



The Complete Plays of Jean Racine: Volume 1: The Fratricides

Jean Racine

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This is the first volume of a planned translation into English of all twelve of Jean Racine's plays—a project undertaken only three times in the three hundred years since Racine's death. For this new translation, Geoffrey Alan Argent has taken a fresh approach: he has rendered these plays in rhymed "heroic" couplets. While Argent's translation is faithful to Racine's text and tone, his overriding intent has been to translate a work of French literature into a work of English literature, substituting for Racine's rhymed alexandrines (hexameters) the English mode of rhymed iambic pentameters, a verse form particularly well suited to the highly charged urgency of Racine's drama and the coiled strength of his verse.

Complementing the translations are the illuminating Discussions and the extensive Notes and Commentaries Argent has furnished for each play. The Discussions are not offered as definitive interpretations of these plays, but are intended to stimulate readers to form their own views and to explore further the inexhaustibly rich world of Racine's plays. Included in the Notes and Commentary section of this translation are passages that Racine deleted after the first edition and have never before appeared in English.

The full title of Racine's first tragedy is *La Thébaïde ou les Frères ennemis* (The Saga of Thebes, or The Enemy Brothers). But Racine was far less concerned with recounting the struggle for Thebes than in examining those indomitable passions—in this case, hatred—that were to prove his lifelong focus of interest. For Oedipus's sons, Eteocles and Polynices (the titular brothers), vying for the throne is rather a symptom than a cause of their unquenchable hatred—so unquenchable that by the end of the play it has not only destroyed these twin brothers, but has also claimed the lives of their mother, their sister, their uncle, and their two cousins as collateral damage. Indeed, as Racine acknowledges in his preface, "There is hardly a character in it who does not die at the end."

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