

# ***HORACE***

**a tragedy by Pierre Corneille,  
abridged and semi-staged in the original French,  
with subtitles, and incidental music by Louis Couperin.**

‘La maison des vaincus touche seule mon âme’  
‘Vixit causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni’



Directed by Patrick Boyde

**Main Theatre, Old Divinity School  
St John's College  
7.30 pm  
27 November 2019**

## **Special thanks are due to the following:**

Gillian Jondorf, who composed the surtitles.

Mark Harrison, who gave indispensable help and advice on all the technical aspects of the PowerPoint Presentation.

Alexander Kusztyk, who gave advice and practical help with the choice and preparation of the images.

Fabienne Bonnet, who kept watch on the watchdog.

Esther Palmer, who led the publicity drive from within MML.

Matt Seah, who devised and managed the Eventbrite site.

Sally Sheppard and Tom Pearson, who make everything run smoothly in the Divinity School Theatre.

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### **The incidental music**

is taken from

*Nouvelles Suites de Clavecin* by Louis Couperin (1626–61).

If you would like to hear more of this eloquent and expressive music, performed on a harpsichord, look for the 2 CD set of the complete suites recorded by Christophe Rousset (*Harmonia Mundi*).

If you would like to hear selected movements played on a modern piano, look for the CD made by Pavel Kolesnikov (*Hyperion*).

## THE READERS

Sabine	Félicité du Jeu
Julie	Libby Caffrey
Camille	Léa des Garets
Curiace	Leopold Benedict
Horace	Nick Hammond
Le <small>vieil</small> Horace	Michael Moriarty
Procule	Reuben Thomas
Valère	François Cuvelier
Tulle	Patrick Boyde

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## THE MUSICIAN

Keyboard	Laurence Fischer
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## SYNCHRONISATION

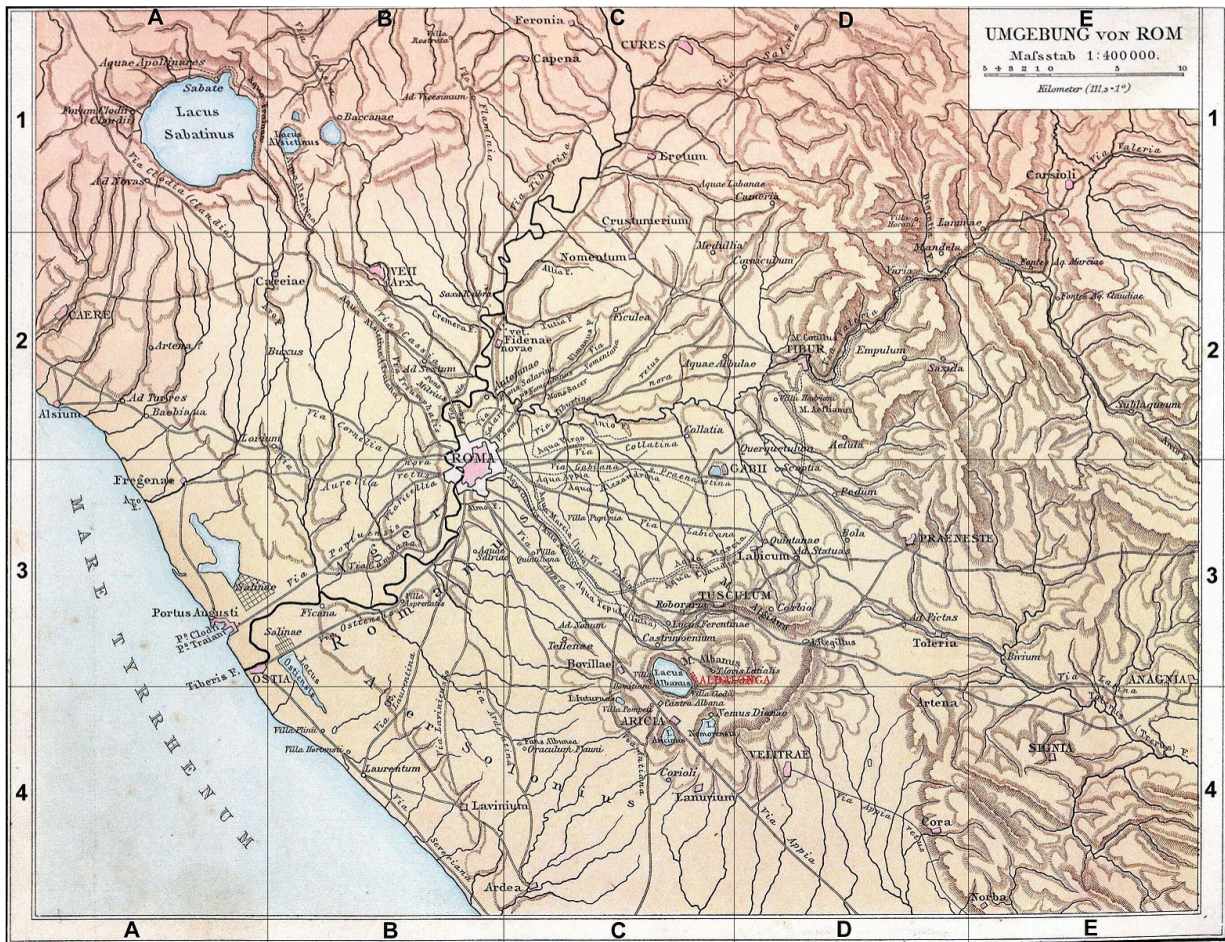
Subtitles and Waymarks	Elena Violaris
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# ALBA

