

INTRODUCTION

Euripides at twenty-five or thirty perhaps wrote very differently from Euripides at forty-six, and that the manner we call Euripidean is only the manner of his later life. There is nothing improbable in this suggestion, but have we any evidence? Yes, a very little, and unfortunately it does not say what we want. We have some fragments—twenty lines altogether—preserved from the *Peliades*, with which Euripides won his first victory in the year 455, seventeen years before the *Alcestis*, and as far as they go they are just in his ordinary manner—a good deal more so, in fact, than much of the *Alcestis* is. Let us face this difficulty.

The ordinary style of Euripides is full, flexible, lucid, antithetic, studiously simple in vocabulary and charged with philosophic reflection. If we look in his extant remains for any trace of a style, like that of the *Rhesus*, which is comparatively terse, rich, romantic, not shrinking from rare words and strong colour and generally untinged by philosophy, we shall find the nearest approach to it in the *Cyclops*. Next to the *Cyclops* I am not sure what play would come, but the *Alcestis* would not be far off. It has especially several Epic forms which cannot be paralleled in tragedy. Now the conjunction of these two plays with the *Rhesus* is significant. The three seem to be three earliest of the extant plays; they are also—if we count the *Heraclidae* as mutilated—the three shortest. But, what is more important, the *Cyclops* is not a tragedy but a satyr-play, and the *Alcestis* is a tragedy of a special sort, written to take the place of a satyr-play. It is a tragedy with some half grotesque figures and a fantastic atmosphere.