ES SOSIES represents the high point of Rotrou’s theater of immanence—or its low point, from the perspective of his transcendental coreligionists. They would find little satisfaction in its euhemerist premises. They would, however, find less to quarrel with in most of the plays Rotrou wrote in the forties, especially those I have arranged here between Crisante and Dom Bernard de Carbrère. I say “less to quarrel with,” and the qualification is important. Even as he begins to stress the spiritual term of sacramental equilibrium, Rotrou finds it difficult to renounce completely the view of the world as a good thing, given its origin in the Divine Goodness. Though he is tempted to a totally transcendental interpretation of the Divinity, the dramatist clings to many of the premises of his theater of immanence in doing so.

Rotrou’s second tragedy, Crisante (1635), belongs in a certain sense to the long series of plays, beginning with Le Filandre, in which a sacrilegious universe is ultimately resacramentalized. But its mood breaks with the idyllic serenities of the plays on either side of it. One way of reading its somber denouement even suggests that it belongs more in that theater of transcendence which makes up much of Rotrou’s canon in the 1640’s.

These suggestions are sounded early in the play. In the haunting beauty of Crisante’s introductory verses, Heaven’s relation to man rather than man’s to Heaven seems perfunctory:
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Ces murs que le porphyre et le marbre décore,
Tous noirs, demeurent nus du bois qui fume encore;
Ce reste est le débris du superbe Palais,
Où régna si longtemps la justice, et la paix;
Et ce qui fut Corinthe avant cette disgrâce,
N'en garde que le nom et n'est plus que sa place;
Sa fumée a caché le ciel à nos regards,
Elle fut un bûcher, ardent de toutes parts.

(1.2)

As in *Hercule mourant*, a worldly conqueror holds a chaste captive in a “palais noirci,” a cloister desecrated by the conqueror’s torches. The conqueror would now also desecrate the temple of the captive’s body by the flame of his desire. Here are the first strong premonitions of the divine transcendence of Rotrou’s late plays. Like many a Racinian captive, Rotrou’s chaste captive is surrounded by counselors whose naïveté in some cases and shrewdness in others leave them less disturbed than their mistress by the rampant sacrilege that has hidden God from view. “Le Ciel peut rendre tout, comme il peut tout ôter. . . . Le Ciel, quoi qu’irrité, jamais ne nous laisse,” Marcie tells the bereft queen, who fears the worst for herself. The queen’s prayers (“Plaise à nos Dieux, hélas! que ma crainte soit vaine”) are tinged more with fear than hope. Unlike her attendant, Orante, she sees in Cassie’s very générosité the likelihood of more cowardice than honor: “de telles lâchetés un insolent fait gloire.” Unlike the queen of *L’Innocente Infidélité*, she cannot excuse this “jeune cœur”: the object of his lascivious “exploit glorieux” will be herself, not some diabolical Hermante. Heaven’s name is more on the lips of the unthinkingly pious attendants than on those of the queen herself—or on those of her priggish husband. Even before he denies his wife’s innocence, before she is violated, his perfunctory piety is evident. Antioche’s first remarks would lead us to think he is a true Stoic of the ancient school:

Heureux qui satisfait d’une basse fortune,
Trouve la vanité des grandeurs importune,
This calm transcendence of fate seems to make Antioche different from the tense, prospective suicides we have met in earlier plays. Those psychological Stoics girded their loins with such impassioned mépris against fate that one suspects their real faith in the Stoical precept of repos. But as Antioche goes on even in this first speech (and increasingly throughout the play), one senses that he is more despairing and self-pitying than his earlier counterparts in Rotrou. His counselor Crates suggests that Heaven rather than fate is responsible for his misfortunes, thus punishing men for their crimes. Antioche pharisaically assents that “son [le Ciel] vouloir arrive et les Dieux soient bénis;/ Ainsi pour leurs sujets les Princes sont punis” (II.1). Priggish and self-pitying, this king is also sanctimonious. Little wonder that he turns on his sensitive wife after she is betrayed.

For all her despair, Crisante does show a certain kind of piety in slaying the impious Orante. True, Crisante shows no more faith in Heaven than that shrewd attendant; linking cruel fate to Heaven, she asks Orante: “... Qu’importe aux Dieux et ma vie et ma mort?” Determined to save her mistress’ life, Orante then rationalizes as she had earlier with Cassie. She argues along lines similar to Crates’ argument about suffering as the due of our sins: our punishments are the signs of Heaven’s favor. Crisante penetrates to the immoral consequences of such a thesis: “On doit craindre les Dieux! alors qu’on leur est cher,/ Et depuis qu’on les craint, on ne saurait pécher!” For her, man is very much on his own. But this does not mean that Orante’s sellout of honor is justified. Indeed, such a sellout is as offensive in Crisante’s eyes as the most overt denial of the gods. Take your freedom, she says sarcastically in plunging her dagger into Orante, “en ta mort, horreur de la nature” (II.3; italics added). Crisante reveres honor more than life. Honor, not the Divine Will. The Divine Will seems to have abandoned her in the loss of her city; it abandons her in the advice of her attendants; it
abandons her in her moment of greatest peril. "Le Ciel impunément a permis cet outrage" (III.4), Crisante tells her husband. This is all the more pathetic in view of the blessing from Heaven she asks for the "repentant" Cassie after he has prevented her suicide (II.4).

And yet, Crisante's way is Heaven's way. At first, her god-denying piety may be more profound than her enemies', her attendants', or her husband's. But it is still not profound enough. Like Cassie's, it must be put to a severe test. This test is not her husband's doubt, severe as that test is. A consideration of Rotrou's dramaturgy in this and other plays of the same period (1634-36) is instructive here: the "demonstration" of Crisante's integrity to her husband occurs in a fifth act that is related to an equally important "demonstration" in the first four acts. Crisante demonstrates to Antioche the illusoriness of a false datum: that his wife surrendered willingly to her violator.

A-B-A: the pattern is familiar. But within this A-B-A pattern (really more Antioche's than hers), Crisante herself goes through an A-B-A pattern whose B portion differs from her husband's. Violated by Cassie, she comes onstage a plaintive figure, far different from the fierce assassin of Orante:

Il semble que je craigne et qu'encore je m'aime,
Je possède ma mort et suis sourde à moi-même.
Mon bras contre mon sein n'ose se hasarder,
Quand je la vois venir, j'aime à la retarder;
D'inutiles discours sont l'effort que j'essaie,
Absente elle me plaît, présente elle m'effraie.

(III.1)

Quoting these lines, Mlle Van Baelen observes:

... Cette hésitation de la part de Crisante montre que l'honneur ne pèse pas aussi lourd que la vie dans la balance, et que, comme l'exprime Orante: 'Un jour que nous vivons vaut mieux qu'un an de gloire'. ... Crisante, dans un certain sens, est criminelle en n'ayant pas soutenu jusqu'au bout cette conception de l'honneur.
True, but the play also makes us wonder whether this compromising doubt is to be attributed to Crisante at the moment of violation as well as in this aftermoment. Her insistence to her husband here that "Hommes, Dieux, Éléments, tout fut sourd à mon aide" seems justified, given Cassie's hypocrisy. As for the strength of her resolve before his hypocritical reassurances, the sequence of deeds and words as he comes upon the dead Orante is significant:

Crisante

N'ai-je pas en la main le secours qu'il me faut?
Porte, lâche, en ton sein ce fer chaud,
Ayant bien commencé, qu'il achève de même,
Et qu'un mal si léger empêche un mal extrême.

