

# Euripides: A Modern, 2,425 –Year– Old Playwright

By Dr. Effie Piliouni Albrecht  
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Someone said that a lie can travel half around the world while truth is putting on her shoes. George Orwell said that the further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it. Euripides, the third one of the Greek tragedians told the truth and advocated it in his plays at the time when Athens was in decline and degeneracy, which led to its fall to Philip's Macedonian armies.

While Aeschylus and Sophocles flourished as playwrights during the flourished period of Athens' victory against the Persians and its gold age of glory, Euripides wrote during the time of the defeat of Athens by Sparta. While Aeschylus attributed to the gods the ability to render justice in his plays and Sophocles deemed that tragedy is the result of human flaws, Euripides begged to differ. He told his Athenian audience that tragedy does not only come from human irrationality and immorality but mainly by chance, outside circumstances beyond our control and by outside disorder. For Euripides, the gods are not active participants in human lives but detached observers, sitting idly and watching individuals destroy themselves through unbridled passions, or heedlessness. These are the elements that make Euripides a modern writer for us today. His plays have influenced playwrights, novelists, film makers and philosophers all through the ancient times as well as through the centuries till today.

To demonstrate the differences among Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, I have chosen one character, Electra, which all three considered part of an important ancient myth. Euripides is the only one who dares to tell the truth about this young woman and make Athenians consider issues as war, infidelity, justice and revenge.

**Effie Piliouni Albrecht** was born in Athens, Greece. She attended the Kapodistrian University of Athens, where she got a degree in English literature and the Classics. She studied linguistics at Cambridge University, England and French and German at the Institut Francais d' Athenes and the Goethe Institut, Athen respectively. She moved to the United States in 1981 and received a Master's Degree in Comparative Theater, and a PhD. In Anglo-Saxon and Medieval British Literature at Auburn University, in Auburn, Alabama. She taught at the same university for 25 years. The classes she taught were Writing, World Literature (due to her multi-cultural perspective and access to several languages), British and American Literature and Women's Studies. She retired five years ago, and she is a full time artist (mosaics) and writer.

Among the works I taught in my World literature classes were Ancient Greek plays by all three tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. I also taught Aristophanes (mainly *Lysistrata*, which is an anti-war play). All three tragedians touch upon almost all human issues, strengths and weaknesses of men and women. Their appeal has not diminished through the centuries, so their value is universal and eternal. Of the three, my favorite is Euripides because he is the most modern of all. Though he did not receive as many prizes from the ancient Athenians as his predecessors (he was unconventional), he managed to capture the core of human nature and expose it. Last year I taught four of his plays at OLLI (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute), an American organization connected to major universities. OLLI offers anyone in the community, but especially the retirees, the chance to take classes in various areas of interest. The classes are taught by professors and retired professors in various areas. My Euripides class had 25 people, among whom were some of my former professors and a favorite student of mine, Dee, 96 years old. The Euripides plays fascinated them. The attendance was impeccable and the discussions more than challenging. I will talk about Euripides and his ancient modernity at your Hellenic Center in Portland. I would be honored to participate in the effort of a Greek community to promote and protect our culture for all it has contributed to the West.

Respectfully,  
Dr. Effie Piliouni Albrecht