

Villains and Victims in Love: An Investigation of Love's Changing Characterization in Racine's *Phédre*

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A Senior Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Integral Curriculum of
Liberal Arts

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April 15, 2016

Jean Racine revitalizes the ancient art of the tragedy in his reimagining of Euripides' *Hippolytus*; this work, which Racine entitles, *Phédre*, not only makes Racine one of the most profound French tragedians of the 17th century but also sparks a change in the fundamental core of tragedy. In Racine's *Phédre*, love replaces fate as the propelling factor of the plot and the driving force that determines the ends of the characters. To accept its new role as fate's replacement, love changes from its simple nature into a darker, more complex force. Another key difference between Racine's *Phédre* and Euripides' *Hippolytus* lies in the clear emphasis Racine places on female characters. Complexity of character sets the women of *Phédre* apart from other iterations of women in tragedy because they are morally ambiguous. Their moral ambiguity manifests itself in the fact that they are heroes, villains, and victims—they are multifaceted female characters who defy restriction to a simple stereotype. Their moral ambiguity complicates not only their characters, but also any perceptions the reader might have of them. As love replaces fate in Racine's take on this Greek tragedy, love must change its form; it evolves into a new, protean entity that affects the three primary female characters—Cenone, Aricia, and Phaedra—who all exhibit different types of the new, changed love and, because of love's changing characterization, are both villains and victims in the name of love.

As an homage to the foundational text—and to better understand the differences between Racine and Euripides' perspectives on this tale—an examination of Euripides' *Hippolytus* becomes necessary. *Hippolytus* and *Phédre*, despite sharing a common source material, are two essentially different stories. The difference becomes apparent in the very titles of the texts; Euripides concerns himself with Hippolytus and his fate

while Racine interests himself in love and its effects on Phaedra. The reliance and prevalence of gods is perhaps another stark difference between these two texts. In *Hippolytus*, Aphrodite and Artemis are two forces at odds over Hippolytus' fate.

Aphrodite's opening lines from the play read:

You call me Love, Aphrodite. And you,
 Who are the world, are only of two kinds—
 Are you not? Either you submit,
 And allow love its place in you—I like those,
 I respect them. Or else you are so proud...so pure....
 Those must be taught their error...

...

No, Hippolytus has sinned against me,
 And today I will punish him for that sin.
 The plans of love have succeeded in the past;
 Now it will not be hard to succeed again.

...

Queen Phaedra, his father's wife, saw him,
 And her heart was taken prisoner by a strange
 And incestuous love... I planned that. (Euripides, 3)

Aphrodite plays a more active role in Euripides' play. She purposefully singles out Hippolytus and victimizes him. Her victimization of him is solely based on a perceived slight. Aphrodite finds herself enraged at the fact that Hippolytus prefers Artemis—the Virgin Goddess—to her, the Goddess of erotic love. Already Aphrodite's actions are vile enough but she furthers her plan by dragging Phaedra—who for all intents and purposes is an innocent bystander in the battle for Hippolytus—into the fray. Aphrodite enacts her plan for vengeance through Phaedra—whom she herself likens to a prisoner. All in all, Aphrodite—as a manifestation of a form of love—deliberately decides to throw the events into motion. She plants the seeds of an incestuous love in Phaedra's heart and watches the carnage inflicted upon Hippolytus from afar. To Aphrodite, Phaedra is nothing more than a means to the end—namely, Hippolytus' end. Due to Aphrodite's immense desire for vengeance against a nearly blameless Hippolytus, the audience's

sympathies lie with Hippolytus and not Phaedra. Phaedra, even in the audience's eyes, is the tool which Aphrodite utilizes to exact her revenge. Euripides allows Phaedra to be portrayed as an extension of Aphrodite—the true villain—and thus permits the audience to vilify Phaedra as well. In shifting focus from Hippolytus to Phaedra, Racine portrays Phaedra in a different light. Where Euripides allows for her complete vilification, Racine redeems Phaedra in showing that she also falls victim to love. With some understanding of Aphrodite's role in *Hippolytus*, we can now shift our attention to Racine's portrayal of love in *Phédre*.

In Racine's *Phédre*, love shares a similar description as the one expounded upon in *Hippolytus*, albeit its agency differs greatly. As with earlier adaptations of Greek myth into tragedy, the characters blame certain gods—in this instance, Venus—for their dejected states. From the very beginning of the play, several characters describe Venus as a vile, visceral and conquering goddess. Theramenes, one of the first to mention the goddess, says, "And could it be that Venus, scorned so long/ By you, has proved him, Theseus, right at last?/ And, putting you with all the rest of men,/ Has forced you to your knees before her shrine?/ Are you in love?" (Racine 31). Theramenes' description of Venus portrays the goddess as a vindictive and violent goddess. In addition, this description makes falling prey to Venus seem inescapable because all men kneel before her shrine. This description of Venus in Racine's *Phédre* resonates strongly with the analysis of Aphrodite's passage from Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Despite a similarity in the description of Aphrodite and Venus, a fundamental difference in their agency occurs here. Venus, despite her perceived violence and forcefulness, is not as active and present a figure in *Phédre* as Aphrodite was in *Hippolytus*. Venus, unlike Aphrodite, is

