

# Iphigenia in Aulis

**EURIPIDES**

# Overview

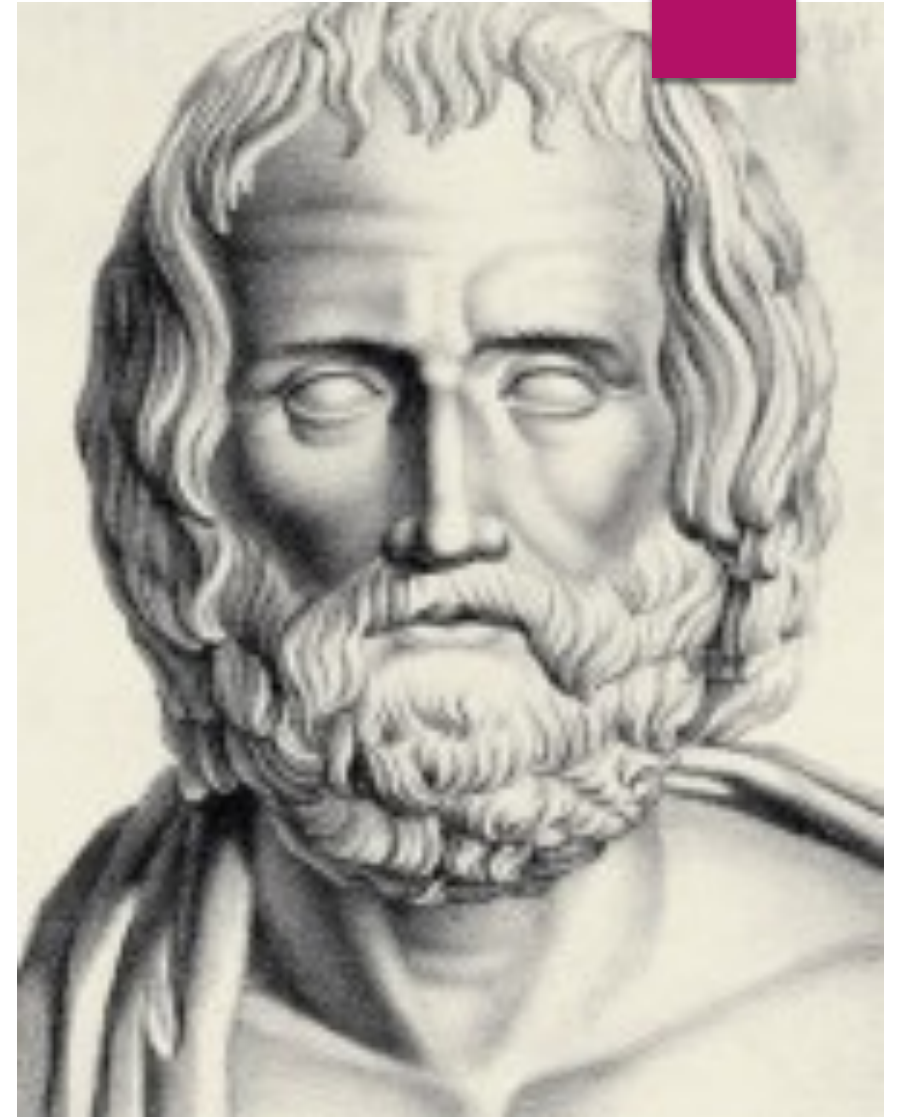
The last play written by Euripides before his death in 406 BCE

Performed the year after his death at the City Dionysia in Athens where it won first place

Produced by his son (nephew?), Euripides the Younger

*Iphigenia in Aulis* was produced as part of a trilogy that included *The Bacchae* and *Alcmaeon in Corinth*

Only a few lines of *Alcmaeon* exist today



# Plot Overview

The play focuses on Agamemnon and his decision to sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, to appease the goddess Artemis and allow his armies to sail to Troy.