Marcie

Ha Madame, calmez un courroux si pressant!
Quel effort tentez-vous contre un sein innocent?
Quel tyran est l'honneur, s'il perd ceux qui le suivent,
Et s'il faut que du jour les vertueux se privent?

(Il3)

Scene 4. Cassie, Crisante, Marcie

Crisante

O defonce importune,

Cassie (lui arrachant le poignard)

O dieux, à quel dessein. . . .

Crisante seems on the verge of plunging the dagger into her breast, but her hesitations here might be more than the occasion for rhetorical and thematic flourishes. A shrewd director or ac-
tress might find the basis for a subtle play of fear in this scene—less in the lines Mlle Van Baelen gives to support her similar interpretation than in the earlier lines of Crisante's appearance after the rape: "O mort, mon seul remède et mon dernier bonheur, / Que me prévenais-tu celle de mon honneur" (III.1). Yet, whether before or after her violation, these doubts suggest that Crisante's development is independent of her husband's doubts. Through the crime, violated as well as violator learn the reality of evil. Each surrenders to the temptation to revere the sign more than the signified.

Like her violator, Crisante finds within herself the resources to carry through on a redemptive suicide. Perhaps because her piety had been greater than his at the beginning, her resolve comes more quickly and with a piety now truly respectful of the gods. Here editorial considerations are more relevant than in any play thus far. As Lancaster reports:

. . . The original MS. seems to have been in five acts, but the play was shortened for performance by the elimination of the end of III.4, all of III.5–IV.3 and the beginning of IV.4, with slight alterations made to prevent the omission from becoming apparent. Some printed copies keep the shortened form and have only four acts, numbered I, II, III, V; other copies replace the missing scenes on pages that seem to have been added after the others were printed, since they are not numbered. The editor of the Ed. of Paris, Desoer, 1820, reproduced at first only the shorter form, but finding the longer at the Bib. Nat., he added the missing scenes as a variant form at the end of his fourth volume.4

The alterations to which Lancaster refers are thematically more significant than his characterization ("slight") suggests. Crisante's ten despairing verses conclude here: "Ou si pareil forfait demeurait impuni, / Gardez que des autels l’encens ne soit banni" (III.4 of shortened version). Mlle Van Baelen reads these verses as an indication that "les dieux ne jouent ici qu'un rôle tout à fait accessoire."5 But in the original version, at this moment Crisante does not mention the gods. Her despair does not last so long as in the altered lines of the shortened version.
She recovers from her “cruel désespoir” in the fifth line of a twelve-verse speech with a recollection of her honor: “En plaignant mon honneur, je tâche mon estime”. She then orders Marcie to assist her in the vengeance that on the morrow will satisfy her doubting husband.

Resolute and rational, her fear of death now seems what it should always have seemed to her: an illusion. She seeks out Manilie to ask for her violator’s life in spite of the pleas of his lieutenants. “Que la loi de César, comme la loi divine,/ Des deux extrémités, à la douceur incline,” pleads one of his lieutenants. He is seconded by another’s more strictly human plea for Cassie “en faveur de nos pleurs.” But an appeal in the name of divine justice, paradoxically uttered by a female captive, carries the day against these virtually Christian pleas for mercy paradoxically uttered by “chefs de guerre”:

Dieux, je laisse à vos soins embrasser ma dispute:  
L’innocence à vos traits n’est pas toujours en butte,  
La constance à la fin calme votre courroux,  
Vos caresses enfin succèdent à vos coups,  
Et vous ne trouvez pas nos peines légitimes,  
Jusques à conseiller l’impunité des crimes.

(IV.5)

Is her appeal to the gods a debater’s trick, a play on Manilie’s Roman piety (compare Polyeucte’s play on Felix’s pagan piety in Corneille)? Perhaps. But the A-B-A pattern of Crisante’s story, her own inner struggle, suggests that her invocation of the gods here shows a restored faith, one that appropriately carries the day. Her earlier imprecations against the hidden heaven have shown a testing of her faith. She and Cassie share this faith now even as they had momentarily lost it through the violation. Co-operating with the Divine Will in this retribution and repentance, she pleads Heaven’s cause in the name of both human and divine justice. For the same cause, Cassie takes his own life.

This more profound piety also leads her to take her own life
before her husband. His perfunctory faith has weakened even more when we see him again at the beginning of Act V. Repeating the familiar theme of Renaissance tragedy of fortune's particular enmity to kings, Antioche complains that "pour moi le sort, les Dieux et les hommes sont sourds." All Stoical reserve is gone. He borders on a conception of a punitive Heaven, Manichaean in overtone: the agent of his downfall was a lecherous woman who perhaps in this very moment sells his life to his enemies (V.1). In this moment, the hero is not Corneille's Auguste (Cinna); he cannot rise to the challenge of his attendant: "se vaincre est l'action la plus noble des rois" (V.2). Like Cassie and Crisante himself, his perfunctory piety must be deepened through suffering. To this end his wife appears, taking her own life as the final ransom effacing both her own and her husband's "soupçon." The terms of his redemptive remorse are familiar:

Quel crime, quels soupçons ai-je conçus à tort?
Par quel aveuglement ai-je causé ta mort?
Le sang que tu répands avec tant d'abondance,
Suffisamment enfin prouve ton innocence.

(V.5)

These reflections suggest that Crisante's own hesitations about dying occurred after her violation. But more pertinent here is the motif of reconciliation through repentance of these lovers separated by their doubts on the meaning of worldly disasters.

Convinced of his wife's honor and piety, Antioche is restored to his own honor and piety. Like his wife, he is restored to his sense of himself as a person and to an understanding of his person in a larger moral context. This world is not the end-all and be-all of existence. Like Hercule mourant, Crisante is a tragi-comedy. Like the great fire taking the life of the man-god (Hercule), or the Cross taking the life of the Man-God (Christ), the blades Cassie, Crisante, and finally, Antioche plunge into their bodies are virtually sacrilegious objects sacramentally cleansed by the pious intention of their "victims." Death is not an end but a means to an end—to a safe and sanctified other-life.
This conception emerges more in the death of Antioche than of his wife. Like her assassination of Orante, Crisante’s self-assassination is of a piece with what one critic has called the “demonic heroism” of Horace, the first of the great tragic heroes Corneille drew from Roman history. Here, like Horace, the queen rejects the demeaning advice of those who counsel the surrender of honor. In Crisante this counsel is not linked to charges of inhumanity uttered by a sister and a wife. Instead, it is proffered by an attendant whose role is more secondary than those of Corneille’s Camille and Sabine. The counsel thus seems irrational. Moreover, according to the “lois constitutives” of the universe of the play as defended by Crisante herself, the action that Crisante takes against it seems rational and just. Supreme value is preserved in the final peripety.