not a physical incarnation of love but rather Venus appears to manifest herself as the human emotion love. While characters like Theramenes—and later Phaedra—speak of Venus as if she were an actual, personified goddess, they actually mean to invoke, blame, and beg before love. Unlike *Hippolytus*, Racine's *Phédre* concerns itself with the spectrum of human emotion. Love is not an incarnate being, ready and willing to enact vengeance. Rather, in *Phédre*, love is an emotion—sometimes incorrectly ascribed to a celestial, godly force—that humans grapple and struggle with.

The change of love from a deific force to a human emotion from *Hippolytus* to *Phédre* merits some substantiation through the text. In *Hippolytus*, the characterization of Hippolytus differs vastly from his characterization in *Phédre*. *Hippolytus* portrays its eponymous Hippolytus in a very damning light. True to Aphrodite's word, this version of Hippolytus does not submit himself to her, nor to love. Where Aphrodite embodies erotic love and desire, this version of Hippolytus represents pure reason. Hippolytus' chastity and affinity for Artemis, the virgin Goddess, find their foundation in reason. Hippolytus makes this abundantly clear in his calculating speech regarding women:

Oh, God, you have married men to living engines
 Of deceit. You have married them to women. Why?
 To perpetuate the human race? Then women
 Were the wrong means. You should have let us
 Donate a sum of gold or silver or copper
 To your holy temples, and buy our children from you.
 At least, we would have had value for our money
 And at home, a life of liberty, and no plague
 Of women... of course, they are a plague! (Euripides 20).

Hippolytus would rather pay for children than procreate in a more precocious manner, so long as he remains free from women. His solution appears all the more rational and calculating when paralleled with an almost inhuman disdain for sexuality. Phaedra later reaffirms Hippolytus' status as a rational being when she states, "...As for me,/ I am full

of a love that has turned to poison;/ But at least my death will hurt *him*, yes,/ It will teach him not to look down at me. For that height/ On which he stands, his reason, is as dangerous/ As my disease” (Euripides, 23). In this passage, Phaedra succinctly summarizes the intended message of Euripides’ play: that human reason is no match against a divine passion. Phaedra also states that Hippolytus’ reason will be his undoing—just as her uncontrollable, heaven-sent love for him will be the death of her.

If the Hippolytus of *Hippolytus* represents a state of reason, the Hippolytus of *Phédre* can definitely be said to embody the emotive aspect of humanity. *Phédre* opens with a decided Hippolytus. He determines he must leave Trozene and when Theramenes presses him, Hippolytus admits that he must leave because he has fallen in love with Aricia. The issue of Hippolytus love, while invoking Theramenes’ comments on the nature of Venus, proves to be a very human issue. Hippolytus works through his dilemma: “And even if my pride could ever melt/ Should I have been insane enough to choose/ Aricia for my conqueror? Did I forget/ The eternal barriers between us two?/ My father disapproves...” (Racine 35). Hippolytus still appears very reasonable here. But, in *Phédre*, Hippolytus does not use his reason as a weapon against love. Rather, Hippolytus struggles to understand his own emotions. He states he could not have chosen to fall in love with Aricia, because logically there exist a plethora of reasons why he could not and should not be in love with her. Hippolytus finishes his speech with a query “Should I embrace her cause, and make myself/ Example of foolhardiness? Against the wrath/ Of an infuriated father, launch/ My youth upon a course of love so mad?” (Racine 35). Here Hippolytus questions not the goddess, nor Theramenes, but rather himself. Hippolytus is still a reasonable man, but he also has passion and desire.

The Hippolytus of *Phédre* appears far more human due to the duality of reason and passion in his being. In this passage, we have seen these two characteristics battle one another—it is yet unclear whether one has dominion over the other. Abundantly evident, however, is the fact that Hippolytus' love is an earthly problem, not a divine one. Hippolytus' transformation is just as subtle as the change that love has undergone. While some similarities are readily apparent, some insidious humanization occurs—this humanization changes both the nature of the character Hippolytus and the nature of love. This shift changes and challenges our perception of love and its effect on the characters. But before investigating the shift and how it affects our perceptions, it will be beneficial to study Phaedra and her understanding of love.

