal associations of the escape ode are overturned, as we see not fantasy but future reality in the positive vision of Athens, yet the usual connotations of the *locus amoenus* are tainted by *Medea*'s future appropriation of it to bring about danger for the city.

In *Bacchae*, the wilderness imagery symbolizes what lies at the heart of Dionysiac worship: an unravelling of the normal codes and barriers in civilized life. Just as the Theban Bacchantes have rejected their ties to husbands and children, and reverted to the 'wild' state of the young girl on the mountains, so the Chorus sing of a symbolic return to the *locus amoenus*: a place associated with young female sexuality, and its brief bloom before it is 'tamed' into marriage. Thus the Chorus, in their explanation

<sup>49</sup> e.g., note the interpretation of the Athens ode, where Musurillo (n. 25), 60 feels the need to defend the ode from a charge of irrelevance, whereas Most (n. 25), 20 takes this as read.

of Dionysiac ritual, imply the mixing up of transitions and boundaries that we see demonstrated by the other group of Bacchae in the play. Pentheus' obsession with the sexual nature of Dionysiac rites can be understood as linked to his more justifiable concern: the disruptive effects that the Bacchae have on the community.

The power of this imagery derives from its ubiquitous presence in Greek poetry, language and ritual: Euripides' audience would recognize the symbolism of the erotic meadow, and would be alert to allusions to it in other poetic forms. The eroticization of nature was so much a part of Greek thought as to be a commonplace, and the audience would have been familiar with it in a range of contexts, from wedding ceremonies to popular song. Euripides' use of it, therefore, is not an obscure or literary device. Rather, the effect would be somewhat as though a modern audience heard the line 'till death do us part' in a contemporary play: the significance of the imagery, and the fact that it evokes certain associations, would be familiar from everyday life and popular culture, not just accessible to the elite or educated. The interpretation I have outlined here, therefore, has a broader significance, for it reminds us that tragedy as a poetic genre does not sit in isolation, but is part of a broader cultural discourse. The poetic and literary outlook of a fifth-century Athenian is just as important to reading Greek plays as his political and ideological views. The symbolism of space, and the key it provides to interpreting certain passages, is just a small part of this larger interpretative puzzle, but an indispensable part of its solution.

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