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Jean Racine

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JEAN RACINE

(1639-1699)



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Racine

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The Complete Works of
JEAN RACINE



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Complete Works of Jean Racine



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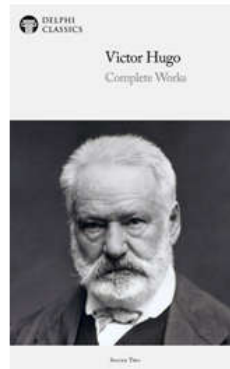
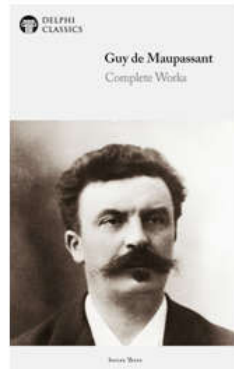
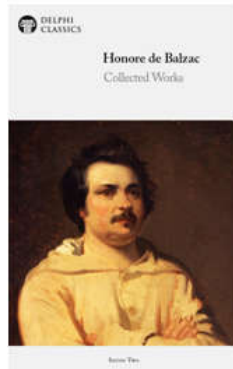
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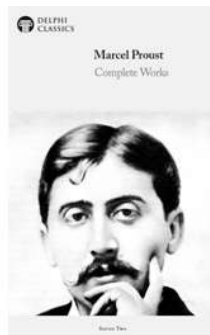
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The Tragedies



'Landscape of La Ferté-Milon' by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, c. 1855 — Jean Racine was born on 21 December 1639 in La Ferté-Milon, in the province of Picardy, northern France.



Racine's home in La Ferté-Milon, where he lived from 1643 to 1649 and which today functions as the Jean Racine Museum

The Thebaid (1664)



OR, THE BROTHERS AT WAR.

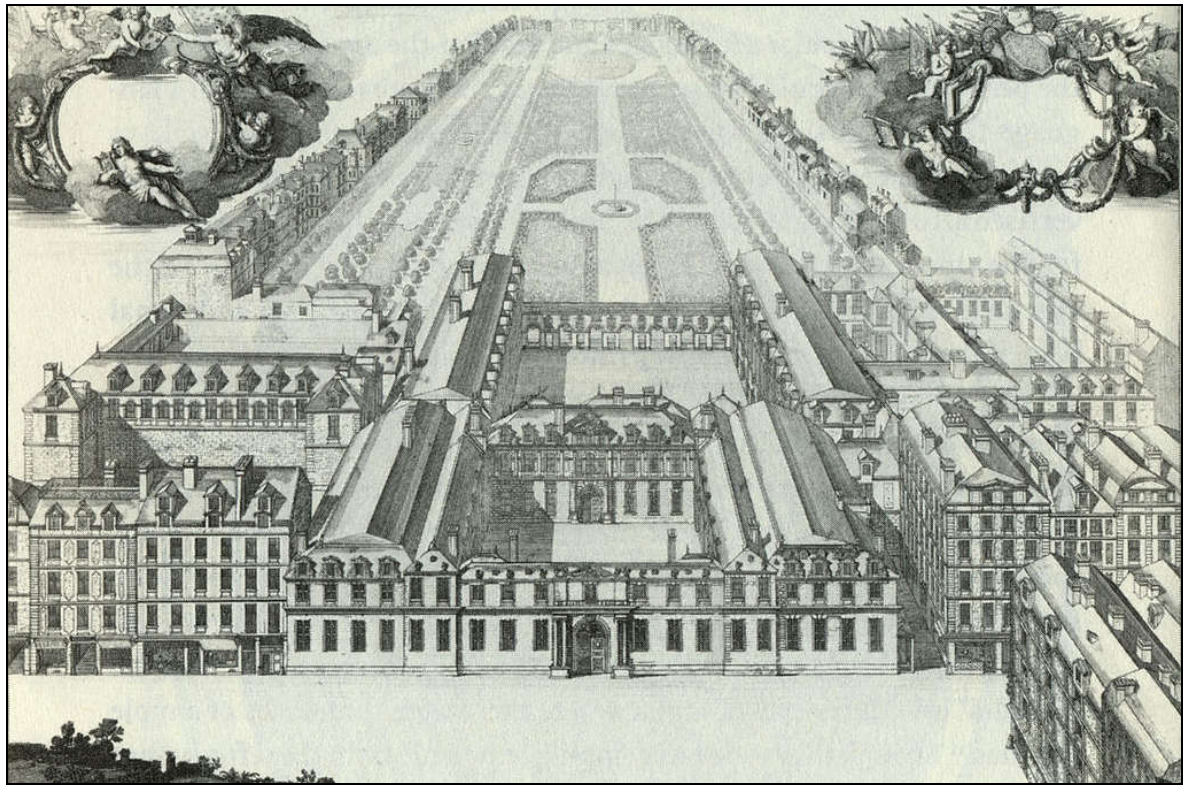
Translated by Robert Bruce Boswell, 1890

