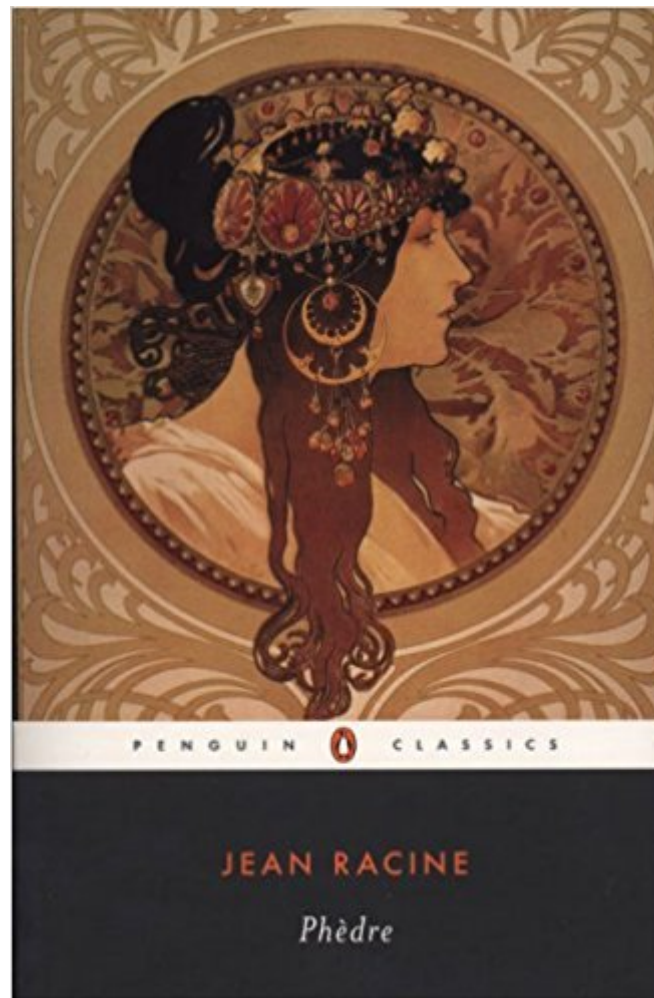




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Phedre: Dual Language Edition (Penguin Classics) (French Edition)



Synopsis

Racine's play *Phèdre* "which draws on Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytus*" is the supreme achievement of French neoclassic theater. In her amusing foreword, Margaret Rawlings explains how this particular translation "made specifically from the actor's point-of-view" evolved from the 1957 Campbell Allen production. Containing both the French and English texts on facing pages, as well as Racine's own preface and notes on his contemporary and classical references, this edition of *Phèdre* is a favorite among modern readers and is of special value to students, amateur companies, and repertory theaters alike. Translated and with a foreword by Margaret Rawlings.

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, French

Jean Racine was born in 1639 at La Ferté-Milon, sixty miles east of Paris. Orphaned at an early age, he was educated at the Little Schools of Port Royal and the pro-Jansenist College of Beauvais. He soon reacted against his austere mentors and by 1660 he had begun to write for the theater and had been introduced to the court of Louis XIV. In 1677, when he had ten plays to his credit and was high in favor with both the court and the public, he abandoned the theatre, which was regarded as far from respectable by the Church, and joined the Establishment as Royal Historiographer. It was only after a silence of twelve years that he wrote his last two plays (both on religious subjects),

Esther and Athaliah. He died in 1699. Margaret Rawlings, in private life Lady Barlow, is a distinguished English actress who is also a French scholar. She was born in Japan and educated at Oxford High School for Girls and Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Miss Rawlings has been a professional actress since 1927 and has played many Shakespearean and Shavian heroines in addition to innumerable other important roles. In 1957 Campbell Allen produced in London a theatre-in-the-round version of *Phœdre*, and Miss Rawlings's performance in the title role was widely acclaimed by the critics.

