

## Phaedra

**Laura Shepperson**

Alcove Press (Jan 10, 2023)

Softcover \$19.99 (304pp)

978-1-63910-153-5

Vengeance and justice drive Laura Shepperson's historical novel *Phaedra*, set in Ancient Greece.

Phaedra, princess of Crete, lives in the shadow of her sister, Ariadne, a renowned beauty destined for greatness. Though she's expecting to lead an undistinguished life, Phaedra is thrust into the rivalries and politics of Crete when Theseus arrives at Knossos as one of the annual tributes from Athens, set to be sacrificed to the Minotaur at the center of the palace's labyrinth. Phaedra's innocence is taken from her when Theseus slays the Minotaur and claims Phaedra as his wife. Placed in a bind, she agrees to marry a dangerous man.

Taken to live as Theseus's queen in Athens, Phaedra is alone in enemy territory. No place is safe and no one can be trusted. In Theseus's absence, Phaedra is raped by her grown stepson Hippolytus and conceives. Set on revenge for the violence committed against her, Phaedra openly accuses Hippolytus of his crime and forces Theseus to take his son to court. Hippolytus is convicted but not punished. Instead, Phaedra is seen as the guilty party whose behavior ruptures the social fabric. Faced with the realization that Theseus will kill her as soon as her child is born, Phaedra takes her own life.

Rooted in the Ancient Greek practice of altering a myth based on the intentions of the poet, *Phaedra* uses Greek mythology and history to comment on modern rape culture, thus exposing its ancient origins. Combining the modern courtroom drama with the format of Greek tragedy, *Phaedra* examines the complicated dynamics that sexual assault evokes in a community. In *Phaedra*, the convicted perpetrator goes free, the victim is imprisoned, and the tyrant king continues to rule.

*Phaedra* is a powerful historical novel that reflects modern injustices with ancient roots.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (January / February 2023)

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