

THE NEGLECTED HERDSMAN IN THE *RHESUS**

EL PASTOR DESATENDIDO EN RESO

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ABSTRACT: The importance of the herdsman-messenger in the *Rhesus* for the question of the authorship and dating of the play has been underestimated. This paper aims at showing that the way in which he is treated by Hector is unlike anything else found in Euripides: no other lower-status character in the extant Euripidean corpus (including fragments) is treated so harshly upon his arrival on stage by an élite principal as he is. The generalization made by Hector about the “stupidity” of herdsmen does not correspond to anything seen in Euripides, who is rather more “democratic” in his staging of non-élite characters, neither to the way fifth-century Athenian theatre tends to avoid criticism of rural workers. If the play had been performed in front of an audience among which rural inhabitants were present, it is likely that it would have elicited a very negative reaction from this part of the audience. Moreover, the herdsman’s internalized self-deprecation, when he answers that herdsmen are indeed “stupid”, is again not found elsewhere in Euripides. The way in which this lower-status character and his interaction with an élite principal are staged provide new elements in favour of a probable non-Euripidean authorship of the play.

KEYWORDS: Rhesus, Euripides, lower-status characters, non-élite.

RESUMEN: La importancia del pastor-mensajero en *Reso* para la autoría y datación de la obra ha sido generalmente subestimada. Este artículo pretende mostrar que la manera en que Héctor lo trata no tiene paralelo en Eurípides: ningún otro personaje de bajo estatus en el corpus eurípideo con servado (incluidos los fragmentos), al entrar en escena, es tratado con tanta dureza por un personaje de la élite. La generalización que hace Héctor acerca de la «estupidez»

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de los pastores no se asemeja a nada visto en Eurípides —quien es bastante más «democrático» en su representación de personajes no pertenecientes a la élite— ni tampoco al modo en que el teatro ateniense del siglo v evita, por lo general, la crítica a los personajes rústicos. Si la obra se representó ante un público integrado en parte por gente del campo, es probable que ese sector de la audiencia reaccionase de forma muy negativa. Además, la autodeprecación interiorizada del pastor, cuando responde que los pastores son efectivamente «estúpidos», tampoco se encuentra en ninguna otra obra de Eurípides. Así, la forma en que se representa este personaje de bajo estatus y su interacción con un personaje de la élite aporta nuevos elementos a favor de una probable autoría no eurípidea de la obra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Reso*, Eurípides, personajes de bajo estatus, no pertenecientes a la élite.

LABURPENA: *Reso* antzezlanaren egilea eta data zeintzuk diren jakiteko, artzain-mezulariak lan horretan izan duen garrantzia gutxietsi egin da orokorrean. Artikulu honen bidez, erakutsi nahi da Hektorrek artzain hori tratatzen duen moduak ez daukala parekorik Euripidesen lanetan: kontserbatzen den Euripidesen corpusean (lanan zatiak barne) eliteko pertsonaia bakar batek ere ez du hain gogor tratatzen estatus txikiko pertsonaia bat agerraldian agertzen denean. Hektorrek artzainen «ergelkeriari» buruz egiten duen orokortzeak ez dauka inolako antzik Euripidesen lanetan ikusitako ezerekin —Euripides askoz ere «demokratikoagoa» da elitekoak ez diren pertsonaiak azaltzen dituenen—, ezta Atenasko v. mendeko antzerkiak, oro har, landako pertsonaiei kritika egitea saihesten duen moduarekin ere. Antzezlanaren taularatu zenean, ikusleen artean landatarrak ere baldin bazeuden, litekeena da ikusleen sektore horrek oso modu negatiboan erreakzionatzea. Gainera, artzainak barneratuta du autogutxiespena, artzainak benetan «ergelak» direla erantzuten baitu, baina gutxiespen hori ere ez da azaltzen Euripidesen beste lan bakar batean ere. Beraz, estatus txikiko pertsonaia hori erakusteko moduak eta pertsonaia horrek eliteko pertsoniarekin duen interakzioak elementu berriak ematen dituzte pentsatzeko antzezlanaren egilea beharbada ez zela Euripides izango.

GAKO HITZAK: *Reso*, Euripides, estatus txikiko pertsonaiak, elitekoak ez izatea.