Jean Racine, along with Molière and Corneille are the three most famous "classical" French playwrights, all having lived in the 17th century. *Phœdra* is the first of Racine's works that I have read, and it is his most famous. The play is largely based on Euripides's *Hippolyte* (French Edition). This particular Penguin classic edition has many virtues, and these include the translation and introduction by Margaret Rawlings, a British actress. In the introduction written in 1960, she explains that her version was developed particularly with the sounds of the English words in mind, as they would be pronounced on stage. Furthermore, to add even a further complexity she notes the differences in that proverbial common language depending on one's side of the ocean: "It is hard not to get a laugh on this, because of the American intonation present in it." So she dropped the ambiguity conveyed by the word "just." And Rawlings does seem to fine-tune her translation that precisely, a considerable achievement concerning a story which comes from the 5th century B.C. via the 17th century to the present, and from Greek to French and then to English... with the latter being the Queen's own. And it is quite a story involving the eternal themes of power, love, lust, fidelity and the cruelty of fate mixed in with the reality-TV show theme of incest, and the complexities of serial families. As Rawlings points out, the dominant characters in most Shakespearean plays are male; Racine updates the Greeks, and put the emphasis on the female. *Phœdra* is the Queen, but second wife of Thesus, who is king of Athens and Trozene. Hippolytus is the son of Theseus, and therefore the stepson of *Phœdra*. Their interactions are the central dynamic of the play, with the other characters serving as useful foils. Oh... I recently became aware of Balzac's *Le Colonel Chabert* - French - Français (Grands Classiques Français) (French Edition), concerning a Colonel in the Napoleonic armies who was presumed dead, but is not, and returns "home" 10 years later, to find that everyone else, including his wife, had "moved on" and his presence was not desired. That too is a central twist in *Phœdra*. As Rawlings says: "When I was twenty I thought that love, in the amorous and jealousy-provoking sense, must certainly be all over by the time anyone was thirty. That an actress of fifty, sixty, or even seventy - however good an

actress - should parade a guilty passion for her stepson..." And she does, she "br  f  le." Or in the American idiom: she's got it bad. Removing the incestuous nature of the relationship, and doing away with all those crazy machinations people seem compelled to take in pursuit of power, it need not be a cautionary tale if tranquility is a cherished state. Being a bi-lingual version, of course, both languages are meant to be read, and I did, to great benefit. Now I know that "un bruit sourd" is a "rumor" and "doux empressements" is a "gentle greeting." But will they know that at a French cocktail party? Lessons for male rulers? Thesus exhibits Oedipus-like blindness to his fate, and he was clearly listening to the wrong advisors, and not double-checking his facts. Hum. Imagine if Obama cancelled his morning's meetings with "advisors" and read this play instead. Well, we can fantasize. In the meantime, for Rawling's translation of an eternal play by Racine, 5-stars. If I read a couple more, perhaps I could be "brought out in public" in French literary society and not banished to ornamentally status.

Penguin here provides the reader with an useful original language text with a thoughtful and poetic English translation. Great for those somewhat comfortable with the French language or those who wish to embark headlong into a study of the language, since there are no footnotes or aids to translate the work. My copy came in splendid condition and despite my carrying it to around all the time over the course of the semester has held up durably. I recommend this to everyone who wants to read the play at all, both because the Rawlings translation is an excellent one and because the French is useful to look at for the curious or the academically interested.

This is an interesting translation because it was done by an actor and so one her concerns was the actual speakability of the text. I think she is justified in worrying about whether one can actually say the lines in a way that makes sense aurally. The translation is therefore not overly literary. The play itself is quite rich and makes for a fruitful contrast with Euripides' "Hippolytus."

It is wonderful to read in French! The Alexandrains are beautiful. The English translation is helpful.

This is one of my favorite French plays. I've read it in two classes, once in English and once in French, so this book was perfect as it has both.

The translation is impeccable. This is a good copy for French students looking to study classical literature. Good going, Penguin!

Pages are in tact. Okay for student to use for his class. Book itself is just okay. Student is fine with it for one class.

This year I am using Jean Racine's "Phaedra" as the one non-classical text in my Classical Greek and Roman Mythology Class (yes, I know, "Classical" makes "Greek and Roman" redundant, but it was not my title). In Greek mythology, Phaedra was the half-sister of the Minotaur who was married to Theseus after the hero abandoned her sister Ariadne (albeit, according to some versions of what happened in Crete). Phaedra fell in love with her step-son Hippolytus, who refused her advances. Humiliated, she falsely accused him of having raped her. My students read "Phaedra" after Euripides's "Hippolytus" as part of an analogy criticism assignment, in which they compare/contrast the two versions, which are decidedly different, to say the least. In the "original" Greek version Hippolytus is a follower of Artemis, and the jealous Aphrodite causes his stepmother to fall in love with him. Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of rape and then hangs herself; Theseus banished his son who is killed before Artemis arrives to tell the truth. In Racine's version Hippolytus is a famous hater of women who falls in love with Aricia, a princess of the blood line of Athens. When false word comes that Theseus is dead, Phaedra moves to put her own son on the throne. In the end the same characters end up dead, but the motivations and other key elements are different. While I personally would not go so far as to try and argue how Racine's neo-classical version represents the France of 1677, I have found that comparing and contrasting the two versions compels students to think about the choices each dramatist has made. Both the similarities and the differences between "Hippolytus" and "Phaedra" are significant enough to facilitate this effort. Note: Other dramatic versions of this myth include Seneca's play "Phaedra," "Fedra" by Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Theseus" by Andrea Gide, and "The Cretan Woman" by Robinson Jeffers.

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