(founded by Aeneas)

# ROMA

(founded by Romulus, king of Alba)





## The Principal Source: What did Corneille find in Livy?



Corneille seems to have gone directly to the text of the first book of Livy's *Historiarum libri ab urbe condita* for his plot, rather than to some earlier play; and it is particularly rewarding to investigate which elements and themes he took over from his source and which he omitted.

The episode falls into three fairly equal sections.

### A (486 words)

Livy begins by describing the nature of the war between Alba and Rome; the incursion by the Albani; the sudden death of their king, Cluilius; and the pragmatic suggestion by their new commander-in-chief, Metius Sufetius, who asks, in effect, 'Since we are really only fighting about our desire for *imperium*, and since the powerful Etruscans will be poised to attack both cities once they have been equally weakened by war, why don't we resort to a contest between champions to settle the issue?' As chance would have it, there are three brothers in each camp. An agreement is spelled out: *ibi imperium fore, unde victoria fuerit* (I, 23–24, opening).

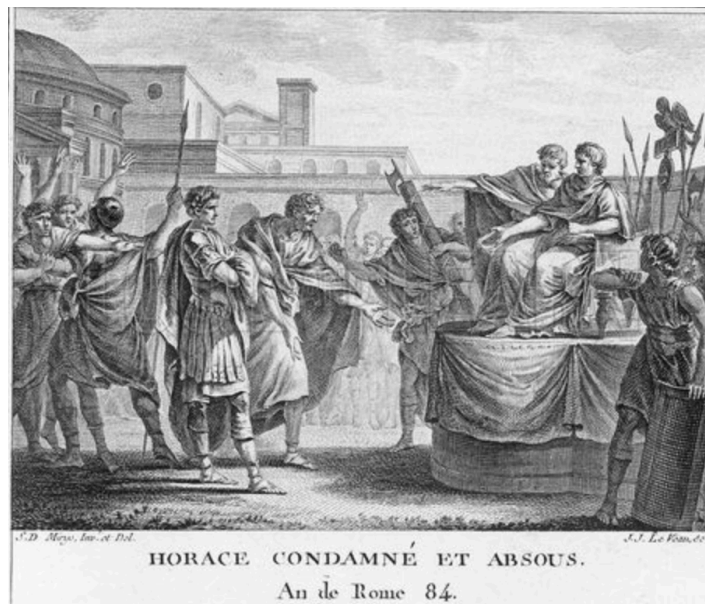
### B (444 words)

After an extensive digression, the next section describes in detail the conduct of this War by Proxy, or Trial by Ordeal. The armies assemble as spectators. The first phase leaves two Romans dead, and all three Albans wounded. Reactions are described. The remaining (still anonymous) Roman cunningly resorts to flight, thus separating his pursuers, and killing each in turn. The third death is recounted in greater detail, as being like a sacrifice. The five bodies are buried at the scene (I, 25–26, opening).

### C (455 words)

Horatius returns to Rome. His sister has been betrothed to a Curiatius. She comes to meet him, sees a fatal trophy which she had embroidered, and cries out the name of her betrothed (in reported speech, only). He angrily rebukes her (in direct speech, ending: 'No Roman woman shall weep for an enemy') and fatally stabs her.

This is perceived as an *atrox facinus*. Hence, despite his services, Horatius is brought before a court. The king, Tullus, delegates the unpopular trial to the *duumviri*. Livy explains the legal penalty which will be imposed if Horace is found guilty. (It is strikingly anticipatory of the Crucifixion, although the 'tree' is a gallows, not a cross.) Livy also explains the legal possibility of an appeal.



