CHAPTER ONE

Immanence and Transcendence in

LE VERITABLE SAINT GENEST

UNTIL he begins rehearsing his role, the pagan actor Genest is very much the professional man of the theater.¹⁸ His masters are a more pious lot. Valérie gives lessons in religious doctrine to her maid, Camille. The latter reproaches her mistress for believing in dreams, as if such belief were unworthy of one in whom Heaven had put “un si digne esprit dans un si digne corps” (I.1). Here is a pagan sacramentalism in which the beauty of Valérie shows the equilibrium of spirit and matter. But Camille’s is also only a perfunctory piety, for dreams do not contradict Heaven’s will. Valérie tells Camille: if Heaven wishes, “la voix d’un songe est celle d’un oracle.” Yet, in the dream, Heaven’s will contradicts the way things ought to be: how can she, a princess, be wed to a shepherd? Valérie finds an affront to herself and to Heaven’s purposes in this alliance, so she will not be reassured by her maid’s confidence in her father. He may raise people to dignity, as he had Valérie’s mother; but he is himself subject to fate, “ce monarque insolent, à qui toute la terre/ Et tous ses souverains sont des jouets de verre.” The world seems ruled by a force independent of the heavens, and the connections between the two ominously promise a highborn princess to a lowborn shepherd.

In her misgivings Valérie anticipates some of the terms with which Genest will forsake the world. I stress some of the terms, for Rotrou cannot fully surrender to the temptation to total transcendence here. Some of this ambivalence is apparent in the motif that now appears in this richly analogical first act.
Dioclétien confirms his daughter’s dream by recalling the origins of her fiancé, Maximin. Dioclétien and Maximin are emphatic existentialists. Dioclétien himself is lowborn, a self-made man proud of any man who “élève sa bassesse,/ Se reproduit soi-même et forme sa noblesse” (I.3). He and Maximin find “le mérite dans l’homme et non pas dans le sang”; they choose “la personne, et non pas la naissance.” These premises are obviously analogues of the destiny Genest will forge for himself. They provide a basis not for contrast but for reconciliation of the pagan piety of the co-emperors and the final Christian piety of Genest. Structurally, the play already provides in this motif those Jesuit premises that both martyrs pose as ways of reconciling the world and divine purpose. Both pieties are existentialist in their premises to a certain degree. It could be the purposes of the Christian God to regard history in the terms used by Dioclétien: “des grands cœurs la plus chère espérance” (I.3). Heaven could confirm Camille’s insight into its workings, even if it is in a form the pagan maid never envisages: “Ainsi souvent le Ciel conduit tout à tel point/ Que ce qu’on craint arrive, et qu’il n’afflige point” (I.3). There could be more than a verbal coincidence between the songe by which Maximin attains high station and the feinte by which Genest attains Heaven. But the reconciliation of pagan and Christian piety is possible only if the materialist stresses of the pagan are invalidated within the spiritual stresses of the Christian. This is the lesson of play and inner play, of the martyrdom of Genest and of Adrien.

The lesson is drawn for and by each martyr in his own characteristic terms. Adrien’s conversion is at once independent of, and closely related to, Genest’s conversion. Here, whatever the difference in thematic stress between this play and others, Rotrou uses a dramatic structure we find in all his plays. Genest moves from reality through feigning to reality, a pattern we might conveniently designate as A-B-A. As I shall show in some detail below, the first reality is at best imperfect, especially in light of the final reality. However, it seems important here to warn against the view of the dramatic structure of Le Véritable
Saint Genest as a Pirandellian pattern in which both the feigning and the final reality, art and faith, coalesce. One can understand the temptation to read an aesthetic of identification into this play about an actor converted while playing a convert. However, to imply that the feigning and the conversion are one is to ignore Genest’s specific denial of the theater qua theater. To fuse the feigned and the transcendental is to deny the reflective process whereby man uses his freedom to be, in part, responsible for his own salvation. Rotrou and Genest keep the aesthetic and the ethical separate.

The basic aesthetic of this play is imitational, but not merely in theory, as might be suggested by the discussion between Genest and his Décorateur just before the play begins. The Décorateur would have preferred more time in order to fool the spectator about what he is seeing. He knows that when you get too close to the stage you see that its perspective is false. Nature, as he puts it, is “nuisible à notre art.” Orlando describes this illusionism as baroque and contrasts it to the “realistic” aesthetic of Genest, who here demands of his assistant “... un jour naturel au jugement des yeux” (II.1). For Orlando, Genest’s aesthetic is in keeping with his earlier preference of ancient over modern authors. Yet, says the critic, “nella concretezza di tutto il resto del testo la temetica barocca domina invece sovrana.” However, we may wonder which of the two aesthetics does prevail in the play. Apart from the illusionism of the staging, the depiction of Adrien’s martyrdom could not be more “imitational” and “classical.” True, Genest himself tells us, “Je feins moins Adrien, que je ne le deviens” (II.4). But this is well before his conversion. When conversion has occurred, he says, “Adrien a parlé, Genest parle à son tour” (IV.6). The use of the same verb stresses that Genest is imitating Adrien; he is acting like Adrien, following his example.

