Stoicism and Seneca’s *Phaedra*

**Mythological Background**

- Theseus marries Antiope, an Amazon, and has a child Hippolytus
- Later, he marries Phaedra, the sister of Ariadne

**The Plot of Euripides’s *Hippolytus***

- Prologue: Aphrodite announces that she has arranged the death of both Hippolytus and Phaedra because Hippolytus refuses to worship or honor her
- The audience learns that Phaedra has not eaten the last three days and Theseus is out of the country
- Phaedra announces that, upon discovering her love for Hippolytus, she followed successively three courses of action:
  1. Keep it secret
  2. Maintain strict self-discipline
  3. Kill herself
- Phaedra’s nurse advises her to go ahead with it rather than kill herself
- Phaedra refuses, so the nurse then reveals everything to Hippolytus to force the situation
- Hippolytus refuses Phaedra’s love and condemns all women as inherently evil
- Phaedra kills herself and leaves a note claiming that she was raped by Hippolytus
- Theseus returns, discovers the note, begs Poseidon to kill Hippolytus, and then confronts Hippolytus
- Hippolytus flees to the shore where a giant bull rises from the ocean and causes him to crash his chariot
- Artemis appears and explains everything to Theseus
- Lastly, Theseus is re-united with his dying son, who forgives him for murdering him

**Seneca’s *Phaedra*** is a Stoic adaptation of Euripides’s *Hippolytus***

- Passion, rather than the gods, is the driving force of the dramatic action
  - Phaedra
    - Phaedra acts upon her own internal evil desires; Aphrodite plays no part in the play
    - *alitur et crescit malum / et ardet intus qualis Aetnaeo uapor / exundat antro* (101-3, “evil is nourished, grows, and burns within me like smoke streams out of Aetna cave”)
    - *Quae memoras scio / uera esse, nutrix; sed furor cogit sequi / petiora* (177-8, “I know that things you say are true, but a frenzy compels me to pursue worse things”)
• **Nutrix:** *Deum esse amorem turpis et uitio fauens / finxit libido* (195-6, “lust, foul and favoring vice, invented that love was a god”)

• **haec sola ratio est, unicum effugium mali / uirum sequamur, morte praeuertam nefas.** (253-4, “this is the only rationality, the sole escape from evil, let me follow my husband, let me forestall evil by death”)

• **uis magna uocem mittit et maior tenet. / uos testor omnis, caelites, hoc quod uolo / me nolle.** (604-5, “a great force drives on my voice and a greater force holds it back. I call you all as witnesses, gods, that I do not want this which I want”)

• **Pectus insanum uapor / amorque torret. intimis saeuit ferus / uisceribus ignis mersus et uenas latens / ut agilis altas flamma percurrit trabes.** (640-4, “a heat and love burn my insane chest. A wild fire rages, buried in my deepest guts and lurking in my veins as an active flame courses through deep timbers”)

• **mei non sum potens** (699, “I am not in charge of myself”)

**Hippolytus**

• **quis huius animum flectet intractabilem? / exosus omne feminae nomen fugit** (229-30, “Who will change his formidable mind? He, filled with hatred, flees the entire name of ‘woman’”)

• **Solamen unum matris amissae fero, / odisse quod iam feminas omnis licet.** (578-9, “I consider it the one solace of having lost my mother, that it is now permitted to me to hate all women”)

**Theseus**

• **o taetrum genus / nullaque uictum lege melioris soli! / ferae quoque ipsae Veneris euitant nefas, / generisque leges inscius seruat pudor.** (911-4, “O race foul and bound by no law of a better land! Even the beasts themselves avoid this crime of love, and an unknowing shame preserves the laws of breeding”)

**Plot changes**

- There is no prologue and no participation of the gods
- Theseus has been stuck in the underworld for the last three years
- Phaedra does not kill herself in the middle of the play, but at the end after seeing Hippolytus’s dead body
- Theseus never confronts Hippolytus about the rape
- Hippolytus dies immediately upon crashing his chariot; therefore there is no opportunity for forgiveness