Horatius is condemned to this grisly death. Encouraged by the king himself (*auctore Tullo, clemente legis interprete*) however, he makes an appeal. The case is remitted to an assembly of the people. Horatius's father pleads for his son (in direct speech), asserting that, in his view, his daughter had been rightfully killed, *jure caesam*. He urges the people not to leave him without heirs. He points to the trophies of the victory, and rhetorically orders the executioner to do his worst, but to do so in some other place where the assembled proofs of his son's virtue would not have to bear witness.

The people acquit Horatius – but more out of wonder at his bravery (*virtus*), than with regard to what is just or right (*jus*): *absolveruntque admiratione magis virtutis quam jure causae*. Moreover, Horace is made to acknowledge his guilt by symbolically 'passing under the yoke' – the yoke being that of the gallows. (It was still preserved in Livy's time, being known by the name *sororium tigillum* (the 'Sister's Beam').

The sister's body was honourably buried in a stone tomb (*saxo quadrato*) on the site where she was killed (I, 26).



## Corneille's Words

When Patrick Boyde first mentioned putting on a surtitled performance of Corneille's *Horace*, I was very uneasy at the thought of trying to translate, and compress, the patterned and stylised language of 17th-century French classical tragedy, in fact I think I told him it couldn't be done. But needs must...

One of the things I came to realise was that Corneille's language was less ornately rhetorical than I had thought. There is plenty of highly patterned writing, an extreme example of which we see at the beginning of Act II, scene iii:

Que les hommes, les Dieux, les démons et le sort  
Préparent contre nous un général effort!  
Je mets à faire pis, en l'état où nous sommes,  
Le sort et les démons et les Dieux et les hommes. (425–8)

But there are many examples also of Corneille's characters speaking in the simplest possible style: 'Iras-tu, Curiace?' (Camille, II, v); 'Défendez-vous, Horace.' 'A quoi bon me défendre?' (King, Horace, V, ii). These 'ordinary' utterances are, I think, what enable us to empathise with characters who are at times hugely distant from us.

Corneille's vocabulary of heroism presents a few difficulties. There is no exact English equivalent of *gloire*, but 'honour' will generally do, while sometimes 'fame' is more appropriate. *Vertu* can be tricky in that it can occasionally revert to its etymological meaning of 'courage'. But interesting problems arise with *devoir* and *vouloir*, important words in Cornelian tragedy. When Camille declares that her tears are 'Ce que doit une amante à la mort d'un amant' (1250), *devoir* has a strong meaning. She does not just owe Curiace these tears, but it is her solemn duty to offer them, and her only duty, since love is her central value. When Horace speaks of 'vouloir au public immoler ce qu'on aime' (443), *vouloir* means more than 'be willing to' or even 'want to'; it means 'to commit one's entire willpower to'. This is what gives Horace the advantage in the fight; this, and the deliberate narrowing down of angle of vision. Having said that he *sees* the full horror of his and Curiace's plight ('Je l'*envisage* entier', 490), he then 'accepte *aveuglément* cette gloire avec joie' and after this wilful self-blinding is able to tell Curiace: 'Albe vous a nommé: je ne vous connais plus' to which Curiace can only reply sadly 'Je vous connais encore, et c'est ce qui me tue' (503). And of course, it does kill him...

**Gillian Jondorf**

## Corneille critique de lui-même

Corneille's critical *Examens* of his plays appeared (for the first twenty-six plays) as accompaniment to the plays in a collected edition in 1660. They are always worth reading. Sometimes they are surprisingly disparaging: 'As I am not in the habit of disguising my mistakes, I find two or three pretty big ones here.' (*Examen of Horace*). Sometimes they are self-congratulatory: 'It is widely accepted that Act II is one of the most touching in today's theatre, and Act III one of the most cunning.' (*Examen of Horace*). Often they have flashes of humour: 'A virgin martyr on stage is like a Term [a statue] which has no arms or legs, and therefore can't do anything.' *Examen of Théodore*). But they are always thoughtful and carefully argued.

In the *Examen of Horace*, he starts by reporting the general opinion of the play:

Most people think this could be rated one of my best plays if the final acts were as good as the earlier ones. Everyone thinks the death of Camille spoils the ending, and I agree.

He then goes on to narrate the killing of Camille in terms which at first seem to justify Horace's action. There is no comparison, he says, between the spectacle of enraged Medea murdering her own children and:

the anger of a man who is passionately devoted to his country, against his sister who hurls terrible curses at that country...