In the end Genest rejects the aesthetic of metamorphosis for the aesthetic of imitation. Here, becoming is naturalistic in an Aristotelian sense. Final stages of a process, spiritual or physical, actualize a potential form; final form realizes (makes real) inner form. Plays or games show the final form
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a datum of reality could achieve. Play-acting and other feignings become occasions not only for reflecting reality but for reflecting on reality. Illusion provides an occasion to follow an example if it is judged good by the spectator or not to follow it if judged bad by him. We have this process here in Rotrou's thirty-first play as in his first play.6

The play about the martyrdom of Adrien is a reflection of reality upon which Genest reflects. Some find that the play within a play here is too long.6 (In this light the middle acts of all of Rotrou's plays are too long.) “The Martyrdom of Adrien” occupies the B portion of Rotrou's structure: Acts II, III, and most of IV. The A portions are those initial and final moments in which the pious pagans damn Christians for their sacrilegious piety. Initially, Genest and all of the actors are among these pious pagans, and they remain there throughout the playing of the “The Martyrdom of Adrien.” They are both actors and spectators, a motif that is rendered explicitly before, during, and after the play. For example, as the actors go off to prepare the play, Maximin says that he will be “... spectateur/ En la même action dont je serai l'acteur” (1.5). The differences between Rotrou and his models in Lope de Vega and Desfontaines here are instructive. In Lope's Lo Fingido Verdadero the fusion of planes occurs not only in the play about the persecuted Christians but in the previous secular play put on by Ginés and the actors. In Lope, Ginés is in love with the actress Marcella, but she is in love with another actor, Octavio. In the secular play they first put on, Ginés arranges to play a part in which he can make love to Marcella while he abuses Octavio. The fusion of illusion and reality during the performance is frequent. Again, when Ginés does put on the play about the persecuted Christians, he has already been converted during the rehearsal. When he goes on stage, he plays himself quite literally.

As for Desfontaines' L'Illustre Comédien, his Genest is not so perfunctory as Rotrou's in scoffing at Christians. Desfontaines' actor is actually more like the Adrien whom we meet in Rotrou's inner play. Planes of reality dissolve—or, there is
only one plane of reality. We do not need theatrical props to put on a play, says the actor. He even rejects the subject of martyrs who were also actors. He can come closer to reality with the subject of his own family in which, to his shame, his father and sister converted to "la loi prophane" of Christianity! In the inner play of Desfontaines, Genest pretends to receive baptism to ensure his inheritance, but his sacrilegious baptism has a real effect: when Genest as the character in the inner play returns from baptism, he has been in fact converted by it. Feigning becomes transcendence in Desfontaines' actor. A sacrament has apparently been efficacious *ex opere operato* in a way that would make the most liberal Catholic theologian blush. Coming to the baptismal waters in an improper disposition, Genest is nonetheless converted! The effect of grace is total, and Desfontaines' convert seems to have had nothing to do with it. The convert later speaks of an angel who had told him "qu'il ne venait si je le voulais croire/ Que pour me revêtir des rayons de sa gloire" (III.2). Orthodoxy is perhaps preserved in this recapitulation, but, both ethically and aesthetically, one is struck by the fusion of planes in Desfontaines' play. Displeased that Rotrou had not imitated *Polyeucte* by having a plethora of conversions at the end of his play about a conversion, Sainte-Beuve should have been pleased with Desfontaines. Genest's off-stage mistress, Pamphilie (who plays herself in Desfontaines' play!) is converted. Dioclétien himself ends the play with a prayerful speech to the "chères ombres" of Genest and Pamphilie and with a repentance addressed to his own plural gods but of strongly Christian overtones. Desfontaines' emperor is at that halfway house between pagan and Christian piety in which we find Sévère at the end of Corneille's *Polyeucte*.

