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RHESUS — A POOR POET'S PLAY

Abstract. The poet of *Rhesus* abuses of the *pi*-alliteration, showing a higher frequency than in any other extant play of Euripides. After presenting the evidence, the author concludes that the play is not likely to be by Euripides.

Twenty years ago, William Ritchie has eloquently and forcefully argued for the authenticity of *Rhesus*, dating it as the earliest extant play of Euripides (somewhere between 455 and 440)¹. While considering the *alliteration* of the play, Ritchie admitted that, „Alliteration is perhaps slightly more frequent in *Rhesus* than is usual in Euripides“, only to reach this conclusion: „But some of his plays have as much or more, the device being especially prominent in the *Supplices*. . . Here again therefore there seems to be general conformity with the style of Euripides“ (p. 242).

It is this conclusion that I wish to challenge here. I feel that the poet of *Rhesus* shows a poor taste by abusing of the *pi*-alliteration, which shows a higher frequency than any other extant play of Euripides. For the sake of brevity, I shall leave apart here the words of a line with *two* initial *pis* only², and concentrate on the clauses with at least *three* initial *pis*. Here is the evidence (the figure refers to the number of words with an initial, not internal, *pi*)³.

V. 5—7	(Lyr.) : 4	78—81	: 8 ⁴
26—28	(Lyr.) : 5 ⁴	85f.	: 4 ⁴
41—44	(Lyr.) : 5 ⁴	106f.	: 3 ⁴
61—63	: 4	116f.	: 3 ⁴

¹ William Ritchie, *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides*. Cambridge U. P., 1964, p. 361.

² No matter how impressive some of them may be. Here are such *pi*-alliterations of the play: 18; 95; 153; 182f.; 213; 231 (Lyr.); 240 (Lyr.); 307f.; 335; 384 (Lyr.); 396; 398; 408 Πάγγαιόν τε Παιόνων τε γῆν/; 468 / πράξει παρέξω; 532 (Lyr.); 538 (Lyr.); 543 (Lyr.); 562 (Lyr.); 572; 587; 616; 618; 634 τοῦ πεπρωμένου πλέον /; 655; 656f.; 674; 695 (Lyr.); 747f. (Lyr.); 771; 786; 838; 846; 865; 869; 927; 934; 941; 946; 955; 966.

³ The edition used here is that by Dietrich Ebener, *Rhesos: Tragödie eines unbekanntes Dichters* (Schriften und Quellen der Alten Welt, 19). Berlin, Akademie—Verlag, 1966.

119—122	: 4 ^a	549f.	(Lyr.) : 3 ^a
135f. (Lyr.)	: 3 ^a	593f.	: 4 ^a
140—142	: 5 ^a	602—604	: 5 ^a
161—163	: 6 ^a	609—612	: 6
185—188	: 7	623f.	: 4
216f.	: 4	628—630	: 5
223	: 3	646—648	: 5 ^a
266—270	: 7	653	: 3
273f.	: 3	663f.	: 4
278	: 3	685	: 3
282f.	: 6	700—703 (Lyr.)	: 6 ^a
284—286	: 5	716f. (Lyr.)	: 3
292f.	: 3	720f. (Lyr.)	: 4
296—299	: 4	743f. (Lyr.)	: 3 ^a
303—305	: 3	769	: 3
311f.	: 5 ^a	773—779	: 8 ^a
314—316	: 4	794—798	: 10 ^a
330f.	: 3	803	: 4 ^a
342—350 (Lyr.)	: 12 ^a	808f.	: 3 ^a
360—369 (Lyr.)	: 9 ^a	813—815	: 6 ^a
370—375 (Lyr.)	: 8	830—832 (Lyr.)	: 4
388—392	: 7	840f.	: 3 ^a
413—415	: 6	888f. (Lyr.)	: 3
429	: 3	892	: 3
436f.	: 4	900—903 (Lyr.)	: 4 ^a
440—443	: 5 ^a	915f.	: 5 ^a
445f.	: 3	919f.	: 3 ^a
447f.	: 3 ^a	929—932	: 4
474—476	: 5	972	: 3
489f.	: 4 ^a	976—980	: 7 ^a
503—506	: 7 ^a	984f.	: 4
528—530 (Lyr.)	: 4		