Phaedra flounders in her understanding of this new take on love; she follows instead the Euripidean belief in love as a physical, incarnate being that must be held responsible for human failings. In Phaedra's eyes, love is not patient, love is not kind; love is forceful, love is the inevitable end to which we all succumb. Phaedra, more than any other character, feels the dark nature of love. Love afflicts not only Phaedra's present, but also her past. She comments on the effects love has had on her family, "Your fatal hatred, Venus! Oh, your wrath! Into what aberrations did Love cast my mother!" (Racine 47). In this small speech Phaedra recalls the fate of her mother, Pasiphae, whom—according to mythology—Aphrodite compelled to mate with a bull. Phaedra decries the goddess' hatred and wrath, claiming the goddess was the ruination of her family. Love follows her family lineage and now tortures her. Phaedra proclaims, "Since Venus wills it so, I perish now,/ Of that doomed family, the last and most/ Pitiabile" (Racine 49). Phaedra struggles to differentiate love as a human emotion

and love as a godly force. Phaedra feels just as victimized as her mother at the hands of this Goddess whom she perceives as dooming, damning and demanding. In her eyes, love and a preordained, celestial fate are one and the same. Phaedra, when confronting Hippolytus about her love for him, explains:

... Well, look at me!
 Know me, then—Phaedra—in my madness know
 I am in love. But do not dare to think
 That I—in love with you—believe that I
 Am innocent, or of myself approve.
 Nor that the mad love now deranging me,
 Like poison in the blood, is fed at all
 By cowardly connivance of my will. (Racine 85)

This passage highlights the changing nature of love and the changing nature of the characters that Racine subtly crafts. Phaedra, like most of humanity, finds herself caught between her reason and her passion. However, Phaedra does not analyze the conflict between the two. Instead of attempting to understand how she came to love Hippolytus, she claims that her desire is so profound, so irrational, that it must be heaven-sent. In blaming Venus, Phaedra frees herself from the perplexing duality of human beings—reason and desire both reign over humans and the choices that we make.

However, there is no mathematical formulation for deriving choices made from places of reason versus those stemming from desire. When these two components of human nature find themselves at odds—and this is especially the case in scenarios where desire overpowers the faculty of reason—we suffer in our attempt at understanding ourselves. But Phaedra does not make any such attempt. Instead, she blames the gods:

Unlucky object of the spite of Gods,
 I am not so detestable to you

As to myself. The Gods will bear me witness,
 The same Gods who in my veins have poured
 This burning fire, a doom to all my race;
 The Gods who take a barbarous delight
 In leading a poor mortal's heart astray! (Racine 85)

It is far easier to blame another than to understand one's own failings. While ascribing blame is Phaedra's intent in speaking these lines, Racine's purpose in writing them may differ. Instead of simply denouncing Venus for an irrational love, perhaps these lines are meant to decry a God who would create in humans such a conflicting duality of reason and desire. Phaedra claims the gods have led her heart astray. She argues that she could not reason against her love, therefore it must be divinely inspired. But Phaedra's struggle is not unique—it mirrors the challenges that humans face almost every day, the constant battle between reason and desire. Her resistance to acknowledging the humanity of her suffering leads to her downfall. She believes herself a captive, a prisoner to some celestial force instead of recognizing herself as a creature of choice—albeit a choice limited and narrowed by the conflict between reason and desire.

In Racine's *Phédre*, love changes from a deific force to a human struggle—our changing perception of love may then further affect our perceptions of characters. The reason humans struggle in their understanding of love lies in the duality of human nature—we are beings controlled by reason and desire alike. While the language that the characters—like Theramenes and Phaedra—employ does not mirror an understanding of this changing love on their part, we as readers can infer from the language a difficulty between reason and desire. Both Hippolytus and Phaedra exhibit the conflict between reason and desire—both claim that an overpowering of reason results in the love they hold for someone forbidden to them. This humanization of love—as opposed to its deification in *Hippolytus*—complicates love. Instead of an external,

uncontrollable, godly force love now falls under the purview of humanity. While characters may struggle with love and hold Venus responsible for their perceived “uncontrollable” emotions, Racine has undoubtedly brought love from the celestial sphere to the terrestrial. Love has become deep-rooted, complicated human issue. Given this new understanding of love, we can now investigate how love affects the three female characters who dominate the text—hopefully, this new understanding of love will provide a richer, more complex understanding of the characters.

Cenone, one of the three main characters, cares for Phaedra dearly—almost as if Phaedra was her own daughter. Cenone’s motherly affections and concern for her mistress are completely understandable. Cenone and Phaedra share a complicated relationship. Cenone, who has been Phaedra’s nurse since her birth, cares very deeply for Phaedra. Cenone feels a maternal tenderness for her mistress, and the role of mother and servant do not often go hand in hand. Their relationship, from Cenone’s perspective, seems clear when Cenone declares, “...You were received,/ Remember into these same arms new born./ My home, my children I have left for you,/ Abandoned for your sake” (Racine 45). Cenone has clearly given much of herself and of her private life simply to be with Phaedra. Forsaking home and family, she remains with her mistress. She chides her mistress, as a mother would scold a small child, listing all the sacrifices made for Phaedra’s benefit. Given this clarification of Cenone’s sacrifice, her protectiveness of Phaedra seems more permissible. Here, Cenone rationalizes her love for Phaedra and lists off the reasons that Phaedra should love her in return. As any mother would, Cenone defines filial love in terms of obedience and acceptance of maternal advice. For this reason, Cenone pushes Phaedra to act in the best interest of

her family. She, more than Phaedra, understands the complicated political situation surrounding Theseus' disappearance. With other contenders for the throne, Phaedra's focus should lie in securing the seat for herself and her family, in CEnone's humble opinion. While Phaedra laments over love and desires death, CEnone focuses on securing Phaedra's power. She proclaims:

...Indeed your anger should
 Explode, with reason! And I love to see
 You shudder at that cursed, ill-fated name.
 Then live! Let love and duty make you live!
 Do not permit this Scythian's son to crush
 Your lovely sons beneath his odious rule..." (Racine 43).

Love should not be killing Phaedra. Familial love should kindle Phaedra, should drive her to action. Familial love is a duty she owes herself and her sons, CEnone reminds her. A pure love, such as the love and obligation Phaedra has for her own children, should counteract the ill effects of her incestuous, "irrational" love for Hippolytus. CEnone, in the aforementioned passage, mentions reason. She then goes on to list the reasons that Phaedra should fight against Hippolytus. She rationalizes love for Phaedra in explaining that it is more reasonable for her to stand up for herself and her family. Phaedra need not be a victim of her desire, she has plenty of reasons to overcome her desire, at least in CEnone's opinion. CEnone, in this rationalization of love, also clarifies the nature of love to Phaedra. Love is not inherently evil; in most instances love creates life, instead of destroying it. The familial love and obligation Phaedra feels should rekindle the flame of Phaedra's desire to live. Obviously, CEnone cares deeply for Phaedra. She demonstrates her love for Phaedra through a motherly concern for Phaedra's position and power. And while motherly love and care are integral components of CEnone's character, there are other, more sinister aspects to her.

Cenone's characterization goes far beyond the simple "loving mother" stereotype; with the introduction of Racine's darker, more twisted take on love, Cenone's maternal concern takes on a more malevolent tone. Cenone's love extends far beyond that of a normal mother; her love causes her to make dangerous recommendations and insidious plots to assure Phaedra's safety. Once Phaedra believes that Theseus is dead, she begins to wonder what will become of her future. At this point, Phaedra believes she can have it all. Power has been secured for her son and with Theseus dead, she can declare her love to Hippolytus without it being incestuous. However, things are never so simple for characters of a tragedy. Phaedra confesses her love to a horrified Hippolytus, Theseus returns—alive and well—and Phaedra finds herself in a worse position than she began with. Should Hippolytus tell Theseus what transpired during his absence, she stands to lose not only her power, but also her very life. Cenone's motherly instincts of protection kick in. She formulates a plot that will assure Phaedra's safety:

Why surrender him the victory?
 You fear him. Then be bold, accuse him first!
 Charge him with the same crime of which today
 He can accuse you! Who can call you liar? (Racine 105)

Again, Cenone's motherly instincts drive her towards reason. Cenone realizes that Phaedra's accusation of Hippolytus could convince Theseus to banish his son—or worse. This would eliminate two problems for Phaedra. In the first place, with Hippolytus gone Phaedra would no longer feel the thorn of her desire such a taboo as the incestuous love she feels for her stepson. In the second place, it would assure Phaedra's safety—for if Hippolytus accuses Phaedra and Theseus stands with him, Phaedra's life could be forfeit—and also the security of Phaedra's position for Phaedra herself and her sons. Cenone's dangerous, rational discourse continues:

All counts against him. His sword, in your hands
 Luckily left, your present state of mind;
 Your former trouble and repeated cries
 Of warning to his father long ago;
 Even his exile you obtained!
 I would have you do nothing but keep quiet!
 My passionate devotion to you needs
 Nothing from you but silence. I, like you,
 Am trembling, and indeed I feel remorse.
 You'd see, I'd rather face a thousand deaths:
 But since, without this bitter remedy,
 I'd lose you, and to me your life outweighs
 All else, I'll speak! (Racine 105-107).

Cenone convinces Phaedra to speak against Hippolytus. She accomplishes this feat with her rational mind and her desire to keep her mistress alive and well. Both of these aspects of Cenone's character work in tandem. Her desire to keep her mistress alive fuels her mind, which quickly works to find a solution. Cenone not only finds the solution in the denunciation of Hippolytus, she also details the reasons Phaedra's accusation could overpower Hippolytus' own indictment of Phaedra. Cenone formulates this plot—which again, would save her mistress in more than one way—and assures Phaedra that this is the only course left open to her. Sadly, this plot ultimately leads to Hippolytus' tragic and untimely death.