But if Horace could not help killing Camille, that does not mean it was not a crime, and a dishonourable action.

If Camille had stabbed herself in despair on seeing her brother with his sword drawn, that brother would still be guilty of drawing it against her.

Furthermore if he were innocent he wouldn't need the defence constructed by his father. The danger he faced in fighting for Rome was 'un péril illustre', where even death would have brought him glory, but the danger he faces when standing trial for his sister's murder is 'a shameful danger from which he cannot emerge untarnished.'

If there is a character who speaks for the author in *Horace*, it would appear to be the king, Tullus (historically, Tullus Hostilius, reigned 673–642 BCE), and to a lesser extent Valère, rather than Horace's intransigent father.

**Gillian Jondorf**



## Notes to a Performance in English by the Shakespeare Theater Company

Is Corneille the most underrated playwright in dramatic literature? Prolific, poetically gifted and instinctively experimental, he architected neoclassical drama while subtly colouring inside and outside the lines.

In 1637, Corneille had already taken Paris by storm with *Le Cid*, an unorthodox, Spanish-inspired tragicomedy which suggested the Shakespearean dimensions of his talent. Looking forward to the heroes of Friedrich Schiller, Corneille's Rodrigue is prototypically romantic, a great man torn between the irrational demands of the heart and the austere commands of reason. The play begins with him killing his future father-in-law in a duel, an act which shocked and horrified Cardinal Richelieu, who commissioned a series of pamphlets condemning the play, outlined 'rules' of dramatic composition, and pulled it from the stage.

*Horace* was Corneille's response. Published with a warm dedication to his aristocratic patron, Corneille follows Richelieu's mandate, taking his subject matter from Roman history. Making ingenious use of the dramatic unities of time and place, Corneille sets the entire action in the domestic interior, pushing the battle offstage and refracting the play's increasingly mortal stakes through the eyes of its women. In a crowning touch, Corneille adds the figure of Sabine, sister to Curiace and wife to Horace.

Constructing an intricately symmetrical structure, Corneille contrasts the sympathetic Albans (Sabine and Curiace), whose un-Roman compassion manifests as weakness, with the comparatively austere Romans (Horace, Camille, Old Horace), who combine an admirable adherence to principle with a strict militarism. Tied together by bonds of family and marriage, each character finds him- or herself divided between the central dichotomy of heart and mind first explored in *Le Cid*. Thus Corneille's seemingly archetypal neoclassical tragedy constitutes a darkly subversive answer to Richelieu's dictates. Rather than swearing off the moral ambiguities hinted at in his previous work, Corneille has quadrupled them.

More significantly, in its refusal to choose sides *Horace* obliquely calls into question Richelieu's 'policy of glory,' his imperial designs on continental power, which at the time of writing saw France involved in the financially ruinous, morally ugly imbroglio of the Thirty Years' War. Like Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, another anti-heroic tragedy drawn from Livy, Corneille refuses to offer us a purely admirable character to smooth out the play's moral universe, nor does he resolve the thematic ambiguities at the end of the play. We are left to ponder this resonant portrait of the inhuman ideals of the state and the all-too-human costs of the will to power.

Corneille trained as a lawyer and his characters tend to 'argue both sides of the case,' exchanging prosecutorial speeches impressive both in their rhetoric and reasoning, using the stage as a moral tribunal. Rather than depicting man's problems in isolation from the world, Corneille presents them as ineluctably political dilemmas, tragedies born out of the clash of competing rights. His virtues are perhaps easily overlooked in a dramaturgical landscape governed by psychology, one where primitive outbursts bear the mark of authenticity. But he is a classical playwright in the original, deepest sense, as well as one for our times. We ignore him at our own peril.

**Drew Lichtenberg**

## A miniature from a fifteenth-century manuscript of Livy

*The artist re-imagines Rome as a medieval city and squeezes three episodes into the single frame, but his representation of the two armies, Alban and Roman, facing each other on the plain below the 'murailles', is a splendid representation of the situation at the beginning of Corneille's play.*



## ‘Old men ought to be explorers’

This performance of *Horace* is the latest in a series of semi-staged productions which have kept me busy since my retirement in 2002. I have had to learn so much in the past seventeen years – how to speak dead languages as though they were living, how to use, creatively, the essential high-tech resources; how to coach and inspire teams of amateurs; how to persuade audiences to come along to a reading aloud of dense and complex texts in four different languages (none of them Italian). But I have of course been re-deploying my previous knowledge and skills (acquired through the teaching of Dante and Italian Narrative Art); and there are some ‘red strands’ running the whole length of the ‘cable’.