When one considers Rotrou's models, one is tempted to believe that Rotrou used the epithet *véritable* in his title precisely to point to the orthodox truth-saying of his actor.\(^7\) The truth that Rotrou's actor pronounces in his conversion is his own as well as God's. It is the same truth for both, to be sure; but if Genest's dignity as a free man under God is to be preserved,
it must be his as well as God’s! This co-operative relation is one of the key lessons he learns as an actor who reflects Adrien, and as a spectator who reflects on Adrien. If his conversion is to be meaningful even in God’s eyes, it must come through a human response to God’s call. The actor in the Divine Comedy must be as free in his choice of role as Genest shows himself to be in putting on “Human Comedies.”

This point comes out especially well in a portion of the “rehearsal scenes” that Jacques Schérer has discovered and restored to the play. Even in the version of the scene as it is widely known, Genest and Marcelle have radically different attitudes toward their profession. She complains about the distractions of her admirers in the audience, but on stage she acts in a way to encourage these importunities. The stage simply gives her the chance to be herself, and this self is conceived in strictly materialistic terms. When she rehearses Natalie’s pious joy, Marcelle impresses Genest by her artistic prowess as much as she does her stagedoor suitors by her personal charms. The gist of this brief scene is thus to dramatize the discrepancy between the piety of Natalie and the frivolous impiety of the actress portraying her.

In the portions of the scene republished by Schérer, these aesthetic and ethical premises are spelled out more clearly. Her role, the actress tells Genest, “me trouble, et j’aurai de la peine/ A feindre à votre gré cette amour surhumaine.” How, she asks with indignation and bewilderment, can she portray in a touching manner “une femme crédule/ Qui mieux qu’un bel époux préfère un sot trépas?” Obviously, Marcelle’s conception of the actor’s art denies the objective theses of Diderot’s actor. “Comment juger, sentir . . .” asks Marcelle, as romantic on stage in her aesthetics as she is off stage in her no doubt easy-going ethics. “Mais par analogie,” answers the director of the troupe, and he asks his colleague if she has never loved anything preferable to life itself. His aesthetic is imitationist and reflective: life provides models for art, and art reflects the model of life. Such subtle perspectives elude the actress; she complains that were she to suffer death for such a love, she
would nevertheless still find it ridiculous to savor that death "comme autant de délices," in the manner of Christians. "Il faut être Chrétien . . .," replies Genest. "Non, il faut être fou . . .," retorts Marcelle. They are now talking not about acting but about the reality that, in Genest's view, good acting would reflect "par analogie." Not surprisingly, with his objective aesthetic, the director must curb Marcelle as she puts herself in Caesar's shoes in expressing violent hostility to the Christian sect. "C'est sagement pensé, grave législateur," he tells her with gentle irony, "Mais restons comédiens aujourd'hui."

The imperative is in the first person. Backstage, Genest is a comédien, an actor for whom art and life are separate. This is true when, rehearsing his lines alone, he considers the effect of the lines upon him as a man. He pulls himself up short when it appears that he is becoming rather than imitating Adrien. He considers that habit might be responsible for this confusion of planes, but he then dismisses this on the grounds that here "des vérités sans fard" go beyond habit and "la force de l'art." Moreover, it seems "que Christ me propose une gloire éternelle/ Contre qui ma défense est vaine et criminelle." Christ proposes that which seems just, but He does so in the words of a play on which Genest reflects. In its rehearsal the play has already taken on the sacramental character of its actual production: an occasion of grace with which Genest may co-operate for his own salvation. In the concept of resistance as vain and criminal, we see the compulsive inclination of higher reason, the conception of sanity and rationality that characterizes even the conception of freedom in that arch-rationalist of Rotrou's time, Descartes. But for the moment, in the actor's recall to the raison raisonnante—"Mais où va ma pensée?"—we have a corrective stress on human agency in the act of salvation. This co-operative relation between two free agents, God and man, is stated from the divine side as well: "Ton salut," the mysterious voice from on high tells the actor, "ne dépend que d'un peu de courage,/ Et Dieu t'y prêtera la main" (II.4). God's hand and man's courage: as we shall see throughout Rotrou, courage is a public faculty. Cœur in Rotrou is an instrument of knowledge
within what Pascal would call the order of esprit, not an instrument of knowledge constituting its own order. These ethical reflections tell us, then, exactly what Genest’s aesthetic observations have told us. What we see in “Martyrdom of Adrien” is not a single action fusing two planes but two actions in which a potential martyr considers the example of an actual martyr.