However, to the extent that Crisante’s suicide shows the same piety as Cassie’s suicide, her husband’s final reflections on Roman piety suggest that such piety is an evil. The dying Antioche is surrounded by counselors whose perfunctory piety does not prepare them for the “malheurs” of the royal suicides. “Mon cœur reste immobile,” says Crates, crying over his expired master; “ma constance [est] abbatue,” says Euphorbe, and in vain tries to render the last “devoir” to that master; “je ne le puis aussi,” says Marcie, closing the play with an appeal for someone who can. But before he expires, Antioche is more than equal to the last rites to be pronounced over this world he leaves. In his deepened piety, he is glad to depart with his wife in the hope “. . . qu’un même destin à jamais nous assemble.” Let Auguste triumph over “ces lieux” in all his fury and violence, let his insolence reign without punishment, for

Notre sort s’est soustrait à son ambition;
Crisante, sans danger est ma possession;
Là-bas, d’aucun souci l’esprit ne se consomme,
On s’y trouve à couvert des injures de Rome,
On n’y relève point de l’Empire Latin,
Et César quelque jour aura même destin.

(V.5)
Theologically, this Stoical disdain of the body violates the dogmatic injunction against self-slaughter. The Divinity being immanent in the world and, especially, in the image of man, to destroy that image is to desecrate the temple of the Lord himself. Again, self-slaughter of the kind here wrought by the king and queen is a sacrilege even according to an orthodoxy stressing the spirit rather than the body. Committed rationally, suicide shows the sin of pride. Now, Crisante's suicide might be forgiven under either stress as the product of a reason disordered by the violence done her by Cassie.\(^7\) Her husband's is undertaken in a lucidity and rationality the equal of anyone's in Rotrou's fifth-act "illuminations." But if Antioche is to be damned for the sin of pride in this self-slaughter, it must be recognized that, like the material hedonism already seen in earlier plays, this "spiritual hedonism" grows logically out of orthodox sacramental theology itself.\(^8\) Whatever the unorthodoxy of the suicide, Antioche is led to it not in despair but in hope. He looks forward to a world in which he will enjoy the "possession" of Crisante and be free of Rome's spiritual sacrilege. His vision of the afterlife is one in which the components of the sacramental union, flesh and spirit, will be once again fused. Even in his blackest play thus far, one clearly designated tragédie, Rotrou seems to get "beyond tragedy."

Nevertheless, to the extent that the "Empire Latin" is emblematic for this world, Rotrou posits in the final moments of Crisante the radically transcendental view of the plays of the 1640's: "Et César quelque jour aura même destin" (V.5). This final warning by Antioche repeats in strikingly similar terms the last verse of the converted actor in Rotrou's most famous play. Brought in judgment before Dioclétien, Genest announces that, happily, he is being tried in a still higher court under "un favorable juge" by whom "... un jour César sera jugé" (V.3; italics added). Now, in Crisante, Antioche has been converted, we might say, to a profound piety by the example of his wife even as Genest has been converted by the example of Adrien. The parallel in both situations and both final
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warnings suggests that, in its last moments at least, Crisante breaks radically with the immanentism of Rotrou’s plays till the late 1630’s. It repudiates, in its final moments, Manilie’s boast in its early moments: “Tout succède à nos vœux et Rome est toujours Rome” (I.1). “Non,” Antioche in effect tells the Roman general in his final warning, “Rome n’est pas toujours Rome.”

Antigone, Tragédie (1637), is first about events occurring while Etéocle is king and then about events occurring while Créon is king. This structure has led some to criticize Rotrou for making an inconsistent assortment of material from various models. One of the most famous of these critics, Racine, found much to borrow in this play, but he objected that the author “avait réuni en une seule pièce deux actions différentes.” Lancaster has defended Rotrou against this criticism on two grounds. He notes that Racine is himself guilty of this “duplicité d’actions” in his third play, where a “similar shift from Andromaque to Hermione is found.” Lancaster also argues that “Rotrou’s tragedy is quite superior in characterization and dramatic interest to that of Racine and may be defended even for its unity. The theme chosen is the effect of the curse upon all the descendants of Cadmus that appear in the play, including Créon and his sons, as well as upon Jocasta and her children.”

As developed by Rotrou, the story of this curse centers on the misrule of young and old princes who violate the divine and human conventions of “natural law.” In keeping with the dramaturgy of polarized types found in previous plays, this virtually sacrilegious theme is brought out both verbally and structurally. Sacrilegious figures are pitted against sacramental figures. However, no figure of either type is rigidly typical, and the playwright makes a subtle use of various figures of one tendency to dramatize the opposing tendency in another figure. Polynice is largely a sacramental figure, one more offended by, than offensive to, the largely sacrilegious Etéocle. Polynice marches with foreign troops against his own city, but this is
an effort to repair his brother's greater sacrilege. The latter violated a sworn contract between them, entered into after the death of their father.

... Qu'un traître viole avec impunité
Le respect de l'accord entre nous arrêté,
Et que j'observe après celui de la naissance,
Une vertu si lâche excède ma puissance.

(1.6)

Moreover, the law of contract has even deeper roots in nature than the law of primogeniture:

La chose est résolue et la Nature même
Souscrit à cet arrêt de ma fureur extrême;
Outre qu'elle est muette où parle la raison,
Elle ne s'entend pas avec la trahison:
Au contraire, elle enseigne à repousser l'injure,
Et condamne surtout la fraude et le parjure.

(1.6)

Is this rationalization of a will to power? Perhaps—especially when linked to his reply to his mother, who invokes the "natural law" of love between kindred as a counter to her sons' fratricidal intentions. His eyes fixed in hate on his brother all the while, Polynice answers her:

Ne désirez-vous point que je vous dissimule
Ma sûreté dépend de n'être plus crédule;
La nature n'a plus d'inviolables droits,
De son propre intérêt chacun se fait des lois:
Et l'épreuve m'apprend que du pur artifice,
Nature son contraire aujourd'hui fait l'office:
Votre parole, enfin, m'est suspecte en effet,
Ma mère pourrait bien ce que mon frère a fait.

(II.4)
But this is a sarcastic reply by a son who feels betrayed by almost everyone in his own city, including his family. Under the sarcasm of the beleaguered Polynice, there lies a nostalgia for absolutes revealing his true feelings. “Mais qu’un traître viole avec impunité/ Le respect de l’accord . . . ”; “Non, non trop de justice à ce devoir m’engage” (I.6), Polynice proclaims in overcoming his father-in-law’s opposition to the proposed fraternal duel. “Mon honneur plus que tout à ce devoir me presse:/ J’arme pour le bon droit, lui pour la trahison,” he tells Antigone, “sœur, pieuse et sage fille,” when she tries to dissuade him from the duel (II.2). Justice, devoir, honneur, foi—these are the values Polynice defends.

