Greek playwright. One of the great writers of Greek tragedy. His plays, with their cynical depiction of human motivation, caused controversy. The significance of the chorus was reduced in favour of a more complex examination of individual behaviour, especially women. His works include Medea, Electra, Hecuba, and the anti-war satire Trojan Women. Only 18 plays are extant.

Greek tragic dramatist, ca. 485-406 BCE. According to Aristotle, Sophocles said that he drew men as they ought to be, but Euripides drew them as they were. Euripides has always been a more controversial dramatist than Sophocles or Aeschylus. His plays take a more skeptical view of human, and specifically male, pretensions, at times bordering on black farce; the cosmos they portray is more savagely unpredictable; their aesthetic principles are at loggerheads with Aristotle's. No wonder that to later ages he has always seemed more "modern" than his rivals, though not necessarily more estimable. Nietzsche was not alone in deploring (with the exception of the Bacchae) the degenerate worldview that Euripides represented.

His plays appear more heterogeneous than those of his two peers partly because more of them have (accidentally) survived. Eighteen were published in Venice in 1503, and within a few years the great Humanist scholar Erasmus had produced Latin translations of Hecuba and Iphigeneia in Aulis that would find their way, along with the brief quotations included in his much-reprinted Adages, into schoolrooms and libraries throughout Europe. These two plays, together with Medea and Alcestis, also translated into Latin (by the Scots Humanist George Buchanan, mid-16th cent.), created the dominant image of Euripides at least up until the end of the 18th century, when, like Sophocles' and Aeschylus', his plays first became available to the Greekless reader in their entirety. Euripides was admired mainly for creating icons of female suffering, whether "good women" like Alcestis, Iphigeneia, and Polyxena (Hecuba's daughter) or "bad women" like Medea. The Phaedra of his Hippolytus was another significant figure, inflected by the later Senecan version in Latin, through which, along with the Roman dramatist’s rewritings of Medea, The Trojan Women, and Heracles, Euripidean tragedy reached Shakespeare and Racine.

From 1660 onward Euripides was a major influence on the vogue for sentimental dramas known to British audiences as she-tragedies. Though Creusa, Queen of Athens, William Whitehead's adaptation of Ion (1754), has not stood the test of time, this phase of history did produce at least one masterpiece based on Euripides (and Seneca), Jean Racine's incomparable Phèdre (1677), itself the object of many subsequent rewritings, by Robert Lowell (1961), Tony Harrison (1975), and others. Euripides is also the source of two lesser but still magnificent tragedies by Racine, Andromaque (1667) and Iphigénie (1674). A hundred years later Euripides inspired another fine verse drama that marked a climax of the Enlightenment’s faith in human reason and goodness, J. W. von Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris (1787). This is close in time and temper to two major works by the Viennese composer Christoph Willibald Gluck, whose Iphigénie en Aulide (1774) and Iphigénie en Tauride (1779) mark a turning point in the history of opera.
Alcestis, the wife and mother prepared to die for her husband, Admetus, has proved a particularly durable model of self-sacrifice, invoked by poets from Chaucer, Milton, and Wordsworth to Rainer Maria Rilke and Marguerite Yourcenar. Robert Browning gives her play a Christian turn and frames it within his narrative poem *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), and it provides the basis for T. S. Eliot's verse drama *The Cocktail Party* (1950). Sacrificed at Aulis, sacrificer at Tauris, the virginal Iphigeneia also continues to appeal. But artists have been no less powerfully drawn to Medea and Phaedra, more insidiously passionate and dangerous to their nearest and dearest. Many divas, actors, and singers have been grateful for the chance to reincarnate them, in Luigi Cherubini's opera *Médée* (1797), in Martha Graham's dance dramas *Cave of the Heart* (1947) and *Phaedra* (1962), and in Benjamin Britten's cantata *Phaedra* (1975). Dramatists have been particularly attracted by the challenge of reimagining Phaedra's story in a modern setting. Prominent examples include Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms* (1924), Brian Friel's *Living Quarters* (1977), and Sarah Kane's *Phaedra's Love* (1996).

Euripides' tragedies attend closely to the passionate bond between mother and child and the violence unleashed by its rupture. For this reason Freud's Oedipal theories have less purchase on them than those developed by his successor, Melanie Klein (1882-1960). In addition to Medea, two further maddened and murderous mothers have proved significant, Hecuba and Agave (in the *Bacchae*). Through the 16th century the play to which Hecuba gives her name provided a memorable model of maternal revenge, but only in recent years has it begun to regain its potency, partly through its association with the other great war play dominated by Hecuba, *The Trojan Women*. Throughout the 20th century this latter has frequently been staged in times of war across the globe from Moscow to Brazil and Germany to Japan.

Before about 1900 no one paid much attention to the *Bacchae*, but it has come to seem one of the defining models of Greek tragedy and even of tragedy itself, rivaling Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*. For this Friedrich Nietzsche must take some of the credit. The idea of "the Dionysiac" propounded in his *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) has had a massive influence not only on understandings of tragedy but on theories of theatrical performance itself. Between them Nietzsche and Euripides sponsored the event that redefined the possibilities for Greek tragedy in the contemporary theater, Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69* (New York, 1968-1969). There has also been an upsurge in new works inspired by the *Bacchae*, including Hans Werner Henze's opera *The Bassarids* (1966), with libretto by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* (1973), in which the Yoruba god Ogun merges with the Greek Dionysus.

Euripides' greatest legacy, however, has been his freedom from the precepts of the Aristotle (and Aristotelians) he never knew—his generic volatility, his nonconformity, his endless capacity to disconcert.

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