While on stage, Rotrou’s actor can be a far more attentive spectator than either Lope’s or Desfontaines’. Rotrou does not link the actor and his on-stage wife in an off-stage amorous relationship. Rotrou avoids the slightest possibility of having his actor’s conversion attributed to an unrequited love, but he does portray the love relationship between a martyr and “mistress”: Adrien and Natalie (played by Marcelle) do love each other, and one does have a part in the other’s conversion. But as Deschanel showed some time ago,¹¹ the terms of the relationship here come from Father Cellot’s Latin play about the martyr Adrian. Thanks to Natalie’s secret Christianity, says Adrien, he has come, in part, to the Christian faith: “Enfin je reconnais . . . que je dois mon salut au saint nœud qui nous lie” (III.5). Here, momentarily, Rotrou seems to overstep orthodox sacramental theology on matrimony. Marrying Natalie when he was a pagan and when he thought her one, Adrien hardly brought the proper disposition to his marriage—a desire for its benefits of grace. But the orthodoxy is nonetheless quite clear: the benefit accrues to Adrien because it was sought by the baptized Natalie. Ex opere operato, and through the proper disposition of his wife, Adrien can claim that he owes his salvation to holy matrimony.¹² Moreover, Adrien was a pious pagan. He was thus eligible for salvation according to the liberal theology associated in Rotrou’s day with the Jesuits and St. Francis de Sales.

The overt conditions of Adrien’s conversion as well as the terms in which he expresses his new faith give further parallels with St. Francis’ conception of “la vie dévote.” Adrien was moved by God’s grace, but his part in the act of salvation was due to a reflection on the soldierly courage of the Christians whom he persecuted as one of Maximin’s loyal officers.

[26]
Le Veritable Saint Genest

Ne délibère plus, Adrien, il est temps
De suivre avec ardeur ces fameux combattants:
Si la gloire te plaît, l'occasion est belle;
La Querelle du ciel à ce combat t'appelle.

(II.7; italics added)

These are the first words of the inner play, already heard in the rehearsal scene. As a soldier, Adrien knows the horror of death as well as Marcelle does; but unlike the actress, he was struck by the martyrs’ acceptance of it as “des délices,” by their “vigueur” and “vertu.” The etymological overtones of “vertu” are pertinent in this soldier’s praise of the Christians: *vir, virtus*, Latin for man and manly courage. Through this example their manly persecutor is brought to imitate them. The inner play provides a sustained lesson in générosité as it appears in Corneille. Adrien is a believer in générosité under whichever gods or God he serves.

This is not to say that his newfound Christian piety is a matter of indifference to him. Corneille’s Polyeucte can be suspected of seeking to go to Heaven to replace God. And some of this emphatic self-assertion may characterize Rotrou’s Adrien (viz., his defiance of Maximin in particular). Nevertheless, Rotrou’s soldier-convert thinks considerably more of Heaven than he does of himself, and he seems more aware of Heaven’s role in his conversion. One cannot say of Adrien what Pauline says of her husband: “Polyeucte est Chrétien, parce qu’il l’a voulu” (III.3). Note that God is disturbingly absent from this formulation. But for Adrien, “La grâce dont le ciel a touché mes esprits / M’a bien persuadé, mais ne m’a point surpris” (II.8). The forces are in delicate imbalance in which man has had a sufficient, but not the capital, role. Adrien has not been surprised; he has had time to reflect on whether to co-operate with Heaven. He reconciles divine persuasion and human freedom. He also attempts to reconcile his pagan piety and his newfound Christian piety. When he is brought before Maximin, he does not, like Polyeucte, aggressively and egotistically goad his royal captor into granting him his martyrdom:

[27]
Pour croire un Dieu, Seigneur, la liberté de croire
Est-elle en votre estime une action si noire,
Si digne de l'excès où vous vous emportez,
Et se peut-il souffrir de moindres libertés?
Si jusques à ce jour vous avez cru ma vie
Inaccessible même aux assauts de l'envie,
Et si les plus censeurs ne m'en reprochent rien
Qui m'a fait si coupable, en me faisant chrétien?
Christ réprouve la fraude, ordonne la franchise,
Condamne la richesse injustement acquise,
D'une illicite amour défend l'acte indécen,
Et de tremper ses mains dans le sang innocent:
Trouvez-vous en ces lois aucune ombre de crime,
Rien de honteux aux siens, et rien d'illégitime?

The moral law is for all men an expression of natural law. Even instances of positive law—here, the proscription of adultery—show that the natural law in question is being interpreted according to the “liberal” strain of sacramental theology.