Were the context Racinian, we might suspect that these are unconscious “rationalizations.” But in the context of the play, a number of dramatic motifs and explicit statements show that Polynice is a wronged rather than a wronging party. Most notably, he is the favorite brother of Antigone:

Une étroite amitié de tous temps nous a joints
Qui passe de bien loin cet instinct ordinaire
Par qui la sœur s’attache aux intérêts du frère
Et si la vérité se peut dire sans fard,
Etéocle en mon cœur n’eut jamais tant de part.

(I.4)

Here, Rotrou echoes the titillating abnormal sexual relations of earlier plays—this time in a relatively rare heterosexual but incestuous expression. Little wonder that Polynice’s wife will tell her sister-in-law that she was jealous of her, for “Je paraissais sa sœur et vous sembliez sa femme.” But as Antigone repeats in this very context, “L’amitié nous joignait bien plus que la nature” (III.7). Amitié has always been spiritual in Rotrou, and it is especially so in this play, where, if nature’s language and man’s language find themselves at odds with one another, it is man’s contracts—his word—that takes precedence, whatever the relation. But the commitments must be spiritual, that is, fully in keeping with the higher reason expressive of,
and implanted by the Divinity. Étécle violates this faith in the name of circumstantial or positive law. Étécle warns Créon about his tendency to tyranny (II.4), but his own opportunism is no less overt. Clearly, he is wrong in violating a sacred contract with his brother because of the will of the people. Jocaste tries to make Polynice look like an “enfant prodigue” bringing an alien army against his father’s house (II.4). The gambit cannot obscure the fact that Étécle is the greater usurper and prodigal. There is no denying that Polynice’s kingship would be more just than merciful, whereas Étécle’s throne is built on the sands of a violated oath and the quicksand of popular support. Again, Polynice is a faithful ally, a respectful son-in-law, a loving husband, and the first victor in the combat with Étécle. These relations put him in a more favorable light than his opportunistic brother, monomaniacally bent on preserving power.

Polynice perhaps absorbs more than he sheds the sacred energy found in large degree in each of these relations. He seems more patriotic than pious. He renders unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and seems only perfunctorily concerned with the things that are God’s. Piety is a virtue for women with him: “Adieu vous que . . . le Ciel doua d’une vertu si rare,” he tells his beloved wife (I.6); “pieuse et sage fille” is his apostrophe to his sister, Antigone (II.2). True, at his moment of victory as reported by Hémon, he thanked the gods for vindicating his cause. This is pride, not hypocrisy. Nevertheless, Polynice is no existentialist forger of purely human values; he is an essentialist espousing received values.

These values are public, those of house and family. If Rotrou’s great contemporaries are to be invoked, the conception of character here recalls Corneille rather than Racine. As Philip Butler, a subtle critic of the later dramatist, has said of Rotrou’s rebellious brother: “Le duel est [donc] la libre décision d’une âme altière, semblable à celle d’Horace punissant la sacrilège: ‘Ma patience a la raison fait place.’ ” At first glance, given Polynice’s call to “passion,” Butler’s comparison seems inexact. Repudiating his mother’s “inutiles avis,” Rotrou’s Polynice

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commands, “Parle, ma passion, les tiens seront suivis” (II.4). Here, passion does seem to prevail as it does in Racine: there is a surrender by reason to the violence of hate and personal ambition. As certain women have shown us (notably Salamacis in L’Heureux Naufrage), this Racinian tension has been a significant one for Rotrou. Yet, Butler’s comparison of Polynice and Horace is exact: Polynice uses passion as the energy of his rational, just opposition to Étéocle’s violation of the oath between them. The violation is as sacrilegious to the religiously patriotic Polynice as Camille’s treason is to her religiously patriotic brother. The higher reason prevails in Rotrou’s Polynice as well. In his adolescent anxiety, he is afraid not because his “self” confronts the abyss of absurdity but because it strives to achieve its entelechy. His “self” strives to become what it is destined to be in virtue of the received values of the world neither it nor any other man ever made. Imperfect as he is, Polynice has fuller being, greater reality than his brother Étéocle. The latter is a usurper: “Voyons s’il m’ôtera le nom que j’ai pris” (II.3). More than ever in Rotrou, all is in a name. To take a name with a view to keeping it is to confuse the planes of reality, to betray an ontological trust.

The brothers will go on hating each other beyond the grave, says the dying Polynice. The rest of the play suggests that in this statement, Polynice really shows himself imperfect in his being. Undoubtedly, this “deathbed lack of repentance” will have to be weighed by the gods against his intention before combat: to expiate the fault he was about to commit by taking his own life. Repentant before his fall, Polynice must seem a casuistical confessor, but confessor he is. In him the light of the higher reason works its way both independently and providentially. Nothing could demonstrate more tellingly the difference between Rotrou’s vision and Racine’s. Rotrou’s brothers may hate each other beyond the grave; in Racine they have hated each other from the womb. Racine’s Étéocle says:

Nous étions ennemis dès la plus tendre enfance; Que dis-je? nous l’étions avant notre naissance.

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Triste et fatal effet d'un sang incestueux!
Pendant qu'un même sein nous renfermait tous deux,
Dans les flancs de ma mère une guerre intestine
De nos divisions lui marqua l'origine

(IV.1)

The brothers' mutual hatred in Racine is prenatal and prerational and thus irreparable; the brothers' mutual hatred in Rotrou is irrational but for that very reason not irreparable. In Racine the mutual hatred is "une guerre intestine," the norm of nature itself; in Rotrou it is "une peste," as Jocaste calls it, a break with the norm that after its paroxysm will find nature restored to her norms. Racine's is a desecrated universe beyond hope of resanctification; Rotrou's, a "dis-graced" universe in the process of being resanctified.

The relation between Étéocle and Polynice is paralleled in the relation between Créon and Antigone. She is obviously more pious than Polynice. Compared with the subtle portrait drawn by Sophocles, Rotrou's heroine seems monochromatic. Showing little of the ancient heroine's pathetic regret at her frustrated womanhood, Rotrou's Antigone is almost all piety. Almost, for she does show a momentary despair at fortune's special vindictiveness toward kings (III.1). She overcomes this despair only to behave with more pride than humility in carrying out the forbidden last rites. Her reproaches to her sister here seem arrogant (III.5). Finally, she seems to goad Créon into ordering her martyrdom (IV.3), just as Polydeucte goads Félix into a similar order in Corneille's famous play. I stress seems, for in another dramatic context, this behavior might point to tensions in the character's own conception of herself. Yet, we cannot believe in this context that Antigone "doth protest too much" her own piety. She is joined in that protestation by too many others. The theme of Antigone's piety is less an end than a means to the depiction of another theme: Créon's impiety and its detestation by almost all the voices he hears. Antigone's is only one of a chorus of voices and dramatic motifs, so to speak, putting Créon in the wrong as surely as a
similar pattern put Polynice in the right in the first part of the action.