Original French Title: 'La Thébaid'

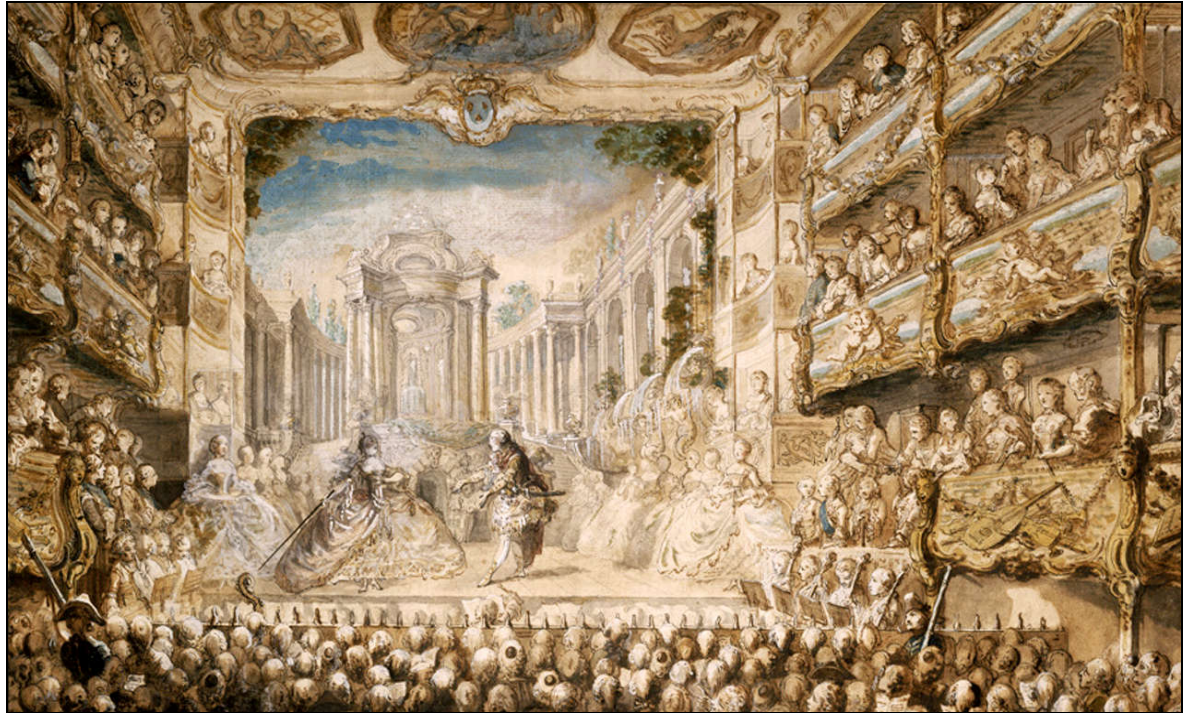
Jean Racine is frequently cited as one of the three celebrated French playwrights of the seventeenth century, alongside Molière and Pierre Corneille. He received a classical education at the Petites écoles de Port-Royal, a religious institution run by followers of Jansenism. This theology was condemned as heretical at the time by the French bishops and the Pope. His interactions with the Jansenists would exert a great influence over Racine throughout his career. At Port-Royal, he excelled in his studies of the classics and the themes of Greek and Roman mythology would play a large role in his future works. He initially planned to study law at the Collège d'Harcourt in Paris, but he instead found himself drawn to an artistic lifestyle. Experimenting with poetry, he drew praise from France's greatest literary critic, Nicolas Boileau, with whom Racine would become great friends. Turning his back on legal studies, Racine took up residence in Paris, where he soon became involved in theatrical circles.

His first play, *Amasie*, never reached the stage. On 20 June 1664, a tragedy, *La Thébaid ou les frères ennemis* (The Thebans or the enemy Brothers), was produced by Molière's troupe at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal, in Paris. It received a muted response from contemporary theatre audiences, as well as from eighteenth century critics. However, after Roland Barthes' famous scholarship of Racine in the 1960's, where he argued for the play's merits and stated it was one of the playwright's great tragedies, other critics have re-accessed the quality of the drama.

The Thebaid is a five-act tragedy set in Thebes, in ancient Greece. The source of the material for the play is taken from the famous Theban tragedies produced by Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus. Racine also relied upon French retellings of the myth written by Jean Ratou and Pierre Corneille to assist him creating his version of the drama. The plot centres on the warring brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, the sons born of the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother Jocasta, who are fighting for the rule of Thebes. Their mother Jocasta and their sister Antigone beg Eteocles and Polynices to cease the conflict, but to no avail and the play concludes with the brothers' deaths.



View of the Palais-Royal in 1679. The Théâtre du Palais-Royal (situated in the east wing, on the right) first opened on 14 January 1641 with a performance of Jean Desmarets' tragicomedy 'Mirame.' The theatre was used by the troupe of Molière from 1660 to 1673. Racine's first tragedy was performed here on 20 June 1664.



