EURIPIDES:

His strengths:
1. <u>poetic power</u> - strong imagery, but not as complex as Sophocles' - more simply expressed/homely?
2. <u>exciting, off-beat plots</u> -with extra appeal via unexpected twists eg. Hippolytus - lust of stepmother, revenge of stepmother, final reconciliation.
3. <u>strong female characters</u> - make own demands on other people,not merely respond to their own situation.
4. <u>social variety in the cast</u> - eg. slave, nurse in hippolytus; the "socially disadvantaged" get a look in.
5. <u>darker cast of thought</u> - philosophically pessimistic, and difficult to fathom; does not expect the gods to do the right thing (reflects public outlook- the Persian wars had brought triumph, the Peloponnesan war was bringing disaster, and "moral decay")

Weaknesses:
1. <u>use of deus ex machina</u> to sort things out - how necessary is it in Hippolytus? the chorus is free not slaves and knows the truth,but is sworn to silence so cannot corroborate the goddess' assertions. What other way would there be of bringing about the reconciliation without the intervention of the all-knowing Artemis? Is it really a weakness?

(compare end of Oedipus - brilliant structure of play means the ending "flows" naturally.)

2. <u>The chorus</u> - does little to heighten drama; plays little part in the action? BUT is vital for the transmission of the Nurse/Hippolytus fracas
3. <u>Difficult to know where sympathies should lie</u> - this may not be orthodox tragic drama but maybe this was Euripides' intention?
4. <u>his "tone" is slightly odd at times</u> - in some dialogue exchanges, he is trite or even frivolous when more profound expressions might be expected eg. Theseus on hearing news of wife's death

Euripides' use of traditional dramatic elements:
<u>Prologue:</u> a long speech with no action: presents the situation,sets the scene -dull compared with Sophocles?

says what is going to happen -spoils the play compared with Sophocles who suggests how things will be worked out.
Why do it this way then?
1. it's the playbill - lists the dramatic personae
2. saves time on explanation and introduction.
3.basic information no secret anyway a familiar myth - facts are not the point of the play
   The issue will be what sort of things happen and how they happen, not exactly what will happen
4. sets the atmosphere - remember this is a religious occasion not a fun trip to the pantomine- the Hippolytus has a powerful vengeful and inexorable goddess to sets things going who vanishes at the sound of a hunting horn and the entry of a chorus of young men.
   ie. the prologue has a supernatural element a sense of waiting for something to happen.

Long Speeches:
often in "balanced" pairs,these are really Euripides' equivalent of dialogue (his stichomythia lines are more the expression of emotional reaction or the often cumbersome presentation of some vital piece of information)

the purpose is to reveal state of mind - his characters speeaks their thoughts in thes speeches; they are not essentially natural dialogue, or background to incidents, or to provide information- but to convey thought on a large scale (for a large audience) and in heightened language. Bitty bits of speech are lost on large meeting if it is thoughts that are to be conveyed.

Messenger's speech:
starts plain, simple, unemotional; rises gradually to a climax; then falls away insimple pain and grief.The whole pattern is carefully prepared and structured for maximum impact and sustained impression on the audience.

Deus ex machina:
for Euripides it is part of the ritual: a divine epiphany before a quiet closure; not simply to sort things out and cut through a tangle or an impasse by divine intervention (or the use of coincidence eg. discovery of lost shepherds, missing fathers etc.) but to create the final effect or purpose of the play.
It seems strange to us, but for many Greeks, gods still walked the earth, even in the time of Euripides.