INTRODUCTION AND *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

The importance of the herdsman who enters the stage at v. 264 of the *Rhesus* has not only been neglected (at first) by Hector but also by contemporary scholarship. Among the many works discussing the authorship and dating of the play none (that I know of) uses the way in which this lower-status character is treated as a possible argument in this debate.

While this is not entirely surprising, given that modern scholarship has only recently begun to seriously take into account the importance of secondary characters of ancient Greek tragedies, important points regarding the question of the authorship and dating of the *Rhesus* have been missed because the staging of the herdsman-messenger has never undergone the level of scrutiny which the élite/heroic/divine characters have been submitted to¹.

¹ A number of works devoted to the presence of non-élite spectators in the audience of tragedies as well as on non-élite secondary characters have been published during the last decade. See, e.g. Allan & Kelly 2013, 77-122; Paillard 2017 and 2021; Roselli 2011; Yoon 2012.

On the articulation between élite and non-élite points of view in Sophoclean tragedy, see also Paillard 2020.

For a discussion of the possible reasons why Classical scholarship has for a long time focused on élite/heroic characters, see Paillard 2019.

A brief survey of the most recent and/or influential works devoted to the play may prove helpful². A widely —if not unanimously— shared consensus seems to have been reached about the authorship of the play, i.e. that the *Rhesus* we have was not authored by Euripides. W. Ritchie's book-long careful demonstration that many of the seemingly un-Euripidean characteristics of the play are not, in fact, incompatible with what we know of the great tragedian's production has failed to convince later scholars³. As for the dating of the play, most scholars now agree that it should be dated to the (late) fourth century⁴. Recently, V. Liapis has argued that the play was perhaps composed with a Macedonian context of performance in mind⁵. A. Fries, however, has expressed doubts about the validity of this proposal⁶. The Macedonian elements present in the play are surveyed by M. Fantuzzi 2020, 41-49 who concludes (pp. 48-49), however: "It is possible, then, that the author of *Rh.* was a non-Athenian, or that he envisaged a specifically Macedonian audience. But it is also conceivable that he was an Athenian who envisaged a primarily Athenian audience, keen to know about the new warlords, and perhaps had in mind the possibility of later performances in places under Macedonian control."

The present article will not depart from the consensus about the date and authorship of the play. It will, however, demonstrate that a close analysis of the way in which the herdsman-messenger is staged provides a hitherto neglected element in favour of a late dating and a non-Euripidean authorship, or at least a non-Athenian, non-democratic context of first performance and primary target audience. In order to do so, vv. 266-272 will be closely examined, and in particular the striking use of the word *σκαῖός*, which appears twice in the passage (vv. 266 and 271). The contemptuous treatment received by a rural worker from an élite principal will be at the heart of the following examination. The question of the relationship between the lower-status secondary character and Hector will also be addressed, in order to determine whether it follows early patterns for this type of relations between élite and non-élite figures in tragedy or whether it more closely corresponds to the late developments that characterizes the staging of such relations, where lower-status characters are portrayed as more active and increasingly able to influence the decisions taken by the élite/heroic principals.

THE HERDSMAN MISTREATED BY HECTOR

When he enters the stage (v. 264), the herdsman announces that he brings good news to Hector. His optimistic tone is answered by Hector's commenting (v. 266) on the general stupidity of rural people:

ἦ πόλλ' ἀγρώσταις σκαῖὰ πρόσκειται φρενί·
«How stupid the minds of rustics are!»⁷

² Good summaries of the *status quaestionis* regarding the authorship and date of the *Rhesus* can be found in Liapis 2012, lxxvii-lxxv; Fries 2014, 22-46; see also Fries 2018, 66-89. More recently, see Fantuzzi 2020, esp. 16-41.

³ Ritchie 1964.

⁴ See already Strohm 1959, 273-274: «Die Frühdatierung des «Rhesos» gehört zu den erstaunlichsten Fehlurteilen in der Geschichte der Tragikerkritik. Es ist ein spätes Werk, gebildet im Schatten einer reichen Tradition.» Fantuzzi 2020, 24-40 conveniently summarizes

the evidence in favour of a dating of the play to the late fourth century. Recent editors and commentators of the play following the idea that *Rhesus* is a post-fifth-century, non-Euripidean play: Feickert 2005; Fries 2014, who, however, disagree with a dating in the late fourth century; Kovacs 2002; Liapis 2012; Fantuzzi 2020.