Here we see the extent to which Cenone's love will drive her. Cenone's love for Phaedra appears fanatical and intense. She cares more about Phaedra's life, her comfort and security than ruining the life of a young man. Her love spurs her to action where she should be still. In order to save Phaedra from the mess she creates for herself, Cenone concocts a scheme in which Phaedra emerges not only triumphant, but also innocent and blameless. However, Cenone claims she feels remorseful. In a way, her remorse only adds to the gravity of her actions. Despite knowing that what she is doing is wrong, Cenone enacts her plan and defends it as the only way to keep her

mistress safe. The duality of love seems explicit in this analysis of CEnone's character. On the one hand, CEnone undoubtedly uses her reason to find the best solution for Phaedra. On the other hand, CEnone's love for Phaedra and her desire for her mistress' safety causes her to inflict harm on an innocent person—an act which can be seen as irrational. Her willingness to manipulate Theseus, her resoluteness in holding that this is the only way to save Phaedra, help prove that CEnone is not the stereotypical doting mother figure. Her love drives her to dark, dirty deeds. Our perception of CEnone as a character thus becomes far more complex. She is not a stereotypical loving mother figure. But neither is she simply a dark, manipulative crone intent on controlling the situation. She is somehow a combination of both. This combination causes a duality in her character and causes the audience to pause and think lest they judge CEnone either too easily or too harshly. Love creates in CEnone a complex, conflicting character; however, she is not the only character a more human love complicates.

Arcia may by all means be called the "heroine" of the play—despite her limited appearance and affect on the plot; however, we cannot hold Arcia to the "heroine" stereotype as love adds layers to her personality. Before the events of the play, Arcia suffered a great injustice. Theseus slaughtered all of her brothers—all of whom were capable of opposing his right to the throne—and forbade that Arcia ever fall in love or marry. Arcia describes her plight: "The most severe decree has made it law/ That no Greek heart may beat, or sigh, for me. / Lest by a sister's love's temerity / The brothers' ashes be perchance relit" (Racine 65). None can love Arcia for fear of Theseus' decree. Theseus fears the power that love has for through love Arcia could marry and bear a son to threaten the legitimacy of his rule. It seems that love can only improve Arcia's

life—at least, more so than it can for any other character in the play. However, Aricia loathes love. She counts herself lucky that Theseus' law fits her plans so easily. She thinks herself free from love's grasp until she meets Hippolytus:

You know that I have always been opposed
 To love and therefore often rendered thanks
 To unjust Theseus, whose severity
 Happily reinforced my own contempt!
 But then my eyes, my eyes had never yet
 Beheld his son. Not that my eyes alone,
 Weakly attracted, made me love in him
 A celebrated grace and beauty: gifts
 Bestowed on him by Nature and of which
 He seems unconscious, or indeed to scorn: ... (Racine 67)

Aricia rationalizes her prior state. Not only does Theseus establish a decree that keeps any from marrying—or loving—her, Theseus unknowingly helps his enemy in giving her what she wants. Aricia, prior to this speech, had nothing but contempt for love (perhaps similarly to *Hippolytus'* Hippolytus) and Theseus' decree helps her in avoiding it. Yet, in this speech we also see a glimmer of desire. Aricia allows desire and love to creep into her life—love and desire make her a far more interesting character. Aricia begins to desire Hippolytus. She lists some reasons for her desire in the section above. She initially claims that she loves Hippolytus for his virtues: strength and pride. She loves not only his virtues but also loves his humility in refusing to acknowledge his virtues. This seems a fully innocent comment to make and falls into the stereotypical actions of a heroine to say. For Aricia love apparently has none of the dark implications it has been known for—at least, we have not seen love take its darker form in Aricia yet. Aricia further rationalizes her desire as she continues her speech:

I love in him a richer, rarer prize
 His father's strength without his weaknesses.
 I love, I own I love, that noble pride
 Which never yet has stooped to be in love.

Phaedra won little glory from the love
of Theseus. I, more proud, refuse to snatch
The easy triumph of such lavish vows,
A thousand times elsewhere bestowed, and shun
A love whose heart's an ever-open door! (Racine 67)

Arcia goes on to characterize the aim of her love and desire. She desires Hippolytus because he embodies all of the positive characteristics of his father, Theseus, without demonstrating any of Theseus' fatal flaws. She submits herself to love, but not so easily. Arcia claims part of her desire is the difficulty associated with getting a man to love her. She states that she will not, like Phaedra, fall for a man whose vows of love are so easily given. She loves Hippolytus because he—like Arcia—does not fully submit to love. Hippolytus, unlike his father, is not a womanizer. As a prince with noble attributes and strong virtues, Hippolytus could easily conquer a heart with a vow. Yet he does not submit himself and Arcia admires this. Arcia further characterizes the nature of her desire when she proclaims:

But to make stoop a heart inflexible;
To touch a soul insensible to love;
To take a captive startled by his chains,
Vainly a mutineer against his joy,
That is my hearts desire, that is my spur!
Even Hercules was easier to disarm
Than this Hippolytus, for he gave in
More often and more quickly, and so laid
A lesser triumph at the feet of her,
Each her he vanquished! (Racine 67).