**Use of Stoic language**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin Word</th>
<th>Number of Appearances: Line Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>insanus-a-um</td>
<td>7: 351, 361, 640, 700, 736, 1130, 1193</td>
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<tr>
<td>metus/metuo</td>
<td>15: 29, 72, 146, 170, 217, 219, 243, 435, 492, 727, 993, 1053, 1054, 1136, 1240</td>
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<td>timor/timeo</td>
<td>10: 96, 163, 341, 428, 523, 722, 874, 897, 1033, 1089</td>
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<td>terror</td>
<td>3: 47, 1066, 1079</td>
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<td>pavidus-a-um</td>
<td>4: 636, 1056, 1070, 1082</td>
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<tr>
<td>trepidus/trepido</td>
<td>7: 427, 593, 729, 847, 901, 1063, 1262</td>
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- Ultimately, Seneca, as he did with his other plays, has adapted his source material to develop a play that shows rather than tells the audience about Stoic philosophy, in particular the danger of passion.

**Bibliography:**


Phaedra In Greek mythology [1], Phaedra was the daughter of King Minos and Queen Pasiphae of Crete and the younger sister of Ariadne [2]. Phaedra married Theseus, king of Athens [3] and slayer of the beast known as the Minotaur. In response, Poseidon has a sea monster frighten Hippolytus’s horses. The birth of children to carry on the family line was the highest priority of a marriage. Once a bride had borne offspring, preferably sons, she had fulfilled her main marital obligation. In Seneca’s play, Phaedra reveals that her own marriage to Theseus is a political arrangement, intended to quell hostilities between Athens and her native island of Crete. HIPPOLYTUS, son of Theseus and an Amazon PHAEDRA, wife of Theseus and stepmother of Hippolytus THESEUS, king of Athens NURSE OF PHAEDRA MESSENGER SLAVES AND ATTENDANTS CHORUS OF ATHENIAN CITIZENS. The young Hippolytus is organizing a hunt, and invokes Diana, goddess of the hunt, to help his luck. The Chorus prays to the gods that beauty may be as advantageous to Hippolytus as it has proved pernicious and fatal to so many others. Phaedra’s husband, the great Athenian hero Theseus, then returns from his quest in the underworld, and, seeing Phaedra in distress, seemingly prepared to kill herself, demands an explanation. All the nurse will say in explanation is that Phaedra has resolved to die. Theseus had wed Antiope, the Amazons, and of their union had been born Hippolytus. This youth grew up to love the chase, austere and beautiful, shunning the haunts of men and scorning the love of women. Theseus had meanwhile slain Antiope, and married Phaedra, Cretan Minos’s child. And now, for four years past, the king has not been seen upon the earth, for, following the mad adventure of his bosom friend, Pirithoüs, he has descended into Tartarus to help him steal away its queen, and thence, men think, he will never return. Deserted by her lord Phaedra and Hippolytus recounts the two different versions of the unnatural love of Phaedra for her stepson Hippolytus - as told by Ancient authors. Quite the opposite, she was interested in her husband’s son from his previous marriage with the Amazon queen Antiope (also known as Hippolyte). So, Phaedra set out to entice him, using all her charms and trickeries both plentiful. The Death of Hippolytus. Unfortunately for her, Hippolytus turned out to be a tough nut to crack: not only he rebuffed her advances, but he also did it without blinking an eye. Afraid of the consequences and thirsty for revenge, Phaedra rushed to her husband Theseus and lied to him that Hippolytus had tried to seduce her, even going so far to suggest that he did so Template:Subject Antiope (Template:Pron-en) is a figure from Greek mythology. She was the only Amazon known to have married. Daughter of Ares and sister to Melanippe and Hippolyte and possibly Orithyia, queens of the Amazons, she was the wife of Theseus. There are various accounts of the manner in which Theseus became possessed of her, and of her subsequent fortunes.