⁵ Liapis 2009; Liapis 2012, lxxii-lxxv.

⁶ Fries 2014, 18-20.

⁷ The edition and translation of Kovacs 2002 is used throughout for quotations of the *Rhesus*.

The principal surmises that the lower-status herdsman brings him news about the cattle, and he cannot hide his irritation: this particular herdsman, who comes to bore him with trivial information, at night, in the middle of the battlefield, is a perfect illustration of the generalization just mentioned.

Very little has been written about the almost violent way in which Hector «welcomes» the messenger⁸. Scholars have generally thought that the main aim of staging this mistreatment of the herdsman was only to characterize Hector⁹. Indeed, there is a parallel between the way in which the élite principal treats the messenger and attributes to him wrong intentions, only to be proven wrong later, and the way in which Hector treats Rhesus upon his arrival. In both cases, Hector is staged as a rash, almost violent, character who is forced to change his opinion later. He is easily carried away by appearances, and his interaction with the herdsman may indeed be a way to portray him as such. However, there is much more at stake than the mere portrayal of a principal in the scene.

It is worth delving deeper into the interpretation of vv. 266-267 by considering the herdsman as a fully characterized figure, and not as a mere literary tool or foil for the characterization of the principal¹⁰. Hector qualifies him as *σκαῖός*, although he has not done anything to warrant this strong term except being a herdsman. Indeed, the beginning of v. 267 makes it clear that Hector perceives the behaviour of this herdsman as illustrating and reinforcing the stereotype about his likes: *καὶ γὰρ σὺ (ποιμνας δεσπότηαι τευχεςφόροις / ἦκειν ἔοικας ἀγγελῶν ἔν' οὐ πρόπει.)*, which Kovacs translates “Here you are [...]”. These three words emphasize a strong logical link between the generalization previously exposed and the present behaviour of this specific herdsman. One could better translate them as “and indeed you [...]”¹¹. In other words, Hector does not only say that all herdsmen are stupid, but also that the man he now has in front of him is a perfect example of this. The fact that he does directly address his reflection to the man in question is in itself striking. Nowhere else in extant Euripidean tragedy (including what can be inferred from fragmentary remains attributed to Euripides) is a lower-status character so directly mistreated/insulted by an élite principal, especially without having obviously done anything to deserve it, as we shall see in the course of this analysis¹².

The word *σκαῖός* itself, which rarely occurs in Aeschylus and Sophocles, is used 23 times in the extant Euripidean corpus¹³. Fries notes that “applied to persons, the adjective —properly «left, on the left hand» (*LSJ* s.v. I)— has a range of figurative meanings, which Bond defines as (a) aes-

⁸ In his recent commentary, Fantuzzi 2020, 284 (mentioning Gibert 1995, 62 n.º 10) compares “Hector’s prejudicial behaviour” to “Eur. *Hclid.* 646-59, where Alcmena straightaway takes the messenger-servant to be hostile and threatens him”. There is a fundamental distinction, however, between the two passages: Alcmena does not express a general contempt for the category of people represented by the messenger. The reaction of Alcmena in front of the messenger is in no way comparable to the way in which Hector’s reacts to the presence of the herdsman: her reaction is dictated by her will to protect the children and by her previous experience, not by a general contempt for the category which the messenger belongs to. On the speech assignments to various messenger figures in the *Heraclidae*, see Rodríguez Piedrabuena 2019.

⁹ This is in line with the usual way of considering secondary characters as mere foils to help the characterization of the principals. For such an approach, see Yoon 2012.

¹⁰ For the idea that Euripidean messenger should be treated as full characters of the drama rather than mere tools for including narrative parts, see de Jong 1991, esp. 65 ff.

¹¹ *καὶ γὰρ* as Lat. *etenim*, see Kühner & Gerth 1904, 338.

¹² The fact that the shepherd seems not to follow the (quite indirect) orders of Hector either to report to the palace or to stop speaking is not surprising. As Bain 1981, 3 has shown: “Characters who have speaking parts may dispute an order whatever their status”.