Arcia states that she loves Hippolytus because winning his love is a challenge. The language with which she describes love here becomes more visceral and war-like. Love has made Arcia a hunter and Hippolytus became her prey. When Hippolytus fell hopelessly in love with Arcia, he became her captive, her conquest. She rationalizes her desire for Hippolytus through this strong imagery of conquest. The conquest of Hippolytus is indeed a strong desire for Arcia, but it is not blind desire. She categorizes

and sorts through the reasoning of why—if she must submit to love—she will have Hippolytus and no other. Aricia's language also reflects a sinister aspect of her desire. She enjoys loving him all the more in knowing that love is a difficult, strange emotion to which Hippolytus is unaccustomed. A sense of domination pervades the latter part of her speech describing her love for Hippolytus. This stands in stark contrast to the earlier description of her love in which she states that she loves Hippolytus for his strength and pride.

The contrast between the innocent and domineering within Aricia's speech demonstrates the complexity of her character due to love. Love's entrance into Aricia's life necessarily complicates the character. She is simultaneously our innocent, damsel-in-distress heroine and a war-like huntress taking pride in conquests made through love. Love gives her power where before she was powerless. Her love seems well intended at first. She loves Hippolytus' virtues instead of his looks or any physical thing about him. This seems to be something that we, as an audience, applaud. A love that is based on more than just the physical just seems so much more real than one that is not. Her love here appears based in reason and not in desire. But this assumption may be a dangerous one for us to make. For a love with a basis in virtue makes Aricia seem more chaste and pure than she may be. As Aricia pontificates on her love for Hippolytus, her love goes beyond the pure appreciation of virtues. Aricia's love appears savage in the latter half of her speech—she has become a conquistador taking an unwilling man captive. The latter half of Aricia's speech undoubtedly embodies the extent of her desirous, appetitive nature. She submits to love because she finds the pursuit of Hippolytus exhilarating. She bends to love so that she can break Hippolytus' unloving

nature. Aricia finds enjoyment in the fact that she brings down someone who has eluded love for so long. But, again, Aricia is not merely desirous of Hippolytus, she can rationalize the nature of her desire. She compares him to both his father and to Hercules, who are both strong, albeit womanizing, men. But Aricia takes this comparison further and states Hippolytus would be better than both because winning his love would be more difficult than winning the love of either Theseus or Hercules. Aricia claims to love Hippolytus because he does not want to love—she craves the power to subjugate Hippolytus based on his emotions. Her enjoyment in the chase and the conquest makes her seem far more perverse a person than she initially appeared to be. Love complicates Aricia—though perhaps not to the degree in which it complicates Cœnone—and draws her away from the audiences' stereotypical first impression of her. Love can help her more than it can help anyone else. Through love, she could resume her rightful place as the wife of a leader instead of an unwilling ward of the man who usurped power from her family. Instead, love brings out both purity and perverseness in Aricia. She loves the intangible and the virtuous while simultaneously enjoying—and desiring—the pursuit that love provides with Hippolytus as her quarry. Love's implacable nature cannot satisfy itself by simply changing Cœnone and Aricia; indeed, they are almost side dishes when compared to how love consumes Phaedra.

Love darkens Phaedra's horizons; it crushes her with its oppressive weight and tortures her day and night—it also serves as a dark reminder of her guilt and her sins—and thus love victimizes Phaedra. Despite the disgust one might feel towards Phaedra's incestuous love for her stepson Hippolytus, her situation causes us to empathize with her and see her as a victim of her own love. Already Phaedra has described the

inevitability of love. Its clutches are inescapable. Even more depressing than the fatalistic love that Phaedra has for a man that she cannot have is the fact that Phaedra realizes the darkness and hopelessness of her situation. Phaedra dramatically monologues:

This malady of mine is from far back.
 Only just married to Aegeus' son,
 My peace, my happiness seemed safe at last,
 When Athens showed me my proud enemy.
 I saw him. First I blushed and then grew pale;
 At sight of him my troubled soul was lost.
 I felt my blood run icy and then burn;
 I recognized her! Venus! (Racine 51)

Here Phaedra lays out the roots of her tragic love. She explains that she came to Athens and was ready and happy to be Theseus' wife. At least, this was her situation until she saw Hippolytus. After seeing Hippolytus, Phaedra realizes that she was unconditionally and irrevocably in love with him. Phaedra employs interesting language to describe her love and her lover. She calls Hippolytus her "enemy". This language invokes similar imagery to Euripides' representation of Aphrodite in *Hippolytus*. Love appears war-like, especially as Phaedra combats her feelings. The conflict of her emotions evidences itself in her description of her blood running icy and then the burning in her veins. Phaedra's recognition of Venus may seem unreasonable, but as she continues her speech we can see Phaedra's logic:

... Dreaded fires,
 Inevitable torments for that blood
 Which she pursues. With fervent vows I thought
 To ward them off: I built for Her a Shrine,
 Adorned it with great care, and at all hours,
 Myself surrounded by my victims, sought
 In their entrails the reason I had lost.
 Weak remedies for love incurable!
 In vain my hand burnt incense at Her shrine
 My mouth invoked her name, my heart adored

Hippolytus; and, always seeing him,
 Continually, even at the foot
 Of altars that I made to smoke for Her
 Worshipped the god whose name I dared not speak.
 I fled his presence everywhere, but found him—
 Crowning misery!—in his father's face. (Racine 51-53)

Phaedra strongly combats her emotions and the appearance of love in her life. She attempts to combat them by appeasing the goddess Venus. She sacrifices before Venus' shrine, an unreasonable act in an attempt to regain her reason. It might be said that she desires freedom from her perverse love. And yet, for all of her reasoning and all of her desire, Phaedra cannot rid herself of her love for Hippolytus. While the altar she constructs and the sacrifices she offers are to Venus, Hippolytus is the god she truly worships. He, like love, is inescapable. She sees him every night in the face of her husband and is reminded of her dark, incestuous love. But Phaedra still does not submit. She continues her struggle to attain reason:

Against myself at last I dared revolt,
 And forced myself to persecute my love,
 My foe whom I adored. To banish him
 I feign'd a stepmother's malevolence
 With such incessant clamour that at last,
 I breathed again, CEnone, once again,
 With him away, my days were innocent.
 I could submit to Theseus, hide my grief,
 Devote myself to brining up the sons
 Of such a fatal marriage. All in vain!
 Brought here to Trozene by my lord himself
 I had to see the enemy I shunned,
 And my live wound instantly bled afresh.
 No longer is it the fever of the blood
 Concealed within my veins, but She, herself,
 Venus herself, entire, crouched upon her prey.
 Now I am seized with terror for my crime;
 I hate my life, my love is horrible.
 I wish, in dying, to preserve my fame,
 And hide from light of day a love so black. (Racine 53)

Since Phaedra cannot escape from Hippolytus and she cannot liberate herself from love, she does the next most reasonable thing. Phaedra assures that Hippolytus stays far away from her. She secures his banishment and believes she can return to her simple, happy life. Sadly, the safety Phaedra sought for herself is too quickly overturned as Theseus brings Hippolytus back. In bringing Hippolytus home, Theseus himself assures Phaedra's torment, unbeknownst to him. Despite her immense desire for Hippolytus, Phaedra can reason why this desire is dangerous. Again the imagery of war, conquest and enmity evidences itself through Phaedra's language. She acknowledges the deranged nature of her love and the madness that afflicts her. Despite her knowledge, there is nothing Phaedra can do to alter her condition. She cannot make herself fall out of love. This makes it more difficult to see Phaedra as anything but a victim. If love replaces fate as the inescapable end of mankind, how could Phaedra be anything more than a victim, a plaything for cruel gods? In this context she appears to be the victim, which is fitting for a tragedy. However, as evident with previous characters, there is more to Phaedra than meets the eye—Phaedra is more than just a victim.

While Phaedra has no choice in falling in love, she does have some choice as to the actions she takes while in love—her actions and the atrocities she commits in the name of love make her more of a villain than a victim. Phaedra confesses her love—dark, incestuous, and twisted as it may be—to Hippolytus. He does not return her sentiments. Phaedra convinces Cœnone to persuade Hippolytus to see her. Phaedra rationalizes:

Oh serve my madness, dear Cœnone, not
My reason. Is he inaccessible

To love? Then let us seek to find a place
 More vulnerable to attack. The charms
 Of empire seemed to touch a chord in him:
 That Athens drew him he could not conceal.
 His vessels' prows were pointed there: the sails
 Were set; the breeze is in them now! You, go
 Find this ambitious boy and speak to him
 For me: dangle the crown before his eyes.
 Let him assume the sacred diadem,
 I only ask the joy of placing it
 There on his brow. Let him accept this power
 I cannot keep, and he shall teach my son
 How to rule men. It may be he will deign
 To be a father to him. Son and mother
 He shall control. Try every means to move him.
 Your words will find more favour than can mine,
 Cry, groan, and weep! Show Phaedra dying;
 Be not ashamed to plead and supplicate
 You are my only hope... (Racine 97-99).