The play deals with the futility of war, the nature of heroism, loyalty to family instead of the common good and the individual sin of hubris



*The Anger of Agamemnon*, Jacques-Louis David, 1819

# The Backstory

Agamemnon has gathered a huge army for war with Troy caused by the abduction of Helen, his sister-in-law, by Paris, a prince of Troy

1000 ships to transport the army assemble in the waters near Aulis, a seaport in the region of Boeotia

Before sailing, Agamemnon kills a deer sacred to the goddess Artemis and boasts about it

Artemis punishes Agamemnon's hubris by causing ill winds to prevent the sailing of the fleet

Calchus, the famous seer to Agamemnon, foretells that the only way to appease Artemis is to sacrifice Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra



*Le Sacrifice d'Iphigénie*, Abel de Pujol, 1823

# Don't Cross Artemis

Twin of Apollo, daughter of Zeus

Goddess of the Hunt, among other things

Perpetual virgin with a bevy of virgins to attend her

She's famous for her wrath if you cross her

Agamemnon should have known better



*Diana and Actaeon* by Giuseppe Cesari, circa 1605

# Strange Things in Aulis

Who actually wrote the play?  
Finished in the last year of his life and  
not performed until the following  
year

The ending is a bit sketchy and  
leaves a lot of questions about  
future actions of Clytemnestra

Then there are the ships and the  
wind

And the port of Aulis isn't big  
enough to hold 1000 ships



# Euripides

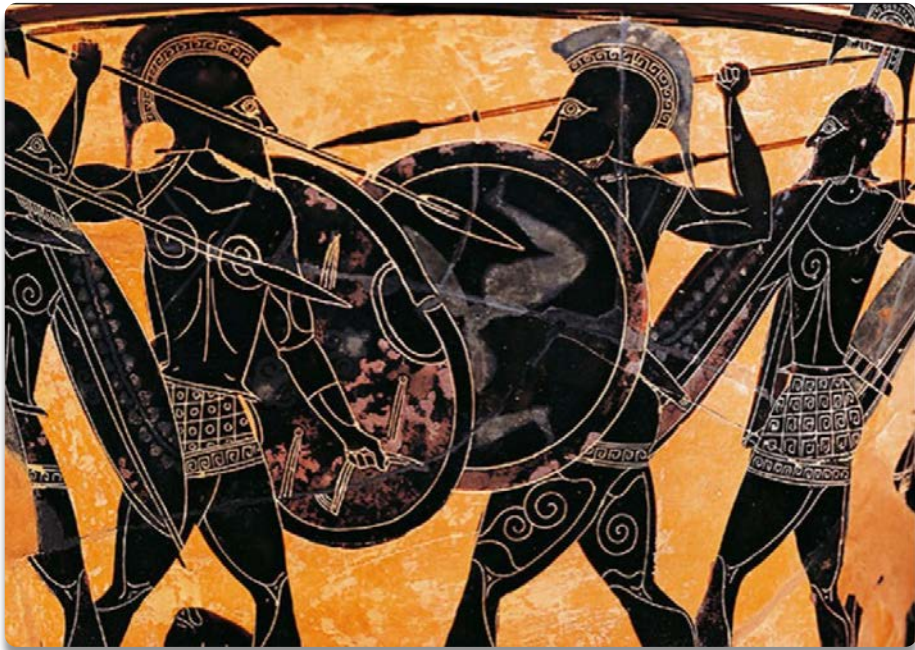
Born in 480 BCE on the island of Salamis the same day as the great naval victory over the Persians

Youngest of the three great Tragedians

Said to have written his plays in the "Cave of Euripides" on the island of Salamis



# The World of Euripides



Shaped by Persian Wars and the conflict between Athens and Sparta known as the Peloponnesian War

After checking the second Persian invasion in 479, Athens leads a coalition known as the Delian League that conducts aggressive war against areas of remaining Persian influence and increasingly dominates other Greek city-states

They are opposed by Sparta and its allies who resent the growing power of Athens

The period between 431 and 404 see Athenian naval power and Spartan land power vying for supremacy. Eventually, Sparta and its allies prevail



# Athens at the Height of Glory

Literally, from the day of his birth until the year of his death, the life of Euripides spanned the height the Athenian culture

Athens dominated the Delian league, collected enormous wealth, and saw an unprecedented era of arts, architecture, and influence