¹³ See Allen & Italie 1954, 574.

thetically repulsive, (b) intellectually stupid, (c) morally deficient, and (d) socially “ignorant”.¹⁴ It is a strong term, close to an insult, and clearly indicates Hector’s contempt for the lower-status figure. Among all occurrences in Euripides, only three other passages could be put into parallel with the situation in the *Rhesus* where an élite character uses it to qualify a lower-status secondary figure: *Heracleidae*, v. 258, where Demophon tells the herald that he is σκαῖός to think that he can outwit a god, fragment 510, where the word appears to be in the description of a man (παπαῖ, νέος καὶ σκαῖός οἶός ἐστ’ ἀνήρ.), and fragment 736, which might belong to a dialogue where a character tells another one that a third person is σκαῖός because he does not remember what friends/allies he should remember. However, in the first case, the word is used in a full-blown confrontation between Demophon and a herald whose possible lower status is negated by his authoritative stance. The context is completely lacking in the second occurrence. As for the third one, the word «stupid’ is clearly used as a result of what is perceived as a misbehaviour towards ξένοι, which almost certainly excludes that the rebuke could have been directed at a lower-status person. In none of these cases is the adjective used in a general description of a particular category of people: the word is directed at (or used about) a particular character in a particular context.

Given the way in which Euripides usually takes care of staging lower-status figures as being able to show intelligence, skills, and rhetorical abilities, the way in which Hector treats this character, through a generalization about all other people who belong to the same category, is striking and does not correspond to anything similar in the extant Euripidean corpus. The fact that the herdsman must certainly be considered as a slave does not change the feeling that his treatment by Hector is extraordinary. As G. Martin remarks in his commentary on *Ion*, Euripides adopts a marked “egalitarian attitude” in the handling of his lower-status characters, including slaves¹⁵. Already in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (vv. 948-950) Euripides is portrayed as a poet who takes pride in the fact that he stages characters who belong to marginalized groups and give them active roles from the beginning in his plays. Even if caricature was part of the comical effect, Aristophanes could not have elicited a positive reaction from his audience through these lines if there was no kernel of truth in what the character of Euripides was saying here. And indeed, the Euripidean corpus is full of active and clever nurses, astute pedagogues, slaves who behave as free people. Some examples include: the herald in the *Suppliant Women* (vv. 399-584), the second servant in *Helen* (v. 1627-the end), a herdsman in *Bacchae* (vv. 660 ff.),¹⁶ the messenger (vv. 1151-1267) and the nurse (vv. 176-787) in *Hippolytus*¹⁷. None of these is treated as the herdsman is by Hector.

More to the point, other rural characters who play the role of messenger bringing news from the countryside are usually not staged as being badly treated by the principal to whom they come to report the information. The herdsman who announces the arrival of Orestes and Pylades in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* perhaps sounds like a rather naïve character, but he is never rebuked by Iphigenia for being so. The countryman who reports the debate that took place during the trial of Orestes to Electra in *Orestes* even shows that he is educated enough to understand the trial and to recognize the political manoeuvres of the speakers. In the remaining fragments of *Theseus*, we find a herdsman who, acknowledging that he does not know the name of letters, is inventive enough to describe the shapes of those composing the name of Theseus (fig. 382): he is staged as lacking education but would certainly not be stupid enough to come to a general in the middle of

¹⁴ Fries 2014, 217 (with ref. to G. W. Bond, *Euripides. Heracles*, Oxford 1981, 283).

¹⁵ Martin 2018, 393. On Euripides’ critique of contemporary views on slaves, see Gregory 2002.

¹⁶ See below on this character.

¹⁷ For a detailed examination of these characters and for other examples, see Paillard 2021. On Euripides’ portrayal of slaves, women, and bastards, see Gregory 2002.

the night, on a battlefield, to give him information about his cattle, as Hector accuses our herdsman of doing. Finally, perhaps the closest figure to our herdsman is the herdsman of the *Bacchae* who brings news to Pentheus of what the women do in the wilderness (vv. 660 ff.)¹⁸. He feels obliged to ask the king if he can benefit from a total freedom of speech (*parrhesia*), which shows that he is not entirely certain that his status could allow him to address an élite superior freely. However, the king does indeed readily grant him *parrhesia* and never treats him as badly as Hector does when the herdsman first comes to him. Furthermore, what the messenger in the *Bacchae* has to say will go against his élite interlocutor opinion, whereas in the *Rhesus*, the herdsman is the bearer of good news. Yet, the first character is never as badly treated as the second one.

