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## Berenice and Bajazet (Ff Plays)

*Alan Hollinghurst, Jean Racine*  
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**Alan Hollinghurst, Jean Racine : Berenice and Bajazet (Ff Plays)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Berenice and Bajazet (Ff Plays):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Out in the Eastern desert, what grief came to me.....By torontoThis is a clean, fine, no nonsense translation of two of Racine's lesser known (lesser known in the Anglo-Saxon world, that is) plays. They aren't attempts at rhyme or Alexandrines or such. Plain English doesn't have the drawn-bow tautness of simple French (except in Beckett and early Hemingway, I guess), but these would still come across on stage, I think.

The critical event in *Berenice*, the death of Titus's father, the Emperor Vespasian, happens a week before the play opens. Thereafter Titus knows that his separation from Berenice is inevitable. Thereafter Titus knows that his separation from Berenice is inevitable. The breaking off of a great love affair involves too the hopes of Antiochus, himself long in love with Berenice. The play pushes all three of its principals to the brink, not of revenge but of self-murder, before in her sublime last speech Berenice redeems and directs them all in an act of collective abnegation. Many tears are shed, but not a drop of blood. The effect is unconventional, and profound: the pained acceptance of the irreconcilable in human affairs, and the surrender, by each of the main characters, of the person they most love. *Bajazet* is Racine's most violent drama; it ends, like *Phdre*, with a female character's on-stage suicide, here the culmination of a vividly described sequence of off-stage murders. The setting, in a claustrophobic space within the harem at Constantinople, menaced from both without and within, seems to license a violence of emotion as well as of deed. Violent too are the repeated reversals of fortune, and the terrifying acceleration of the play towards its inexorable catastrophe. Alan Hollinghurst's translation of *Berenice* premiered at the Donmar Warehouse, London, in October 2012 and *Bajazet*, at the Almeida Theatre, London, in November 1990.

About the Author Alan Hollinghurst is the author of four novels: *The Swimming Pool Library*, *The Folding Star*, *The Spell*, and the winner of the 2004 Man Booker Prize, *The Line of Beauty*.