*Antigone* stands as a play whose spiritual sacramentalism corrects the materialistic imbalance of *Les Sosies*. Créon's sacrilege consists in his failure to respect the sacrament of the last rites. His position might be forgiven were his niece his only enemy. But his counselor Ephyte, his son Hémon, and the priest Tirésie, all add their calm appeals in the name of reason and justice. To this chorus Créon can only reply in a line of expressive power as sublime as the famous “Moi” of Corneille’s *Médée*. When Ephyte seeks to excuse Hémon’s opposition to his father, the following exchange takes place:

Ephyte: Mais, Sire, son amour?
Créon: Mais, Ephyte, ma haine?

(V.4)

Hatred here, like anger in earlier plays of Rotrou, is an emotion depriving one of being. It obfuscates the power of reason, makes one a prisoner of illusion. The king shows this deprivation in his subsequent attack on the high priest for avarice. This attack is not without satirical thrust on Rotrou’s part. Nevertheless, the sanctity of this particular priest is no more in doubt than the piety of Antigone, the wisdom of Ephyte, and the good will of Hémon. Warned by the priest, Créon will retract his sacrilegious orders to refuse holy burial to Polynice and to execute the pious sister who would defy that order.

In his retraction Créon reminds us of two truths of a sacramental character. First, he is the real rebel and Antigone the defender of the existing order: “Le Prince pèche ici bien plus que le rebelle” (IV.3), says Antigone. Second, illuminated by the “sign” of the heavenly messenger, Tirésie, Créon repents his action. He does so because he is both compelled by necessity and fearful of the consequences for himself. His repentance is, sacramentally speaking, imperfect—more attrition than contrition. But it does restore his reason, showing him accepting
The concept recalls Bellarmin's ladder, although by implication the de-emphasis on the human would perhaps be considerably reduced were Rotrou not bound by certain données of his subject.

Antigone veers into an excessively spiritual emphasis. The play is actually more Créon's than Antigone's. Its A-B-A structure revolves about the false datum of Ménécée's misapplied death. Reading the oracle's "dernier" to mean last in line of birth, Créon's son kills himself and thus leads to a series of illusory developments in a prolonged B part of the action. Créon sacrilegiously curses the gods for working out their wrath against the house of Œdipe through Créon and his house; Créon erroneously assumes that his son's interpretation of the oracle was the right one and that it really led to his own legitimate kingship; Créon attacks Antigone and her supporters as impious rebels; and so on. With Créon become king, we have two different conceptions of piety at odds with one another, as in Crisante: the profound and the perfunctory. However, with Créon's "conversion," it would seem as though the playwright wished to validate the piety of Créon's adversaries. This is a piety showing a sacramental equilibrium or, in Morel's terms, a continuity of the divine and human in a single order. Yet, when looked at in the very terms proposed by Lancaster--

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of the effects of the curse upon the whole house of Cadmus—the play seems all B. Dramatically speaking, its A portions exist in the prerunning and postrunning times of the plot. Thematically speaking, these portions exist in the minds of the gods. Metaphysically speaking, this suggests that Heaven as a good lies beyond this world.

Antigone assumes piously what is never explained here: that her father’s sin was innocent. She sympathizes with Créon over the loss of his son, but she berates him for failing to see that his reproaches to Œdipe were unjust in that her father’s is an “innocent péché” (1.4). The reason for Œdipe’s suffering is not given here, it just is. Now, Rotrou does not view human suffering in the neutral terms Kitto has attributed to Sophocles: the world is in a certain metaphysical and moral balance; Œdipe’s “fault” impairs that balance; the world in its very processes removes that imperfection and thus redresses its balance. Antigone shows that this is not the relation between divine and human in the universe of the play: “Les Dieux,” she tells Créon,

. . . sont maîtres des Rois, ils sont pieux, augustes.
Tous leurs arrêts sont saints, toutes leurs loix sont justes:
Ces esprits dépouillés de toutes passions
Ne mêlent rien d’impure en leurs intentions,
Au lieu que l’intérêt, la colère et la haine
Président bien souvent à la justice humaine.

As Butler has already noted, Rotrou’s conception is Christian and, according to that critic, inappropriate in a play in which hereditary curses affect the innocent. (Antigone seems here to have forgotten her own assessment of her father’s sin as innocent.) Butler suggests that Rotrou could not have chosen a worse subject for his particular non-tragic vision of the human condition: “. . . Son embarras, sa mauvaise humeur sont aussi visibles que ceux de Corneille aux prises dans Œdipe, avec un sujet contre lequel tout son génie se rebelle.” The observa-
tion is penetrating, but it stresses the negative unduly. Butler contends, "C'est Racine et non Rotrou qui écrit une tragédie de la prédestination." But there is predestination in Rotrou: "Les Dieux ne sont pas Dieux," Ismène tells Créon, "si bientôt leur courroux/ Ne prend notre intérêt et n'éclate sur vous" (IV.4). The determinism is not tragic: suffering will come only to those who deserve it; the innocent will be eschatologically justified. In sum, Christian in its premises as these relate to the immediate conflict over sacramental burial rites, Antigone goes "beyond tragedy."

Niebuhr's famous phrase epitomizes the view of many Christian thinkers that Christianity is incompatible with the tragic view of life. An opposing school would find Christianity triumphant through tragedy. However we regard the relation, in Antigone, the resolution points once again, in Rotrou, to the tension between flesh and spirit found in Christian theology. The pious tell the impious here that the earth could be a heaven if natural and divine laws were obeyed. Though impressed by such advice, the impious take it too late in this kingdom whose thrones are destined to be occupied by a series of sacrilegious kings (Étéocle, Créon) and where the innocent suffer inexplicably. Antigone does suggest that self-interest, hate, and anger preside often but not always. This presumably leaves room for resacramentalization of the world once the action is over. But the play ends with Créon looking forward to the fulfilment of the prophecy in which he will die as truly the last of the house of Cadmus. Unlike earlier plays, including the previous two tragedies, the eschatological moment here is somber in its suggestions of the way the world ends. The natural world is pure sacrilege here. Distinctions between "this" world and the "next" world apply to this play as they have to no other. The truly sacred reaches fulfilment out of this world, in the transcendent realm beyond death: "Allons, unis d'esprit," Hémon says to his prostrate mistress before he dies, "sans commerce de corps,/ Achever notre hymen en l'empire des morts" (V.9). Flesh is cut off from body. Christian overtones of the triumph of life in death undoubtedly inform this declaration of
love and faith. But the moment in which it is pronounced sug-
gests that the world is anything but a "sign of the sacred." Desecrated by the impious royal orders, Antigone's dead form
seems to tell her lover that matter and spirit are not coterminous.
The immanent divinity that rules this world is a fallen one. The infernal prison to which Hermante was condemned in
*L'Innocente Infidélité* has burst its tower walls and spread to
the ends of the kingdom of "this" world. With its heroine trans-
cended to the "next" world, leaving her uncle with his tardy repentance, *Antigone* constitutes an important counter to the
immanentist theses of most of the first half of Rotrou's theater.