The only secondary character who is slightly mistreated or mocked for reasons that are linked to his lower status might be the male servant who interacts with Heracles in *Alceste* (vv. 747-860). Heracles rebukes him for looking unhappy and implies, at vv. 779-781, that he lacks the philosophical education which would allow him to appreciate life:

δεῦρ' ἔλθ', ὅπως ἂν καὶ σοφώτερος γένη.
τὰ θνητὰ πράγμαθ' ἦντιν' οἴσθ' ἔχει φύσιν;
οἶμαι μὲν οὐ· πόθεν γάρ; ἀλλ' ἄκουέ μου.

“Come here so that you may be made wiser!
Do you know the nature of our mortal life?
I think not. How could you? But listen to me.”¹⁹

As Heracles makes it clear, the servant is not σοφός enough, and he proposes to enlighten him, to make him wiser/more educated/cleverer. Yet, the tone is very different from what we have in the *Rhesus*: it is not quite the same thing to tell a servant that he could be more clever or that given his social status, there is nothing surprising about his lack of education, and to make such broad generalization about the stupidity of herdsmen as Hector does²⁰.

INTERNALIZED SELF-DEPRECIATION

The reaction of the herdsman is even more striking than Hector's comment in the first place. At vv. 271-272, he answers:

σκαιοὶ βοτῆρές ἐσμεν· οὐκ ἄλλως λέγω.
ἀλλ' οὐδὲν ἦσσον σοι φέρω κεδνοῦς λόγους.

“We herdsmen are stupid—no argument there.
But nonetheless I bring you good news.”

¹⁸ On this character and the specificities of his messenger speech, see Barrett 2002, 118-131.

¹⁹ Text and transl.: Kovacs 20012.

²⁰ The rebuke addressed to the herald Talthybios by Cassandra in the *Trojan Women* (vv. 424 ff.) falls

into a very different category. The criticism is not addressed by a superior to a lower-status character and does not refer to his intellectual or other personal abilities.

The secondary character here internalizes the general negative view of herdsmen promoted by Hector in a self-deprecating comment.

It is true that it could be understood as a clever rhetorical move made by the (definitely not stupid!) herdsman, a concession to Hector's point of view aimed at working as a *captatio benevolentiae*. However, once again, nowhere else in extant Euripidean tragedy is such a negative point of view on a category of lower-status people endorsed by a character who belongs to this category²¹. The effect of such a self-deprecating comment, pronounced by a lower-status character on stage, is indeed important to bear in mind. In a public performance, characters do not only talk to each other but are meant to be heard and understood by the audience. Nowhere in Euripidean tragedy is such a negative view of herdsmen or other rural workers staged without being explicitly refuted by another character who represent a positive authority figure. If inhabitants of the countryside are indeed criticized on stage, as in *Suppl.* 420 ff., it is by someone who is a marked antagonist to Athenian values: here, we find a Theban herald debating with Theseus²². In such a case, Euripides takes care to orient the perception of its audience by having Theseus describe the herald as "comical". In other words, the herald's opinion that poor farmers cannot participate in the democratic life of a city is explicitly marked as ridiculous by a positive Athenian authority figure, a mechanism we do not find in the case of the criticism of the herdsman by Hector in the *Rhesus*²³. In *Suppliants*, the stage does not leave space for the opinion that lower-status people who live in the countryside are to be marginalized. By staging this point of view only to be ridiculed by a great Athenian hero, Euripides clearly positions himself against it in front of his Athenian audience.

While the reasons for the tendency to avoid open criticism of countryside workers might be multiple and difficult to pinpoint, the general "democratic" tone of Euripides' play might well have to do with a desire to please the diverse audience that came to attend dramatic performances in Athenian contests²⁴. Moreover, as has been noted by K. J. Gutzwiller, "herdsmen are not among the characters who people the plays of Aristophanes"²⁵. In other words, herdsmen were not seen as a possible object of ridicule or comic attacks. She also remarks: "[...] fifth-century tragedies came to offset the boorishness of herdsmen by their more admirable internal qualities"²⁶. Euripides' rural characters are indeed more often staged as being useful than as being stupid. More generally, as Fantuzzi 2020, 284 notes, "[s]hepherds' and rustics' work was not in itself universally held to be unworthy", despite their unflattering description in Hes. *Theog.* 26.