Consider these striking examples of exaggeration in the employment of the *pi*-parachesis (selection only):

278	ποίας πατρώας γῆς ἐρημώσας πέδον;
282f.	καὶ πῶς πρὸς Ἴδης ὀργάδας πορεύεται, πλαγχθεὶς πλατείας πεδιάδος θ' ἀμαξιτοῦ;
286	κλύοντα πλήρη πεδία πολέμιας χειρός.
311	πολλοὶ μὲν ἱππῆς, πολλὰ πελταστῶν τέλη
489f.	μὴ συνεμπρῆσαι νεῶν πρύμνας, πονήσας τὸν πάρος πολὺν χρόνον
685	πέλας ἴθι. παῖε πᾶς.

^a Plus a number of internal *pis*.

794	παίει παραστάς νεῖραν ἐς πλευράν ξίφει
797	πίπτω δὲ πρηνῆς· οἱ δ' ὄχημα παλικόν. . .
803	πάρεστι λυπρὰ πρὸς φίλων πεπονθέναι.
972	Βάκχου προφήτης ὥστε Παγγαίου πέτραν. . .

The conclusion to be drawn from this evidence is that *Rhesus* is „a poor poet's play“. It just cannot be the work of a Euripides (not even twenty years old). Thus, pace Ritchie, I would side with Wilamowitz first⁵, with, say, H. D. F. Kitto last⁶ in believing that *Rhesus* is a spurious play⁷.

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ARISTOTLE AND MENANDER ON EDUCATION

1. Obviously, Aristotle shared the view of the old Solon (Fr. 27 West) in believing that the human lifespan could be divided into seven-year periods (hebdomads): *Polit.* H 17, p. 1336 b 37 Ross, Δύο δ' εἰσὶν ἡλικίαι πρὸς ἃς ἀναγκαῖον διηρηθῆσθαι τὴν παιδείαν, πρὸς τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ μέχρι ἡβῆς καὶ πάλιν πρὸς τὴν ἀφ' ἡβῆς μέχρι τῶν ἐνδὸς καὶ εἴκοσιν ἐτῶν. οἱ γὰρ ταῖς ἑβδομάσι διαιροῦντες τὰς ἡλικίας ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ λέγουσιν οὐ κακῶς, δεῖ δὲ τῇ διαρέσει τῆς φύσεως ἐπακολουθεῖν.

2. The age of seven (and not fourteen or twenty-one) seems to be crucial for Aristotle. For it is then that a man becomes „mature“, in the sense that he becomes capable of distinguishing between good and evil. Compare Aëtius 5.23 and Ps. Galen *Philos. hist.* 127: Ἡρόκλειτος καὶ οἱ Στωικοὶ ἄρχεσθαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τῆς τελειότητος περὶ τὴν δευ-

⁵ *Analecta Euripidea* (Berlin, 1875), p. 198.

⁶ *Yale Classical Studies* 25 (1977), 317—350. — Ebener offers a useful survey of pros and cons (pp. 20—23).

⁷ As is known since Chr. Riedel (*Alliteration bei den drei grossen griechischen Tragikern*, Diss. Erlangen, 1900), the *pi*-alliteration is the most frequent one in Greek tragedy (followed by *kappa* and *sigma*). Among the assonances, those of *alpha* and *epsilon* are the most common ones. Compare Ritchie 241f., and now M. Marcovich, *Three-Word Trimeter in Greek Tragedy* (Beiträge zur Klass. Philologie, 158), Königstein/Taunus, 1984, p. 183 and n. 21. On the *π/φ*-*parechesis* compare also Ed. uard Fraenkel ad Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 268.