Rotrou is more respectful of the classical model for *Iphigénie,
Tragédie* (1640): Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Yet, the
striking thematic departures between model and imitation sug-
gest that the fundamental model for this play as for so many of
his other "imitations" is Rotrou himself. *Iphigénie* gives her
name to the play, but it might as easily have been named
*Agamemnon*. The daughter does not appear until Act III,
but the father has one of the longest roles in Rotrou's theater:
he is on stage for three-fourths of the running time of the play,
and even when he is off stage, he is as dramatically central as
when he is present. I think it most useful, then, to explore the
key motifs of the play as they are dramatically woven into the
relations with other characters, first through the father, and
then through the daughter.

The first of these relations is between Agamemnon as king
and Agamemnon as father. The play begins with the father
torn between "pitié" and "courage," between "nature" and
"rang." As in other plays, courage is not the private value we
think of in connection with the etymologically related concept
of cœur in Pascal. Rather, it is the public value that Agamemnon
defends in his role of "bon chef." Kings and generals live by
this value, but fathers ("bon père" here) by another. When
Agamemnon defends his "premier sentiment" for his daughter,
we are reminded of earlier lovers who defended their first love.
Chaste desire has always "sublimated" carnal relations between
lovers in a way reminiscent of relations between the sexes within the family. The family has, of course, been the basic social unit of a great many of Rotrou's pastoral plays and tragicomedies. With rare exceptions, brothers have seldom been enemies or remained enemies if they were misled into being such. Again, male friends have treated each other as brothers, and female friends have called each other "sœur" both aloud and in their hearts. Through these connections, chaste desire becomes linked with the theme of natural love that preoccupies Rotrou throughout his canon, but especially in his theater of transcendence. At times, as I have suggested, the family unit has been reduced in scope, but only in order to increase the religious overtones of the unit. Thus, it is the holiness as well as the naturalness of the family that Agamemnon offends with his "sacrilège et barbare devoir" (IV.3; italics added). The terms are Clytemnestre's as she berates her husband, who has finally succumbed to Ulysse's persuasion.

Agamemnon has stood not for natural law but for générosité once again. He does so regretfully, for he is a far more complicated creature than Ménélas, Ulysse, and Calchas. As Mlle Van Baelen perceptively says, they constitute "une assemblée des personnages les plus déplaisants . . . faibles et violents . . . cupides et cyniques." No doubt, Agamemnon has been the unctuous ambitieux described by Ménélas (II.2) and the ruthless assassin of the helpless whose earlier repentance Clytemnestre regards as hypocritical (IV.3). Yet, at the "limit case" of tragic challenges, Agamemnon shows himself less ready than even his victim to take her life for honor and glory. He goes along with Calchas' final demands for the sacrifice not out of respect for the priest's formulas but because of his daughter's reproaches. He must show himself the father of a généreuse as readily as she shows herself to be the daughter of a généreux.

Clytemnestre is a greater sinner than her husband against either of the basic codes of the sacramental universe. The mother here—like the mother in Hercule mourant—recalls that her child is destined for glorious martyrdom. When she warns her husband that her hand, too, can sin against the law of blood,
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her daughter recalls that this is to offend the Diane to whom she is devoted. "Hélas," says Clytemnestre, "je me souviens, sacrilège et profane,/ De vous avoir vouée aux autels de Diane" (IV.4). Like the attendant in Crisante, Clymnestre reproaches her daughter for her readiness to die for the sake of eternal renown: "Un an de vie en vaut cent de mémoire" (IV.6). (Luckily, she does not suffer the same fate.) Iphigénie must reproach her mother for dishonoring her martyrdom with such entreaties, like Hercule before the tearful Alcmène in Rotrou's first tragedy. Yet, again like Alcmène, Clytemnestre is unable to transcend her own selfish, human imperatives for this divine purpose. Different in its tenor, Clytemnestre's selfishness is no less compromising here. Alcmène sought the narcissistic glories of générosité, whereas Clytemnestre blindly adheres to maternal instinct. She accuses her child of cruelty in wishing to die for whatever cause.

In this sacrilege she is joined by the somewhat prissy Achille. Clytemnestre need not have resorted to a shrewd appeal to his self-interest in seeking his help. He is offended by the very fact that Agamemnon has used his name in a subterfuge. Evoking the doctrine of innocence by intention, he offers Clytemnestre his services and gives one of the most succinct statements in Rotrou of the concept of sacramental kingship according to the code of générosité:

Ce n'est pas que rebelle au joug d'un Souverain,  
Je fasse vanité d'en secouer le frein:  
Mais je veux que ses lois comme ses mœurs soient bonnes,  
C'est par où se maintient le respect des couronnes.

(III.6)

Clearly, the value system of this tragedy is neatly divided among sets of characters. The priest Calchas seems to regard the sacramental in strictly material terms; Ménélas and Ulysse seem ready to put the formulas of piety to strictly personal, human ends; Ulysse is a bizarre compound of the pompous and the unctuous. "Achille," that hero says of himself in a sarcastic
thrust at Ulysse, "sans défense/ Vaut pour le moins Ulysse avec son éloquence" (V.3). "Eloquent" is an epithet used more than once to describe him, as if in a reminder that words have always been suspect in Rotrou. Falling away from their faith, Clytemnestre and Achille, too, seem to belong to the group of the perfunctorily pious represented by the Greek generals. Where, then, can true piety in this world lie but in Iphigénie and her father?

We can say this of her father only at the very end and, even then, only in that relativistic spirit in which Polynice was "more sacramental" than Étéocle in Antigone. The relation between Agamemnon and his brother is parallel in some ways. Ménélas is not too self-sufficient; he is more against than he is for things; he is a sanctimonious fool; and so on. But I do not wish to push this parallel too far, for ultimately Ménélas is regenerated in this more fully resacramentalized universe. Confronted with the prospect of Iphigénie's sacrifice, Ménélas no longer feigns pity for his brother and his niece. He actually is ready to forego the sacrifice (V.1). That he is restrained in this humane wish by Calchas' platitudes is really to the priest's discredit. Uncle and father feel what the priest cannot in his formulas. As the father tells Calchas: "Le Ciel sait mieux que vous combien il est contraire,/ D'ordonner en grand Prêtre et d'obéir en père" (V.1). But obey he does, for the father's faith is restored by the daughter's, even if his zeal is weak. "Le zèle défaillant," says the priest, "l'ouvrage est sans mérite" (V.1).

The theology must not be confused with Protestant insistence on sacramental validity ex opere operantis. The priest questions the sacrificer's zeal—the ardor one brings to a cause, not the cause itself. In Catholic sacramental theology, the efficacy of the sacrament depends on the disposition of the sacrificer, but efficacy does redound to the ill-disposed once he is properly disposed. The sacramental sacrifice is valid in spite of the perfunctory piety of the priest and the hypocritical piety of Ulysse. The latter complains that a girl alone defends the gods in their midst. Ulysse is wrong, for the father's zeal does increase
as the moment of actual sacrifice approaches. Interrupting the violent quarrel between Ulysse and Achille and regretting his own “différends” with the gods and with himself, the father asks the lover to stop irritating the heavens. To his daughter he promises: “... tu vivras malgré ce coup mortel;/ Ce ne te sera pas un tombeau qu’un autel” (V.3). His repentance and illumination are of crucial significance. He has freely come to co-operate with the divine will and is thus restored to full being and understanding. The motif of becalmed vessels aptly expresses the ethical relations between divine and human: Heaven proposes but Man disposes. Agamemnon had already partially regained his being through the grace-ful defense of his daughter. He had seen that his own earlier love for Helen before she married was as impure as hers for Paris; that his expedition to Troy was a folie just as grave. Now he sees that his very resistance to his daughter’s sacrifice is also in error. At this moment he is almost equal to his daughter in divine insight.

