

INTRODUCTION

time to collect. The complete works of Euripides, some two centuries after his death, found this play current as "Euripides' *Rhesus*," but that it was credited with three different openings and that its style was felt to be somehow peculiar.

The peculiarity of style is incontestable. It does not to our judgment suggest Sophocles. It suggests a young man imitating Aeschylus, and it has a great number of Euripidean expressions. Hermann, who collected what he took to be "imitations" of early poets in the *Rhesus*, noted only 25 of Sophocles, 38 of Aeschylus, and 84 of Euripides.

Is it, then, the work of a somewhat imitative fourth-century poet, naturally influenced by his great fore-runners? Hardly: because, with a few exceptions, the verse and diction of the *Rhesus*, are markedly early in character, the verse severe and smooth, the diction direct and rather grandiose, the choral lyrics strictly relevant. In Euripides' later years Drama was moving rapidly away from all these things and, as far as we can judge, continued so moving after his death. If the *Rhesus* is a post-classical play it can hardly be honest fourth-century work: it must be deliberately archaistic, a product of the Alexandrian spirit if not actually of the Alexandrian age. This is what Hermann believed. But unfortunately it is not a bit more like our fragments of Alexandrian tragedy than it is like the *Medea*; and, further, if it is an Alexandrian pseudo-classic tragedy, how did it succeed in deceiving the Alexandrian critics, detectives specially trained for this kind of work?

Let us try quite a different hypothesis, and begin by