The self-deprecating comment made by the herdsman may be taken as a comical element in his staging. Messengers' arrivals are indeed sometimes staged as having a light comic tone. The staging of the guard in Sophocles' *Antigone* is a good example²⁷. When arriving to report news to Creon, the guard clumsily attempts to justify himself in a way that might have appeared as comic to part

²¹ See Fantuzzi 2020, 284 for the fact that herdsmen «could be considered at the low end of the social spectrum».

²² For Thebes as representing a "negative model to Athens' manifest image of itself", see Zeitlin 1990, 131. On the opposition between Thebes and Athens in tragedy, see also Vidal-Naquet 1986.

²³ Hector's attitude towards the herdsmen could be thought as a way of portraying his as markedly 'non-Greek': he is a Trojan and as such does not adhere to fifth-century Athenians' democratic views, if they were the intended audience of the play. However, the inter-

nalised self-deprecation of the herdsman, even if considered as a rhetorical technique, shows that the scene is not only aimed at characterizing a principal. As we shall see below, the herdsman does not come out of this interaction as entirely vindicated.

²⁴ For the presence of non-élite and lower-status spectators among the audience, see Roselli 2011.

²⁵ Gutzwiller 1991, 59.

²⁶ Gutzwiller 1991, 50-51.

²⁷ The Phrygian in Eur. *Orestes* is another example of a messenger figure portrayed with comical elements. See Barrett 2002, 97.

of the audience²⁸. Creon reacts rather harshly to the hesitating tone of the guard-messenger. While the interaction between Creon and the guard may perhaps look rather similar to what we find between Hector and the herdsman in the *Rhesus*, in the latter play the tone is not comical at all. In both cases, it is true that an élite figure treats a lower-status man harshly when he approaches to deliver his message. However, as noted by Fantuzzi 2020, 284, the scene in the *Rhesus* “is certainly more surprising than the exchange between Creon and the guard at Soph. *Ant.* 223-36”. For once, Creon does not extend his criticism of the particular guard he had in front of himself to a whole category of people, as Hector does in the *Rhesus* for herdsmen.

It is therefore very far from certain, if the play had been performed before a fifth-century audience in Athens, that people who had travelled to the city from the countryside to attend the theatre competitions might have found anything comical in hearing one of the principal characters make broad generalizations about their stupidity, let alone it being showed as a valid, internalized point of view by a herdsman (even if, in the end, it is Hector rather than the messenger who comes out of the episode as stupid). If even Aristophanes did not see it fit to mock herdsmen on stage, it is unlikely that Euripides would have risked alienating his audience by alluding to the general stupidity of the rural workers, even under the form of an ironic answer²⁹.

Besides, while the guard is clearly vindicated at the end of his exchanges with Creon, and is staged as being able to outmanoeuvre the king, things turn less clearly in favour of the herdsman in the *Rhesus*. He is indeed allowed to deliver his message in the end, and there may indeed be some trace of irony in his answer to Hector, as mentioned, but the outcome of the exchange does not highlight the herdsman as someone as clever and rhetorically able as the guard in the *Antigone*.

Moreover, the comparison between the interaction of these two pairs of characters calls for some remarks about how the dialogue between Hector and the herdsman conform (or not) to A. Rijksbaron’s 1976 schema of the beginning of messenger speeches. In his work, he excludes *Rhesus* because he considers that the play to be un-Euripidean (1976, 170 n.º 1). It is all the more interesting to quickly explore whether the herdsman departs from the other messengers in Euripides, according to Rijksbaron’s criteria. Although the herdsman’s speaking part in the play is rather small, he is nevertheless a character who appears on stage to deliver a new piece of information to one of the principals. He could therefore be included in the loose constellation of characters called (sometimes erroneously) “messengers” who deliver messages, news, describe offstage events, or announce arrivals of other characters³⁰.