Now, however, the stress has shifted from the material to the spiritual, from the tendency to view God as immanent to that of viewing him as transcendent. Maximin is horrified at his officer’s right to “choisir des dieux.” He has not understood that Adrien’s choice was a co-operative one in which an essentialistic ethic of benevolent determinism has co-operated with an existential human freedom. Just as gravely, Maximin denies the reconciliation that his officer proposes between the old and the new law. He does so, in Adrien’s view, because he exalts matter over spirit: “Je cherche le salut, qu’on ne peut espérer/ De ces dieux de métal qu’on vous voit adorer.” In a doctrine connected with the Jesuits of Rotrou’s day, Adrien had appealed for reconciliation, since there was much in common in both faiths. Under this “dispensation” certain religious practices could be regarded as valid forms of worship so long as such “accidents” of matter and event were regarded for their signifying value. But his appeal having failed, Adrien abandons any attempt at reconciling this ancient
worship of matter and the new worship of spirit. When Maximin threatens him with death, the emperor only underscores the incompatibility of his materialist faith with the spiritual faith of the prospective martyr. The latter replies: “Nos corps étant péris, nous espérons qu’ailleurs/ Le Dieu que nous servons nous les rendra meilleurs.” Even here, note that there will, after all, be that reconciliation of matter and spirit for which Adrien had at first appealed in this world! Rotrou finds it hard to yield to transcendence completely.

Thus, when converted, Adrien finds it hard to forsake completely the habits of thought in which he grew up as a généreux. True, his wife can now be only his sister, he tells her. In this we see the connection not only between Rotrou and his model in Cellot but also between married love here and in other plays, for example, the spiritual love of the “femme et sœur” who is the heroine of La Sœur. But when this “sister” reveals herself to be a Christian and seeks to announce her faith as publicly as the husband she now calls “frère,” he tells her that she must go on as before, even if it means that in the eschatological fulfilment she is to enjoy only a “second rang” (III.5). There are ranks in Heaven even as there are ranks among officers and classes on earth. The notion jars somewhat in the context of the earlier existential pride of the self-made emperor and, more seriously in this context, with the “democracy” of souls informing the Christian ethic. On the other hand, in counseling continuing secrecy to his wife, Adrien breaks one of the most important “laws” of générosité as it operates elsewhere in Rotrou: the imperative to deal with others openly. In view of what she regards as her husband’s apostasy at a later point, Natalie herself is indignant at her own earlier secrecy. Here, we find one of the sharpest points of difference between Genest and Adrien as converts: the converted actor will refuse the counsel to secrecy or hypocrisy from Marcelle because he is bound to declare his profession of faith openly (V.2).

Natalie resolves to declare her own faith publicly after his death, like various women martyrs whom she evokes as examples to her own courage. Analogy and example, in life and
in play, through life and through play. In no other play of Rotrou is this "objective" principle applied so rigorously in both ethics and aesthetics. The play about Adrien is interrupted at a number of points by off-stage events or comments by the royal spectators. This structural device emphasizes the differences between art and life. As Natalie leaves the stage after this litany of resolution, Genest steps out of his role to come forward and ask the emperor to quiet the crowd, which is spoiling the emperor's pleasure by confusing the actors with "ce désordre extrême." The actor and man of the theater in Genest seems to have the upper hand over the spectator and man of the world. This does not mean that Genest as a man is not listening to the "lesson" of the part he plays. The disorder of which he complains is in part his, since he wants to listen attentively to that part. But Genest's professional concern here does show that he is not yet converted. If he were, he would in all conscience be obliged to discontinue this sacrilegious mockery of Christians. These are the very grounds to which he will resort when he does discontinue! But for now he is still a man of the theater, one who, in Christian terms, is "taking instruction" through the example of Adrien. The contrast between the "two" men and their different loyalties is heightened further by the emperor's ironical retort that the beauty of the actresses is responsible for all this disorder! From their side of the footlights, the spectators abuse the principle of objective aesthetics as much as some of the actors. They come to see Marcelle as Marcelle, and she offers herself to them chiefly in that "role"; they do not heed the play.

Genest, the actor, is the only spectator to heed the play; he alone has respected its autonomous character. We cannot say of Rotrou's actor that he is converted by a feigned baptism. Genest does reflect on the grace of baptism (of blood) that Anthisme describes, but his own true baptism occurs separately from the feigned one:

Adrien,
regardant le Ciel, et rêvant un peu longtemps,
dit enfin

[30]
LE VERITABLE SAINT GENEST

Ha! Lentule! en l’ardeur dont mon âme est pressée,
Il faut lever le masque et t’ouvrir ma pensée;
Le Dieu que j’ai haï m’inspire son amour;
Adrien a parlé, Genest parle à son tour.