She is not the psychologically complicated creature Euripides portrays in the model on which Rotrou drew. After the father’s treachery has been revealed, Rotrou, like Euripides, has his heroine seek explanations from her father. “What can I have to do with Helen’s love?” is the question Iphigenia poses in Euripides on this occasion. “Ai-je quelque intérêt aux affaires d’Hélène?” Rotrou’s Iphigénie asks (IV.3). But Rotrou leaves the tears and recriminations of the original Iphigenia to the mother. His Iphigénie does not clasp her father’s knees; nor plead with him, “Kill me not untimely! the sun is sweet!”; nor does she turn to anyone (the child-brother Orestes in the model) and urge, “Yet come and cry with me, kneel down and pray.” Quite to the contrary:

D’avoir recours aux pleurs, d’implorer votre grâce,
Un si vil procédé sent trop son âme basse:
C’est une lâcheté que le sang me défend,
En cela connaissez que je suis votre enfant,
Plus vous me témoignez de n’être plus mon père,
Iphigénie is equal to this occasion, as she is to whatever occasion, with appropriate piety. A virgin about to wed a mighty warrior, she has misgivings about the approaching wedding, but is nonetheless dutiful and loving to the father who has arranged it (II.1-2). Her dutifulness is one with her insistence on her rank; her dedication to Diane is one with her noble blood. Even before she seeks her father’s explanation for his ignoble defense of an adulteress, she tells her tearful attendant that a fear of death would be “une lâche action” and that to die “est un tribut qu’on doit aux destinées.” She wills her death because of her destiny. A redemptive sacrificial figure, Iphigénie sets an example of sacramental purity for all: her attendant, her lover, her mother, her father (and her uncle as well, though not by direct address).

She is at once a sacrifice of expiation and one of ordination. As a sacrifice of expiation, she assumes the impure character of all those about her. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss remind us that these sins or impurities are themselves sacred in character; the profane is a religious category. In Iphigénie the domain of the impure sacred ranges from the adulterous sins of Hélène to the imperfect disposition with which the father begins the sacrifice (the “petit zèle” Calchas reproaches in him). Though not present before us, the adulterous Hélène is an important character, a sort of beauteous devil like Hermante in L’Innocente Infidélité. Describing her, Agamemnon gives one of the most paradoxical definitions of sacrilege in Rotrou’s theater:

La beauté, ce tableau de l’essence divine,
Ce trésor de son sang est souvent sa ruine.
C’est un présent des Cieux à la vertu fatal,
Un bonheur malheureux, un bien source de mal.
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Et pour dire en deux mots mon sens de votre femme,
Le visage en est beau, mais je doute de l’âme.

(II.2)

In Hélène the premises of Les Sosies are reversed: physical beauty is not something toward which the gods themselves are irresistibly inclined; rather, it is a snare the gods place before men to lure them into sacrilege.

But not in all cases of beauty. There is Iphigénie. Her purity gives meaning to the impurity of others and vice versa. Rotrou’s dramaturgy of polarized types serves him well in tragedy as well as in comedy: the sacrilegious physical beauty of Hélène is opposed by the sacramental spiritual beauty of Iphigénie. Iphigénie is physically beautiful, of course. Ironically, in Achille her physical beauty causes the very sacrilege that Agamemnon warns of in Hélène. However, Iphigénie must herself struggle against such offenses on all sides by insisting on her spirituality. As Hubert and Mauss have shown, the function of an expiatory sacrifice implies a “communal” function as well.²⁸ Iphigénie’s sacrifice is an “ordination,” as promised by her mother. In being dedicated to Diane, she expiates the sins of her family while realizing her own divine entelechy (symbolized by her virginity). She resacramentalizes the universe desecrated by others. “Ma flamme devient sainte et la profane cesse,” Achille cries upon hearing the justification of the sacrifice from the goddess; “J’ai par mon zèle enfin satisfaire à l’Oracle,/ Et de notre voyage il a levé l’obstacle,” Agamemnon cries in the same moment (V.4). The sacrifice has been bloodless; his daughter has been spared from death by Diane. Her father had predicted this earlier in a figurative rather than literal spirit: “Je sais le respect de la Grèce,/ Son dessein me tient lieu de l’effet” (V.4).

Seldom has the doctrine of innocence by intention been stressed with such spiritual force. Whatever the intention of the generals at the outset, it has been purified by the consistently good intention of Iphigénie. In not being violated by a knife, her body symbolizes this spiritual purity. Yet, of even
greater significance is the disappearance of that intact body. Iphigénie is disembodied before us. As the goddess says, material effects are not important here. Iphigénie does not suffer physically like Hercule. Instead, she is assumed directly into Heaven, and the explanation of all this comes not from the divinized person but from the goddess herself. Theologically, of course, Iphigénie is now one with the godhead. That she does not show this union in her own physical person only continues that emphasis on the spiritual which had characterized her even before her assumption.

The pure Iphigénie can resacramentalize this impure world only by leaving it. This is the reason for her presence in it. It cannot be said of Rotrou’s play, as it has of his model, that the miraculous salvation of the victim is really an epilogue (perhaps tacked on by Euripides’ son, according to some editors of the great classic). The bloodless assumption into Heaven in Rotrou’s play flows both thematically and dramatically from the données of his play. Once again, we have an A-B-A pattern. Agamemnon’s lie about the marriage to Achille constitutes the false datum, and this false datum proves itself to be really “un mal source de bien.” Iphigénie actualizes in the final portion of the play what was potential but no less real in the initial A portion: her unsullied consecration to the goddess Diane. And as in Rotrou’s previous plays with the same pattern, the sufferings that all undergo in the B portion of the play prove to be mere illusions. This point is given fullest dramatic expression in the very fact that Iphigénie is not dispatched by the priest’s sacrificial knife. This de-emphasis of the material borders on a devaluation of it. Iphigénie continues the marked shift in stress in Rotrou’s theater since Antigone. Here the divinity seems present only on occasion; and perhaps rarely, if Agamemnon’s misgivings about Hélène’s beauty are generalized.

Yet, it would be a mistake to generalize those misgivings. In spite of the temptation to total transcendence, Rotrou’s universe remains sacramental. The divinity may be disembodied, but it is not hidden. In principle throughout and in practice at
the end, the material is de-emphasized but not denied. As in Thomistic theology, Iphigénie regards “orders” as more strictly necessary and higher than marriage. For all this spirituality, Iphigénie is not against the world and the flesh. “Si le décret des Dieux n’avait borné mon âge,” she tells Achille, “Je leur demanderais cet heureux mariage” (IV.6). Each person has his role according to the decrees of a benevolent determinism. The “solution de continuité” obtains for this play as it has for others.