# Prolific Playwright

Over 90 plays written but only 18-19 survive in complete form

More of his plays survive than those of Sophocles and Aeschylus combined

He only won four first-place awards at the City Dionysia

Two of his awards, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Bacchae* were awarded after his death



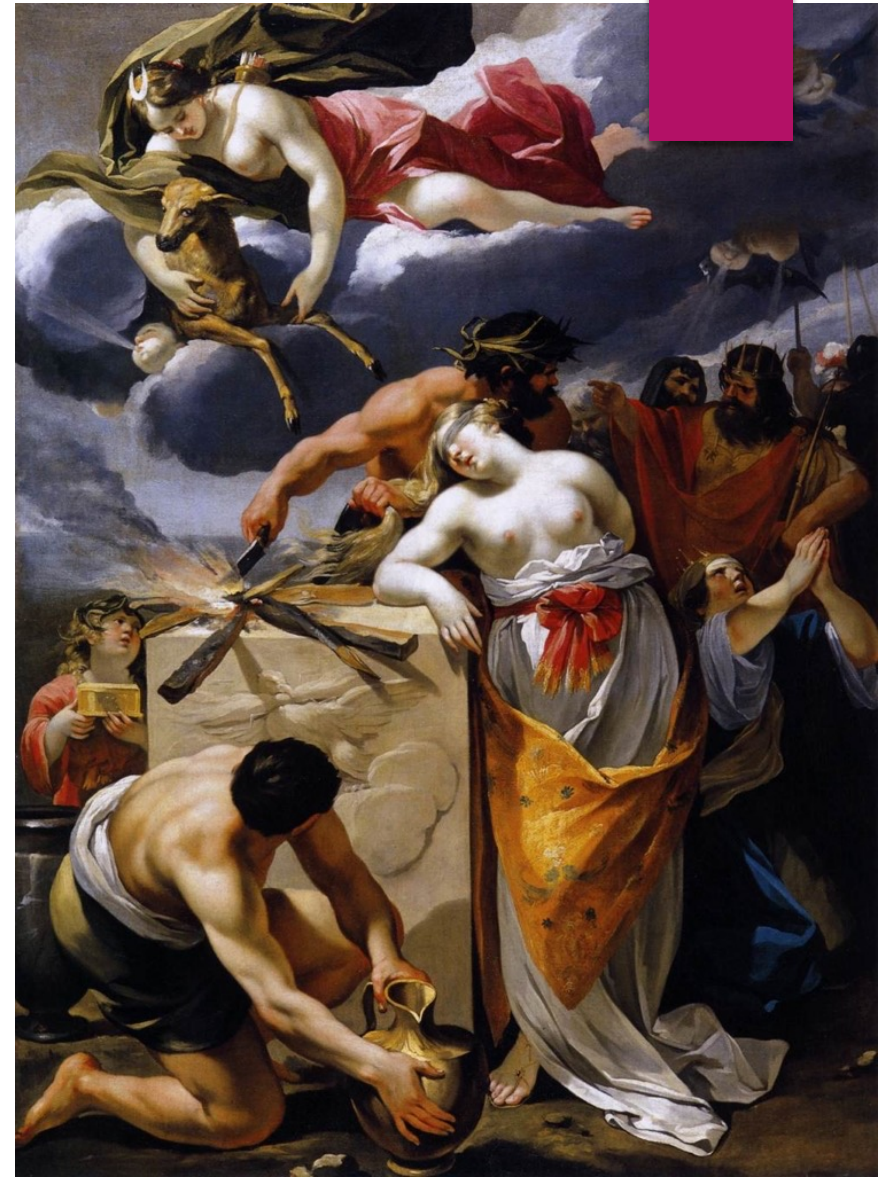
# Literary Themes

Eschewed rare and archaic words and utilized everyday expressions

He frequently used *deus ex machina* to shock audiences and simplify plot structures

He was particularly sensitive to women and his plays frequently highlight their abuse

Euripides treats war with great distaste and highlights the injustices and horror of armed conflict, particularly for women and children