(IV.5; italics added)

It is a real soul that God has inspired. The stage direction shows us the wordless ending of the play and in the next moment Genest’s use of his fellow actor’s off-stage name confirms the sense of the long reflection by “Adrien.” Genest has understood that the play has been an occasion for him to come to a decision about God’s call to him during the rehearsal. Having come to the sacrament in a proper disposition—his open-minded playing—the sacrament has been administered to him (by an angel, he tells us subsequently [IV.7]). Compelled by grace and by conscience, Genest stops playing this mockery of grace. True, throughout this scene and well into IV.7 (verses 1243 to 1372 in Crane’s edition), Genest continues to use the language of the theater to express his new sense of reality, as if the human comedy and the divine comedy continued to be one. Yet, we must be careful not to see in Genest’s theatrical metaphors his own fusion of feigning and transcendence. Having raised the mask in order to open his thought, as he says, he returns to the language of “mask” to make his listeners understand what has happened and, perhaps, to persuade them to follow his example. We are reminded of St. Francis de Sales once again: as Adrien was converted by a soldierly example and continued to express his new faith in a soldierly language, so Genest, converted by a theatrical example, continues to use a theatrical language in professing his new faith. Standing before the confounded co-emperors, Genest addresses not them but the heavens:

Suprême Majesté, qui jettes dans les âmes,
Avec deux gouttes d’eau, de si sensibles flammes,
Achève tes bontés, représente avec moi
Les saints progrès des cœurs convertis à ta foi!

And when the confused Lentule cries out, “Holà, qui tient la pièce,” Genest tells him not to bother with that play, because
"Dedans cette action, où le Ciel s'intéresse,/ Un ange tient la pièce, un ange me redresse" (IV.7; italics added). And he persists in this theatrical language, the only one his auditors understand. But finally, he must use it only in order to abandon it in an extraordinary speech of fifty verses. He begins by assuming all the blame for what has happened:

Ce n'est plus Adrien, c'est Genest qui s'exprime;
Ce jeu n'est plus un jeu, mais une vérité
Où par mon action je suis représenté,
Où moi-même, l'objet et l'acteur de moi-même,
Purgé de mes forfaits par l'eau de baptême,
Qu'une céleste main m'a daigné conférer,
Je professe une loi que je dois déclarer.

(IV.7)

"... That I must declare." At this moment God's share in Genest's conversion is emphasized more than Genest's. "Par une incroyable et soudaine merveille/ Dont le pouvoir d'un Dieu peut seul être l'auteur," he goes on to say he has become one of those whom he had persecuted. Because an angel has led him into this port of salvation, he must give up the diversion of emperors and sing out other praises:

Il est temps maintenant de réjouir les anges,
Il est temps de prétendre à des prix immortels,
Il est temps de passer du théâtre aux autels.
Si je l'ai mérité, qu'on me mène au martyre:
Mon rôle est achevé, je n'ai plus rien à dire.

(IV.7)

Genest has a great deal more to say, in fact. However, he says it not as a man of the theater but as a Christian. The use of theatrical language is persistent throughout the rest of the play, but it is found on the lips of his persecutors. When his jailer uses a theatrical metaphor in addressing his prisoner, the latter uses
a judicial metaphor! The unconverted continue to confound art and life; only in their view, given by one of them in the last words of the play, did Genest wish “D'une feinte en mourant faire une vérité” (V.7).

Genest knows better. He knows it would be sacrilegious now to regard feigning and truth as synonymous. In the first moments of his imprisonment, he places an even lower esteem than Adrien on the world he is about to leave. To him at this moment, God seems total transcendence, an immanence who has abandoned matter: “O fausse volupté du monde;/ Vaine promesse du trompeur,” he says in lovely stances that contradict the exaltation of the world as sacrament heard so often in the early Rotrou. “Nos jours n'ont pas une heure sûre;/ Chaque instant use leur flambeau,” he goes on, denying that time is rehabilitative. Time is debilitative and meaningless, as he insists in a complex image of multiple reflections evoking the derision of Fortune to be heard in plays like Bélisaire and La Sœur:

Chaque pas nous mène au tombeau
Et l'art, imitant la nature,
Bâtit d'une même figure
Notre bière et notre berceau.

(V.1)

The “round” of time, from cradle to coffin, is an implicit but no less striking image of the wheel of Fortune. The wheel is compared to a beloved object who has betrayed the lover, but now that object is not a member of the opposite sex. It is art and, through art, nature. The aesthetic of imitation could not express more dramatically God’s seeming transcendence of the world Genest leaves and Rotrou’s seeming transcendence in this moment of his own theater of immanence! Genest rejects both art and the nature it reflects for the sake of the truth that is opposed to them.