Rijksbaron divides messenger speeches in Euripides into two categories: those starting with an ἐπεὶ-clause, referring to past events or information (which their interlocutor is allegedly aware of), and those which begin with simple declarative sentences and bring something totally new. The herdsman’s intervention in the *Rhesus* would fall into the second category. More importantly for our present purpose, Rijksbaron 1976, 171 explains that messenger scenes generally conform to the following schema: “(1) a messenger enters the stage [...] (2) he speaks one or more introductory lines to arouse the attention of the hearer(s), who ask him to go on; (3) the messenger proceeds by giving the main point of his news, whereupon he is asked to tell his story in detail; (4) he

²⁸ On the portrayal of the guard in *Antigone*, see Paillard 2017, 215-220.

²⁹ For the idea that the herdsman’s answer denotes a ‘gentle irony’, see Fries 2014, 215.

³⁰ Barrett 2002, 224 indeed includes him in his list of messengers in Greek tragedy. For discussions of cri-

teria that characterize messengers, see Barrett 2002, 96 ff.; 223. For his list of messengers, Barrett indicates that he has followed de Jong 1991, 179-180.

takes a deep breath and tells the story proper". Coming back to our comparison between Creon and the guard in *Antigone* and Hector and the herdsman in the *Rhesus*, another striking distinction becomes apparent: the scene of the first play perfectly follows Rijksbaron's schema, while the interaction between Hector and the herdsman departs from it on at least one crucial point, namely the fact that Hector tries to prevent the herdsman from delivering his piece of news rather than insistently asking him to go on with his report (as Creon does in *Antigone*). Nowhere else in the Euripidean corpus do we find another messenger scene that so strikingly departs from the regularities outlined by Rijksbaron. Interestingly, J. Barrett 2002, 180 ff. shows that another messenger in the *Rhesus*, the charioteer who reports on the death of Rhesus, also departs from conventions. While the author points out that the portrayal of some messengers in tragedy could indeed be used as "metatheatrical comments"³¹ and therefore be staged in non-conventional ways, he also acknowledges (after Strohm 1959, 271) that the charioteer-messenger's "narrative depart from conventional practice" in an extraordinary way³². Barrett does not draw links between his observations and the question of the authorship of the play. Yet, as I have shown, the herdsman-messenger is also staged in a way that deeply contrasts with a number of regularities observed in fifth-century Athenian tragedy. When taken together, the conclusion drawn on the two messenger figures of the *Rhesus* indeed points into the direction of a non-Euripidean authorship.

CONCLUSION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STAGING OF THE HERDSMAN FOR THE QUESTIONS OF THE AUTHORSHIP AND DATING OF THE PLAY

This last point brings us back to the internal criteria traditionally used for judging the question of the authorship of the play and its dating. Ritchie has argued that "the poet's vocabulary and style, his choice and treatment of metre and the formal structure of the various parts of the play" are the elements in which "we should expect to find the clearest marks of individuality, which might provide us with solid grounds for or against accepting the play as the work of Euripides."³³ However, those elements are certainly the most easily imitable. With a better access to all the plays composed by Euripides, it would not be exceedingly difficult for a later poet to become familiar enough with the style, the vocabulary, and the metre used by the great tragedian to compose a new tragedy that uses similar features in these categories³⁴.

What would have been less straightforward to imitate, however, are elements of the staging of the characters that were linked with the fifth-century socio-political reality. Typically, a later poet, perhaps composing for a less democratic audience than fifth-century Athenian citizens (and why not for a Macedonian élite!), would not have paid so much attention to the way in which lower-status figures can or cannot be treated on stage, simply because socio-political facts and sensibilities were different in his contemporary context.

Beside his harsh treatment by Hector, another series of characteristics in the staging of the herdsman could also allow us to decide with a reasonable degree of certainty that the play was probably not the work of a young Euripides, despite Kovacs' claim that "it cannot be disproved"³⁵, or at least not of a Euripides who composed with a democratic Athenian audience in mind. As it

³¹ On the notion of «metatheatre», see Paillard & Milanezi 2021.

³² Barrett 2002, 169.

³³ Ritchie 1964, 60-61.

³⁴ For the idea that fourth-century composers were not unable to imitate the technical features of fifth-century poets, see, e.g., Liapis 2012, lviii.