The plays are all abridgements of rarely performed verse-dramas, or dramatisations of episodes in classical epics or of books in the Bible. All have been enhanced by live music and illuminated by appropriate images. The meaning has always been made crystal-clear by specially-composed surtitles, or by the projection of the original text, or – as tonight – by both!

In every case the focus has been on the language of a major text which is to be enjoyed on its own terms and for its own sake, just like a symphony. Every directorial choice is intended to heighten the impact of the Word, to rouse it from its hibernation on the page, to bring it from potency to act. There are two underlying obsessions; first, my conviction – shared with Dante – that the essence of poetry lies in its verbal music (*armonia, dolcezza*), which is why it does not survive translation: and, second, that a good reading depends on deep understanding and conveys a loving interpretation – which it does more effectively than any written commentary. (And, yes, there is also a thin, ‘black thread’ of muted protest against the cult of the Director in the modern theatre and against the dominance of Theory in the teaching of literature at our universities.)

Patrick Boyde

### Alphabetical table of the principal works semi-staged between 2002 and 2019

<i>Achilles: The End of his Wrath</i>	Homer
<i>Aeneas I: Troiae Tutamen</i>	Homer
<i>Aeneas II: Teucrorum Spes</i>	Virgil
<i>Ajax</i>	Sophocles
<i>Anticleia, Calypso, Circe, Nausicaa</i>	Homer
<i>Apocalypse</i>	New Testament
<i>Borderers, The</i>	Wordsworth
<i>Job: Trial by Ordeal</i>	Book of Job (Septuagint)
<i>Manfred</i>	Byron
<i>Mark, The Gospel of</i>	New Testament
<i>Maud</i>	Tennyson
<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Sophocles
<i>Paradise Regained</i>	Milton
<i>Penelope</i>	Homer
<i>Persephone and Demeter</i>	Homeric Hymn + Ovid
<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Aeschylus
<i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	Shelley
<i>Pulchérie</i>	Corneille
<i>Samson Agonistes</i>	Milton
<i>Two Kinsmen from Lycia</i>	Homer
<i>Two Kinsmen from Thebes</i>	Shakespeare

# Who's Who?

**LEOPOLD BENEDICT** is a recent MML graduate of St John's, attaining a special distinction for his spoken French. Having spent a year practicing verse at the Paris Conservatoire, he is currently undertaking an MA in Laboratory Theatre at RADA.

**PATRICK BOYDE** is Emeritus Professor of Italian. He has been adapting and directing dramas in Greek, Latin, French and English since 2004.

**LIBBY CAFFREY** is doing a PGCE in Classics at St John's, having studied French and Classics at Exeter College, Oxford.

**FRANÇOIS CUVELIER** is studying for the LLM in International Law at St John's. He was born in Brussels and raised in the suburbs of Paris.

**LÉA DES GARETS** took her Master's in English at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon in 2017 after two spells as a French *lectrice* in Cambridge. She now works in London as an actress as well as a producer, on screen and on stage.

**FÉLICITÉ DU JEU** is a bi-lingual actress, active on both sides of the Channel. After an early career performing in the French repertoire (Molière, Musset and Marivaux), she went on to train at LAMDA. She has translated numerous plays.

**LAURENCE FISCHER** is a former chorister at St. John's and is now a piano technician in Cambridge. He has composed music for and been *répétiteur* for musicals and stage productions in English, Latin, and Ancient Greek.

**NICK HAMMOND** is Professor of Early Modern French in MML. Recently he has devoted more time to teaching and writing about French theatre than to acting in it. His latest book is *The Powers of Sound and Song in Early Modern Paris*.

**GILLIAN JONDORF**, former Senior Lecturer in Renaissance French and Fellow of Girton, has been composing surtitles for semi-staged productions in Greek, Latin and French every year since 2004.

**ALEXANDER KUSZTYK** is studying for a PhD in the Department of History of Art on Late Victorian and Edwardian painting.

**MICHAEL MORIARTY** is the Drapers Professor of French in MML. Now a Fellow of Peterhouse, he took his BA and PhD at St John's. His special interests are in the literature and thought of the seventeenth century.

**REUBEN THOMAS** has appeared previously as angels and Samson. A chorister and Choral Student at St John's, where he took a BA and PhD in Computer Science, he works and plays as a baritone, programmer, editor, translator, and librettist.

**ELENA VIOLARIS** is studying for a PhD in the Faculty of English on levels, games and 'architectures of play' in postmodern and contemporary literature.