As with other heroes of Rotrou at similar points in their self-realization, Genest overstates the case. In the subsequent scenes of Act V where we see him for the last time, the converted actor
pulled back from these transcendental premises. In his interview with Marcelle just after this eloquent soliloquy, Genest still maintains the distinction between art and life, but he does not see the two as necessarily opposed. Adrien began by positing the reconciliation of pagan and Christian piety and then ended with an emphatic denunciation of pagan piety. Genest reverses the process here: he begins with a disdain of the world but then instructs Marcelle in the potential compatibility of the old and new law. Marcelle has come to berate him as both foolish to give up the favor of the emperor and disloyal to his colleagues in remaining a Christian. (She plays Flavie to Genest's Adrien here in this play rich in mirror effects.) Genest here reminds us of the motif so constant in Rotrou: faith in Heaven is an act of reason. The convert tries to make Marcelle understand that the "récompense" of "notre art" pales in significance before that of Heaven:

La faveur d'avoir eu des Césars pour témoins
M'a trop acquis de gloire et trop payé mes soins.
Nos vœux, nos passions, nos veilles et nos peines,
Et tout le sang enfin qui coule de nos veines,
Sont pour eux des tributs de devoir et d'amour
Où le Ciel nous oblige, en nous donnant le jour.

(V.2; italics added)

"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

The two realms are not incompatible. If they were, Rotrou's own play would be sinful—and, according to Jansenistic premises, is sinful. Jansenism logically leads to a view of art that is, ironically enough, in accord with the romantic aesthetic of identification between man and artist. But this Jansenist aesthetic is a pessimistic romanticism. The notion that the actor's art is something to which "le ciel nous oblige" would be a very instance of "la belle raison corrompue," the proof, in Pascal's terms, that "tout notre raisonnement se réduit à céder au sentiment." Genest in these moments does not believe this is neces-
narily so. He gave up playing Adrien because he was playing a martyr in derision. The society in which he finds himself is committed to the derision of Christians. He must, therefore, suffer martyrdom. But in a different society, tolerant of Christianity, the theater as such is not condemned by the objective aesthetics of Genest (and Rotrou).

Look to the intention, the disposition of spirit that one brings to the playing of a sacramental drama. The depiction of sacrilege can be instructive. According to the orthodox theology informing this play, only an errant Jansenism will regard the theater as a disgrace rather than an occasion of grace. The linkage with Protestant suspicion of the sacraments is clear. For extreme Protestant thought, the things of this world are not occasions of grace. The latter is the arbitrary gift of God, an intervention into history of God’s will, saving man at the cost of his own will. But for Genest and Rotrou, pagan believers continue to believe in “ces dieux de métal et de pierre” at their own risk:

Ta grâce peut, Seigneur, détourner ce présage.
Mais, hélas! tous l’ayant, tous n’en ont pas l’usage;
De tant de conviés bien peu suivent tes pas,
Et, pour être appelés, tous ne répondent pas.

(V.2)

Here, in keeping with his reconciliation of the old law and the new law, Genest reconciles divine foreordination and human freedom. “Many are called but few are chosen”—or, to view the phenomenon from the human side with Genest here: “All are called, but few choose.”

In validating man’s will, Genest not only restores man’s freedom but, once again, stresses reflective reason. Throughout Rotrou’s theater, early and late, reason surrenders to an irresistible “inclination.” Confronted with the evidence of Heaven’s will, usually in the form of a beautiful woman, the “believer” surrenders immediately. In such instances the stress on the causative effect of “sacramental beauty” ties in quite well with the
Tridentine emphasis on the doctrine of *ex opere operato.* Given Protestant emphasis on the validity of the sacraments *ex opere operantis* at the time, Trent’s emphasis on the causative rather than the signifying aspect of the sacraments is understandable.\(^{15}\) Again, the stress on physical causality in the sacraments continues the long-standing Catholic emphasis on the presence of the Creator in His creation. Both within and without the church, however, it was feared that this emphasis only led to materialism, a fear whose extreme consequences are seen in Rotrou’s *Les Sosies.* Genest’s stances at the beginning of Act V do correct this materialism, at times sounding doctrines of God’s transcendence as extreme as any to be heard in Rotrou’s theater. However, as the subsequent scenes with Marcelle show, it is Genest’s persecutors who make the relation of God to the world a question of kind rather than of degree. Their materialism will not allow for a spiritual god, whereas Genest’s spirituality regards the world as a necessary step in the soul’s journey to God. Were Genest to persist in his utter dismissal of art and nature, he would have to condemn the divine direction manifested in the dramatic occasion of his own conversion. Human art is not limited to the imitation of a nature judged absolutely incorrigible in Heaven’s eyes.

