

# Good essay on phaedra: evidence of the centuries old patriarchy

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Phaedra is a play written by Jean Racine in 1677. It is overflowing with an ambience of patriarchy. This is a structure that views and treats women as lesser humans than men. It sees women as weaker creatures having emotions that are more powerful than reason. Moreover, women are duty bound to give sexual pleasures to their husbands, look after the children and manage the hearth. In a patriarchal society, men have the sovereign power over their wives and families. In other words, the wife is a property of the husband. Patriarchy never sees women as decision makers, and leaders along with men. This social structure is still reflected in the 21st century despite many feminist theories, women's movement for empowerment and so forth.

Phaedra reflects how women are perceived during the 17th century in Western Europe. The character of Phaedra as the wife of King Theseus is weak, and is overpowered by her sexual interests. When Theseus was declared dead en route to his journey home, she felt free to pursue her sexual attraction to the King's son, Hippolytus. This was however not successful because Hippolytus is in-love with another girl, Aricia. Moreover, King Theseus suddenly appeared for he was able to survive. In order to save her pride, Phaedra and her nurse Oenone plotted to tell the King about their false accusations to Hippolytus. Oenone told Theseus that his son forced the queen for an incestuous relationship. Theseus believed the accusations leading him to punish his son. It was too late when he knew about the truth because Hippolytus was already dead. Phaedra out of remorse claimed her life after confessing the truth that it was her that had sexual desires to his son-in-law.

The play mirrored that women are indeed a destructive force of nature whereas men embody strength, righteousness and order. Also, it reflected double standard in terms of morality. Phaedra despised herself for desiring a man who is her husband's son to an Amazonian woman. It was pointed out that in moral values, it is incestuous, despised and a grave sin. Throughout the play, it was stressed that women, once committed to a man, should not look and desire other men. On the other hand, Theseus was still a powerful and an honorable king despite having an affair with other women whom he met in his journey. The play suggested that men have the right to have sexual relations with other women, while women are despised and even ostracized if they commit adultery.

Looking deeply in the context of the play, Racine's way of representing women in the 17th century just reinforced the prevailing patriarchal relations. It inculcated a double standard of morality, and stereotyped characteristics of women among the audience. It is however understood that writers are influenced by the environment where they live. Jean Racine may have lived in the era and society where gender equality is unheard. It is also during this period when stereotyped gender roles are spread by the Church, and plays like Phaedra reinforced it.

Today, patriarchy is still a structure that oppressed women in most parts of the world. Gender stereotypes are still institutionalized. In the Philippines for example, Grade school textbooks still contain that the father is the head and provider of the family, while the wife is a housekeeper. Also, blue color is for boys, whereas pink is for girls. These institutionalized gender stereotypes are

indeed reflection of centuries-old patriarchy that had been carried through generations by Church and school institutions.

## **Works Cited**

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