*Le sacrifice d'Iphigénie*, François Perrier, 1633



# Domestic Life

Two failed marriages

Wives were unfaithful

Three sons by second wife, Melito.  
One of these, known as Euripides the Younger, produced the plays after Euripides' death

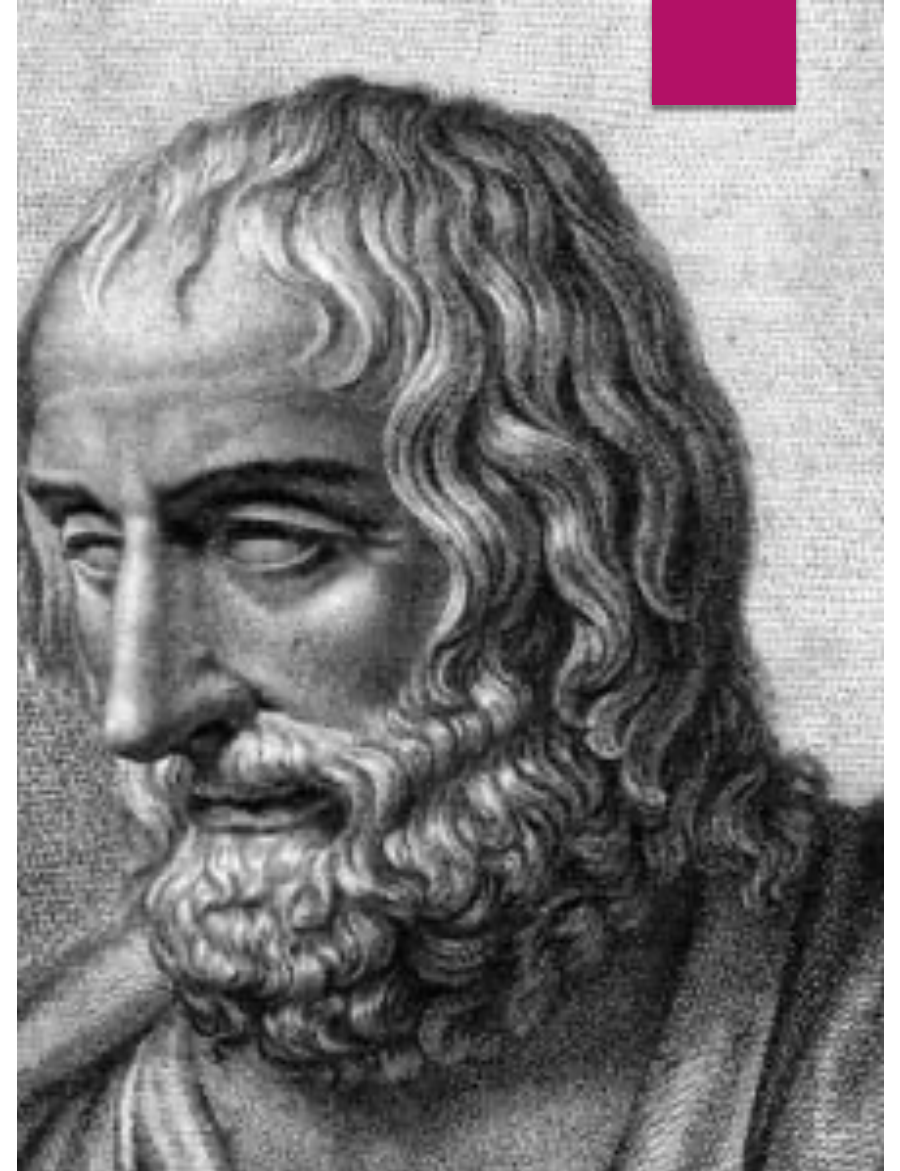
Divorce was easy to get in ancient Athens and could be initiated by either party

# Death of Euripides

Dies in Macedon in 406

Either the harsh winter or the hounds of King Archelaus did in Euripides

A monument to Euripides in Piraeus (Athens) was said to have been struck by lightning - an indication of his unique powers



# Remembered Quotes

Life is like the theater; very often bad people get the best seats

Cleverness is not wisdom