Nevertheless, in the resolution, matter and spirit are not in equilibrium. In his very last words before going to his death, Genest restates the image of the natural world as a “round” of time, meaningless in comparison to the eternal world to which his soul is about to be transcended. To complain about dying is to complain about being a man, says Genest. At the very moment man arrives on earth, “il part pour le retour,/ Et commence de perdre en recevant le jour” (V.2). These final words of the former actor show that the A portions of the drama of pagan piety are the B portion of the drama of Christian piety in this play. From the Christian as well as the pagan point of view, an A-B-A structure is apparent in this play. The “return” of which Genest speaks in his last moment recalls the Christian tenet, “Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return.” In that tenet, as in the image Genest uses to evoke it, the pronoun only
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refers to the corporeal part of man. His soul makes a different "round-trip": from God through life and back to God. Given the stress on man's freedom in this play, given the disparity of belief between the converted Genest and the others, the generality of this proposition may seem in doubt. Yet, though every man may not end the journey "in God," he must spend its penultimate stage before God in the eschatological judgment. In their last words, both Adrien and Genest show still another constant of Rotrou's theater: that of the resurrection unto life.

It is not a life in this world; the martyrs go beyond the world. They thus emphasize "le peu de valeur de la vie," says Van Baelen. But it would be misleading to read "peu de valeur" as an absolute. The world is of little value, but that little is of crucial importance. Ultimate value can be achieved only by passing through the world; the world is the indispensable condition of "value-assertion." Adrien and Genest condemn pagan gods of stone and metal for the sake of the transcendental God. For Adrien, we remember, that God was not all pure Spirit. Like another "converted" pagan hero in Rotrou, Hercule, the soldier-martyr here looks forward to the resurrection of his body in even greater beauty after its mutilation for Christ. Genest's faith is considerably more spiritual. But however they view themselves in the next life, the martyrs here do choose that life and its values over this life and its "peu de valeur." As in every play he denominates "tragédie," Rotrou shows his "tragic" hero actually transcending tragedy. As Orlando has put it, in a combination of aesthetic as well as ethical insights, "il Saint Genest è una comedia de santo e non una tragedia: Alla mancanza di conflitto in senso aristotelico corrisponde il fatto che le morte non à in essa l'annullamento finale di un personaggio." Death is the false datum of the Christian drama.

In Rotrou's drama as in the sacramental theology of his co-religionists, there is undoubtedly more mystery than rationalists can tolerate and more reason than mystics can abide. By "rationalists" I do not necessarily mean unbelievers, for, in the seventeenth century, the argument between "rationalists" and "mystics" was really one among believers. Faith-with-reason

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and faith-without-reason: these are the terms of the intramural argument between liberal theologians and conservative theologians. Pascal’s *Lettres provinciales* has consecrated this as an argument between “Pelagian Jesuits” and “Augustinian Jansenists.” As Pascal shows, sometimes the mystic and the rationalist exist in the one person. In objecting to the Jesuit illogic of separating *sufficient* grace from *efficacious* grace, Pascal is as much the partisan of reason as he is of mystery. Both as empirical rationalist and “Augustinian” mystic, he objects to the Pelagian reliance on reason we have found in Genest’s “tous l’ayant, tous ne répondent pas.” For Pascal, one has only to look at the world to see that all do not respond; one has only to consider the relation of sinful man to the inscrutable God to find presumption in the claim that all have grace. At a very poor best, in such a view, Genest’s extended playing of Adrien’s martyrdom sinfully postpones the announcement of what has already happened. “Console-toi,” Pascal recalls in his *Mystère de Jésus*, “tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m’avais trouvé.” Grace comes unannounced, mysteriously, like those many “accidental” discoveries and rediscoveries of ultimate truth we find throughout Rotrou’s theater. But the dramatist finds this truth expressed in both of the “concupiscences” suspected by Pascal: of the body and the mind. At his most transcendental moments, Rotrou remains on the hither side of Pascal’s tenet about God’s overwhelming responsibility in the act of salvation. “On ne croira jamais,” writes Pascal, “d’une créance utile et de foi si Dieu n’incline le cœur et on croira dès qu’il l’inclinera.” Even in *Le Véritable Saint Genest* and other plays of a transcendental tendency, Rotrou shows too much ambivalence for such Jansenist views. An extreme Jansenist must look upon such ambivalence in that “worser” spirit Conor Cruise O’Brien finds in the young Karl Marx looking on his socialist confrères: “. . . For a ‘worser,’ the nearer a man’s opinions are to one’s own, assuming them not to be identical, the worse they are.” Less rigorous observers will feel that Rotrou remains dramatically and religiously “catholic” in both his theater of immanence and his theater of transcendence.