

Phaedra Key Info

Writer: Lucius Annaeus Seneca | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Key Facts

- **Full Title:** Phaedra
- **Author:** Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BCE – 65 CE)
- **Title of the Author:** Stoic Philosopher, Roman Statesman, and Tragic Playwright; regarded as the “Father of Roman Tragedy” and a major influence on Renaissance drama.
- **Source:** Based on Greek mythology, especially the story of Hippolytus and Phaedra. Earlier versions were dramatized by Euripides (Hippolytus) and later reimagined by Seneca in a Roman Stoic framework.
- **Written Time:** Before 50 CE.
- **First Published:** 54 CE/ 1st century.
- **Genre:** Roman Tragedy / Mythological Drama / Revenge Play / Psychological Tragedy.
- **Form:** Verse drama written in Latin; primarily uses iambic senarii (for dialogue) and lyric meters (for choral passages).
- **Structure:** Five-act structure typical of Senecan tragedy. The play revolves around Phaedra’s forbidden passion for her stepson Hippolytus, her false accusation, and the tragic destruction of Theseus’ family.
- **Tone:** Dark, psychological, moralistic, violent, and filled with themes of passion, guilt, and doom.
- **Point of View:** Told through dramatic dialogue, monologues, and choral odes. Perspectives alternate among Phaedra, Hippolytus, Theseus, the Nurse, and the Chorus.
- **Significance:** One of Seneca’s most famous tragedies. It explores destructive passion, the conflict between reason and desire, the dangers of suppressed emotions, and Stoic ideas of self-control. Hugely influential on Renaissance dramatists like Racine (Phèdre), Shakespeare, and other Elizabethan playwrights.
- **Language:** Latin.
- **Famous Line:** “The one who yields to love’s madness, even against his will, must bear the guilt.”

- **Setting:**
- **Time Setting:** 9th or 8th century BCE. The mythological age of Athens, in the heroic period of Theseus.
- **Place Setting:** The royal palace of Theseus in Troezen (a city in the Peloponnese).

Key Notes

Forbidden Love: At the center of Phaedra lies a story of forbidden and destructive love. Phaedra becomes attracted to her stepson, Hippolytus. This love stood against social rules, morality, and family bonds. Seneca shows how irrational passion can drive a woman to stand against her own family and society. Phaedra tried to hide her love, but in the end, it was revealed. This shows that human weakness and suppressed emotions can never remain hidden; eventually, they erupt and bring ruin. This forbidden love is the very foundation of the play's tragedy.