³⁵ Kovacs 2002, 352.

can be demonstrated from a parallel examination of all secondary characters in extant fifth-century tragedies, the degree of activity and efficacy of lower-status figures tends to increase in the course of time³⁶. While the phenomenon is not systematic, as some secondary characters still remain used as mere literary tools in late plays, the trend is clear enough to be significant. Secondary characters in later plays, at least from the 430s-420s onwards, interact much more with the élite principals and are more often able to change their minds and the course of the action. While it will not be possible here to repeat the analysis presented in Paillard 2017 and 2021, it may be helpful to pinpoint a striking example. Contrasting the way in which lower-status characters who are designated by the same function (nurse) are staged in an early and a later play is telling. The nurse of the *Trachiniae* (Soph.), for instance, remains much in the background behind Deianeira and even asks herself if she really ought to give her advice (vv. 52-53). The nurse in Eur. *Hippolytus*, on the contrary, is a very active character, who takes part in many dialogues and whose arguments succeed in having a principal (Phaedra) change her course of action.

The staging of the herdsman by the poet of the *Rhesus* is therefore more similar to what is found in later plays rather than in earlier ones. Despite being considered, at first sight, as stupid by Hector, and even, ironically or not, acknowledging that his likes are indeed stupid, he skilfully manoeuvres Hector into listening to what he has to say, and even manages, along with the chorus, to convince the great man to welcome Rhesus. Hector himself, at the end of their interaction even praises him for his considerations³⁷. The herdsman's discourse, then, rhetorically built and even containing well-used Homeric reminiscences (in the description of Rhesus, see Liapis [2012], 144) which help him make his point at the end, is not without effect on Hector: the secondary character wrongfully described as "stupid" is able to change the mind of the principal³⁸. However, the rest of the story will prove him wrong on one point: he was rather naively optimistic about the strength of Rhesus³⁹. While the herdsman has indeed managed to have his report heard by the élite principal, the play does nothing to show that Hector's remark about the "stupidity" of rural workers was completely out of place. In other words, unlike the guard in Sophocles' *Antigone*, the herdsman is not vindicated here: this is a crucial point in the argument in favour of seeing the *Rhesus* as composed for a different context than fifth-century democratic Athens⁴⁰. The general perception of the herdsman remains that he is rather naïve (if not completely stupid as Hector had it).

To sum up: the way in which the herdsman is staged in his interaction with Hector strikingly departs from the way in which rural workers and messengers are treated in Euripidean tragedy or plays aimed at a fifth-century democratic Athenian audience. The lower-status figure is active and contributes to the change of mind of the heroic/élite figure. Such traits in the portrayal of non-élite characters are much more often found from the very last part of the fifth century onwards. While this alone would not exclude an Euripidean authorship, the way in which the herdsman is treated by Hector, who openly and strongly displays his contempt for the entire category of rural workers, and the fact that the herdsman is staged as endorsing this deprecation, and is never reha-

³⁶ See Paillard 2017 and 2021, which offer detailed surveys respectively of Sophocles' lower-status characters and of Aeschylus' and Euripides' staging of non-élite figures in the course of time. In both works, their degree of activity and efficacy are assessed, as well as their ability to use «rhetorical techniques» to persuade the élite principal and/or change their opinions.

³⁷ I follow here Liapis 2012, 154-155 in thinking that the herdsman is not praised for his «lookout duty».

³⁸ For the idea that Hector does not only yield to the chorus but to the herdsman too, see Liapis 2012, xlvi.

³⁹ See Barrett 2002, 176-177, who speaks of «the naïveté and foolishness of both the chorus and shepherd».

⁴⁰ See above on the question of the treatment of rural workers on the Athenian stage and on the fact that criticism towards them tended to be avoided in a democratic context.

bilitated in the course of the play, is definitely un-Euripidean, or at least excludes the idea that the play could have been composed by Euripides for a democratic Athenian audience. Indeed, it does not correspond to what we encounter in other plays performed in a fifth-century Athenian democratic context, where herdsmen are nowhere despised on stage in such a striking way. The unfair and almost violent way in which Hector treats the lower-status man upon his arrival by far overshadows his faint praise later in the episode. The close examination of the herdsman-messenger presented here adds therefore a new element to the list of other arguments for a late dating of the play and for a possible Macedonian context of creation and first performance.

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