A performance of Lully's Opera "Armide" at the Palais-Royal, 1761

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LA
THEBAYDE
OV
LES FRERES
ENNEMIS.
TRAGEDIE.

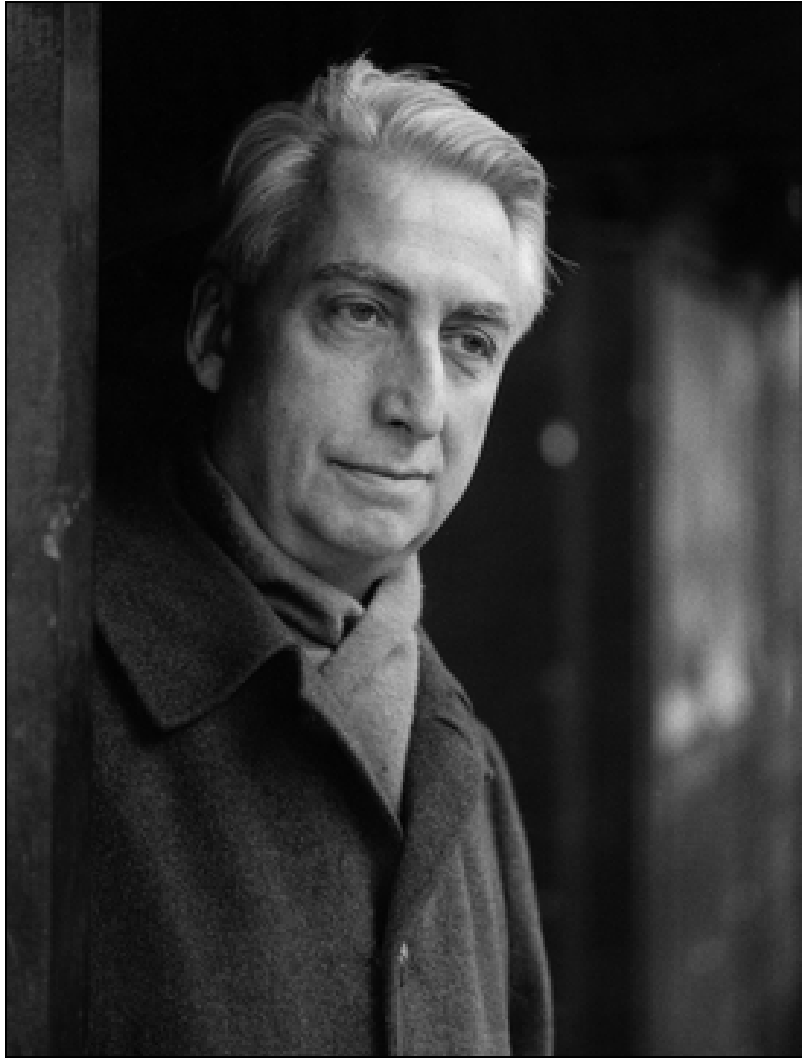


A PARIS,
Chez CLAUDE BARBIN, au Palais,
vis à vis le grand Portail de la Sainte
Chapelle, au signe de la Croix.

M. DC. LXIV.

Avec Privilège du Roy.

The first edition's title page, 1664



Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was a French literary theorist, essayist, philosopher and critic. His work engaged in the analysis of a variety of sign systems, mainly derived from Western popular culture. He was a champion of Racine's first drama, despite its previous neglect.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THEBAID.



THIS PLAY, WHICH was first acted in 1664, when Racine was in his twenty-fifth year, is a tragedy founded upon the “Seven against Thebes” of Æschylus and the “Phoenician Women” of Euripides. The part of Hæmon is borrowed from the “Antigone” of Sophocles, and free use has been made of Rotrou’s tragedy of the same name. The author, in the preface to this drama in his collected works, begs the reader’s indulgence for its imperfections, in consideration of the early age at which he wrote it. He apologizes for the wholesale slaughter of nearly all the characters at its close on the ground that he has therein only followed tradition. Love occupies but a subsidiary place in the development of the plot, the main theme being the hatred between the sons of Œdipus, as inheritors of the curse pronounced against the latter for the fratricide and incest of which he was unwittingly guilty.

The influence of Corneille is strongly marked in this the earliest of Racine’s published plays; and neither in matter nor style is there more than a faint promise of original genius.

CHARACTERS.



ETEOCLES, *KING OF Thebes.*

POLYNICES, *brother of Eteocles.*

JOCASTA, *mother of those two princes, and of Antigone.*

ANTIGONE, *sister of Eteocles and Polynices.*

CREON, *their wide.*

HEMON, *son of Creon, lover of Antigone.*

OLYMPIA, *confidential friend of Jocasta.*

ATTALUS, *confidential friend of Creon.*

A SOLDIER *of the army of Polynices.*

GUARDS.

The scene is laid at Thebes, in a room of the palace.

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End of Sample