



[Author] [Euripides]  
[Work] *Rhesus*, vv. 1-19  
[Place of work] Uncertain  
[Source] Direct transmission  
[Typology] Tragedy  
[Period] 350–300 BC

## [Text]

### ΧΟΡΟΣ

Βᾶθι πρὸς εὐνὰς τὰς Ἑκτορέους·  
τίς ὑπασπιστῶν ἄγρυπνος βασιλέως,  
ἢ τευχοφόρων;  
δέξαιτο νέων κληδὸνα μύθων,  
οἱ τετράμοιρον νυκτὸς φυλακὴν 5  
πάσης στρατιᾶς προκάθηνται.  
ὄρθου κεφαλὴν πῆχυν ἐρείσας,  
λῦσον βλεφάρων γοργωπὸν ἔδραν,  
λεῖπε χαμεύνας φυλλοστρώτους,  
Ἑκτορ· καιρὸς γὰρ ἀκοῦσαι. 10

### ΕΚΤΩΡ

τίς ὄδ' - ἢ φίλιος φθόγγος - τίς ἀνήρ;  
τί τὸ σῆμα; θρόει.  
τίνες ἐκ νυκτῶν τὰς ἡμετέρας  
κοίτας πλάθουσ'; ἐνέπειν χρή.  
Χο. φύλακες στρατιᾶς. Εκ. τί φέρη θορύβῳ; 15  
Χο. θάρσει. Εκ. θαρσῶ.  
μῶν τις λόχος ἐκ νυκτῶν; Χο. οὐκ ἔστ'.  
<Ἑκτορ>. Εκ. τί σὺ γὰρ φυλακὰς προλιπὼν  
κινεῖς στρατιάν, εἰ μὴ τιν' ἔχων  
νυκτηγορίαν; ...

[Metrics] Anapaestic system

## [Critical apparatus]

17 λόχος V: δόλος OQTrP<sup>2</sup>: δοῦλος LP || 17-18 οὐκ ἔστ' . / <Ἑκτορ> Jackson: οὐκ ἔστι LPQ: οὐκέτι  
VO: del. Fix

## [Translation]

(transl. Kovacs 2003, adapted)

**Chorus** Ho, there, any of the prince's squires or armor bearers who are awake, go to where Hector sleeps! Let him receive a message from those who keep the fourth watch of the night and guard the

whole army: “Raise your head on your crooked forearm, open your eyes so dreadful to look upon, leave your bed of strewn leaves, Hector! High time to hear our report!”

**Hector** What man is this, friend or foe? What is the watchword? Speak! What men by night have come to my resting place? Tell me!

**Chorus** We are the army’s watch.

**Hector** Why this troubled haste?

**Chorus** Have no fear!

**Hector** Not I! Is there some night raid?

**Chorus** No, <Hector>.

**Hector** Why have you left your guard post and thrown the army into confusion if you have nothing to report by night? Don’t you know that we are encamped under arms near the Argive army? . . .

### [Comment]

The *Rhesus*, attributed to Euripides but more likely dating back to the 4th century BC, opens with the parodos. This in itself is nothing new, given the precedents of Aeschylus’ *Persians* and *Suppliants*, but *Rhesus*’ parodos has the peculiarity of introducing the audience directly *in medias res*, with the sudden irruption, of definite theatrical effect, of the sentinels who make up the chorus, who enter in a state of agitation, probably in disorder and perhaps running, to look for Hector and tell him that the Greeks are lighting fires. The action takes place in the Trojan camp, in front of Hector’s bed (cf. vv. 1, 9, 14).

At the beginning of the tragedy, the nocturnal setting is immediately highlighted (τετράμοιρον νυκτὸς φυλακὴν v. 5, ἐκ νυκτῶν vv. 13, 17, νυκτηγορίαν v. 19): *Rhesus* is the only Greek tragedy among those that have come down to us in their entirety which, like the story told in the tenth book of the *Iliad* (from which it draws its subject matter), takes place entirely at night, contrary to the convention that plays, being performed outdoors and without the use of artificial lighting, were set during the day. Different are the cases of tragedies such as Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Euripides’ *Electra* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, which begin at the end of the night but whose action unfolds during the day. A night-time setting is also conceivable for some tragedies that have come down to us in fragmentary form (cf. FRIES 2014, 3-4, n. 3; DONELAN 2014, 544-548; FANTUZZI 2020, 55-56, n. 183). The illusion of darkness, impossible to represent realistically, is created by the author through numerous and almost insistent references to night (νύξ and its compounds and synonyms occur 34 times) and darkness.

From the very beginning, night is presented as a time for sleep and tranquillity that should not be disturbed, but also as a time when, because of the darkness, it is difficult to recognise people and is therefore conducive to deception and treachery (λόχος v. 17). Throughout the tragedy, the illusion of darkness is also created, by contrast, through references to the light of the fires lit in the Greek camp (vv. 41-43), the splendour of *Rhesus*’ mares (vv. 304, 616) and his golden shield (vv. 305-306) and the shining of the moon (v. 534). The action, which began in the middle of the night, will end at dawn (vv. 535, 992).

It seems likely that the illusion of a night-time setting was created for the audience solely through the verbal level, but one wonders whether it could also have been enhanced by the actual conditions of the performance. Burlando considered the possibility of an indoor performance for a small audience

(BURLANDO 1997, 19); this is certainly an intriguing hypothesis, but one that finds no parallel in the documentation available to us for the fourth century and also seems to contrast with the particularly lively nature of some scenes in the tragedy and with the probable use of *mechané* for the appearance of the Muse, mother of Rhesus (vv. 890-914).

#### **[Reference edition]**

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#### **[Essential bibliography]**

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#### **[Keywords]**

Euripides, *Rhesus*, night, tragedy, parodos

**[Giovanna Pace]**