Phaedra's desire for Hippolytus is so immense, she is willing to give up the crown to him. She reasons that offering him power will at least convince Hippolytus to come close to her. And Phaedra desires Hippolytus' proximity. It would feed the passionate, frenzied love she has for him and yet Phaedra realizes it could have a positive impact on her children. CEnone previously attempts to convince Phaedra of the importance of familial love. Here Phaedra uses familial love as an excuse to associate closely with Hippolytus—despite his rebuffing of her affections. Phaedra's cunning also extends to the utilization of CEnone. Phaedra, as any pampered child, knows the extent to which CEnone would go for her. Instead of fixing her own mess, Phaedra realizes that CEnone—who loves her dearly—would gladly tempt Hippolytus with power if it meant Phaedra's safety. Here Phaedra demonstrates how love—how a mixture of her reason and desire—makes her villainous. But the extent to which love vilifies Phaedra continues. When she learns that Hippolytus is susceptible to love, but only to Aricia's love, Phaedra falls into a jealous rage:

I cannot bear their happiness Ænone.
 It is an insult to me, drives me mad.
 Pity my jealousy! Aricia
 Must be destroyed. My husband's former wrath
 Against a hateful stock must be revived.
 Nor must he stop at a light punishment.
 Her guilt surpasses all her brothers' guilt.
 I will implore him in my jealous rage... (Racine 137)

In her desire to ruin Hippolytus' happiness, Phaedra once again calls upon her powers of reason. Phaedra plans to use her husband—just as she utilizes Ænone to convince Hippolytus—to enact her vengeance against Aricia. Phaedra acknowledges that she is both enraged and jealous in this passage. And yet, her recognition does nothing to quell her desire for retribution. Given Phaedra's willingness to utilize both Theseus and Ænone, we can come to understand something about Phaedra's villainous nature. Phaedra will not sully her own hands to carry out her desires. Instead, she will use others. She is only able to use Ænone and Theseus because of their love for her. Phaedra now appears manipulative. Given this understanding of Phaedra, it is simple now to see how Phaedra allows Ænone to carry out her plot. Phaedra's contribution to the plot against Hippolytus may seem like a refusal to make a choice when she says, "...I see in his cold eyes my ruin written large. / Do what you will, I leave myself to you. / I am in such a whirlpool of distress / That for myself I can do nothing more" (Racine 107). However, this is all the permission Ænone needed to carry out her plans. There is little Ænone would not do, if it were to save her mistress. Phaedra's inaction indirectly causes Hippolytus' death, not simply because of Ænone's plot but also because of her refusal to defend him once she discovers that he loves Aricia. Phaedra's villainy is not an active one, but a passive one. She allows others to accomplish her desires. Her utilization of those who love her to achieve her own goals paints Phaedra as a

manipulative and villainous person—perhaps even more than her incestuous love for Hippolytus ever did. While Phaedra is undoubtedly a victim of love, she proves herself to be a villain through her lack of action and her poisonous words.

The art of Racine's tragedy lies in his humanization of love which in turn profoundly affects his characters. In *Hippolytus*, Euripides proclaims love is a deific force. Aphrodite, a literal incarnation of love, serves as the moving force behind the events of that play. While both *Hippolytus* and *Phédre* focus on the same tragic story—the means by which the tragedy unfolds changes the significance of Racine's text completely. In crafting love as a human issue, Racine brings love and its interactions with humans down to earth. Racine relates love to human nature. Human nature consists of measures of reason and desire. Therefore, love affects both the reason and desire of humans. Furthermore, with no god to set the tragedy in motion, the characters themselves serve as the force behind their tragic ends. The choices these characters make, whether rational or desirous, are choices made from love. The characters—and humanity in general—design their own tragedies. While this message initially appears bleak, further analysis of its significance results in a shift of power. Namely, this shift occurs from the celestial to the terrestrial. Instead of a god ordaining the events that unfold in a human's life, Racine argues that humanity alone holds responsibility for itself. Our choices influence the courses of our lives, and those of our loved ones. While the responsibility for ourselves appears immense and the absence of a deity strikes a chord of hopelessness, Racine provides humanity with extensive power over their own lives. In addition to the power, Racine affords us an understanding of love and its affects on people. This investigation of love and its effects awards us with an understanding not

only of the characters and their motivations, but also of ourselves. In terms of characters, Racine grants the three primary female characters—Cenone, Aricia, and Phaedra—personhood. Tropes and stereotypes do not limit the women of this play. Racine's new understanding of love allows these women to be so much more. Therefore, Racine's characters mirror real, human women. In investigating and reevaluating these women, we as the audience gain this same reevaluation as a skill applicable to our daily lives. This skill, paired with Racine's gift of a new love, allows us to scrutinize our actions and the actions of those around us. We now have a greater ability to interpret whether our actions—which often find their source in love—are results of reason or derive from desire. In reworking tragedy, Racine makes love a human issue. Racine then relates love to humans and notes the effect of love on human choices. Tragedy and love belong in the human realm. Humans must dissect both love and its effects to avoid tragedy.

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