Rotrou’s Bélissaire, Tragédie (1643), comes after the Bélissaire of Desfontaines, even as his Le Véritable Saint Genest comes after that author’s play about the actor-martyr, L’Illustre Comédien. Rotrou’s play about the royally victimized soldier is closer to its Spanish source and so might well be called Le Véritable Bélissaire. Like the hero of Mira de Amescua’s El ejemplo mayor de la Desdicha and unlike Desfontaines’ eponymous hero, Rotrou’s Bélissaire comes to an unhappy end in the world he serves so well. This is the grandiose world of the East Roman Empire in the middle of the sixth century after Christ. The connection with Le Véritable Saint Genest lies in more than a curious parallel of literary history; the allusion to Christ involves more than fixing the time of the play. Like the play about the actor-martyr, Bélissaire is a profoundly religious and specifically Christian play.

“Je suis Prince et Chrétien, de qui l’exemple importe” (III.5), says the Emperor Justinien in the midst of his remonstrances to his wife, whose perfidy he has at last understood. In believing in the religiously edifying and, here, adjudicatory function of his rank, this Christian ruler of the Eastern Empire does not differ from earlier rulers in the canon. Rotrou’s rulers have always believed that: “Les Rois, comme rayons de la divine essence,/ En leur gouvernement imitent sa puissance” (III.6). At this moment in Bélissaire, the concept of sacramental kingship seems fully validated once again. We appear to be in the final A portion of a typical Rotrou play in which an innocent is the victim of fate or sacrilege. After a B portion full of deceits based on a false datum, the victim has been restored to the
bliss he knew in the initial A portion. The false datum of this B portion is Antonie's unjust persecution of him unto death itself. The hero cannot know that this is only seeming, that he is the victim of a deeper, more abiding false datum: the enmity of the empress.

Her enmity is “false” according to another familiar notion: her jealousy is a folie, a deviation of natural reason. This comes out directly in the fifth act, with the empress’ Heaven-directed confession of her guilt and Bélissaire’s innocence. (V.6). Yet, well before that, in what appears to be the complete play of the first three acts, the notion appears in the emperor’s sadly justified suspicions of his wife: “J’ai peine d’ouïr qu’un nom qui m’est si cher,/ D’un si lâche projet se soit voulu tâcher (II.12). The vindication of Bélissaire in the first three acts moves toward an equilibrium in which matter (political power, here) and spirit fuse. In the fusion the spiritual is obviously capital. The emperor can hardly believe a name to be guilty. In the contingent world of politics, a name points to an essence or being of which the physical person and political conduct are only temporal accidents, but nonetheless revealing. The empress’ name is thus ironical; Théodore is hardly the gift of God her name signifies. She is a grand but disturbing figure. Earlier ferocious queens, like Déjanire, pale before the infernal power of this vengeful empress. Having loved and been denied by Bélissaire before she became empress, Théodore thinks of him now only with hate. Hatred is woven into the language of almost every scene, and in the profoundly expressive rhyme of “haine” and “reine,” made by the empress herself, we sense that this realm is bound to be rendered asunder.

This “rendition” is Manichaean in overtone. During the reign of the historical Justinian, that heresy was still rather strong. We might thus be tempted to see in the palace of this dramatic Justinian some evidence of the Manichaean doctrine that the coterminous relation between the world and evil is represented by woman. Théodore is not, however, pure sensuality, as the Manichaeans regarded woman.27 She is as spiritual as her adversary, driven by a lust for power equaled by no other wo-
man in Rotrou thus far except perhaps Hermante of L’Innocente Infidélité. The comparison is especially instructive in a play where some might see a foreshadowing of Racine in this queen’s use of public power for private ends. When we first meet this queen who loved Bélissaire before her marriage, she tells us that “ma haine est un effet d’une amour irritée,/ Dont il était indigne et qu’il a rebutée” (I.3). Accustomed to think of power and love in French classical tragedy in Racinian terms, the relation between Théodore and Bélissaire might remind some readers of that between Hermione and Pyrrhus, or Roxanne and Bajazet. As Lancaster has shown, the play is not without at least one Racinian pattern: the scenes after Théodore warns Antonie that she must not show her love correspond to those scenes in Britannicus in which Néron forbids Junie to acknowledge her love for the hero of Racine’s play. We may note another fairly familiar dramatic device that Racine will exploit in another play: the hero’s betrayal literally by his own hand through a love letter to a mistress whom the jealous queen would deny the hero. (Bajazet).

Yet, unlike Néron and Roxanne, Théodore does not use the public for the sake of the private motive. She uses both. She is indignant in the quotation I have just given as much because her love has been for an “indigne” as because it has been “irritée.” That is, Bélissaire insults her in two ways—both as a woman and as a queen. “Je suis femme et je hais,” she goes on here, but then she adds: “Ne vois-tu pas qu’encor, pour comble de l’horreur . . . Il s’acquit un pouvoir si près de l’insolence” (I.3). Later, in the very scene coming from the Spanish model and looking to Racine’s Britannicus, she tells Antonie, “Qu’une Reine se venge et qu’une femme hait” (II.3; italics added). The conjunction co-ordinates but it does not fuse two separate motives. In her hatred of the lowly man she once loved, the queen is a double sacrilege—to both chaste desire and générosité. But, as Lancaster senses, there is more to the empress’ motivation than the ill-repressed love that leads Hermione or Phèdre to their political masks. “Belisarius has a fine, but monotonous role,” the historian writes, and “Theo-
dora’s extraordinary vindictiveness is insufficiently explained by the fact that she had once failed to win the general’s love.”

She is concerned with something more than love: she is concerned with her honor, with générosité, rather than chaste desire.

On the other hand, Bélissaire reverses the relations between the codes. He is the perfect example of the Christian paradox in its military version: a brave warrior, his chief virtue is not his courage but his charity. Christ-like, he pardons his persecutors and assassins. Threatened by a would-be assassin who sacrilegiously garbs himself as a pilgrim, he gives alms to the pilgrim and then, when he discovers the ruse, intercedes with the king on his behalf. Little wonder that the pardoned pilgrim calls his savior a “rare . . . divin homme” (1.6). From first to last, seldom has a hero been so regally if providentially determined in his behavior. “Le Ciel” is the key word coming from his lips and heart as frequently as “haine” comes from the lips and heart of his royal enemy. At the very beginning of the play, he stops his confidant’s grandiloquent praise for his victories with the admonition “C’est en ôter le prix au Ciel, dont je la tiens” (I.1).

His sacred character and the specifically Christian character of the play come out at almost every moment, but nowhere so densely as with his third would-be assassin, Philippe, his rival for Antonie’s love. A pious invoker of Heaven’s favor upon his unknown rescuer (II.18), Philippe justifies the murder of the saintly Bélissaire on the grounds that “notre foi nous l’ordonne et qui s’engage aux Rois./ Se fait de leurs desseins inviolables lois” (III.2). He uses the queen’s unholy rage to realize his own unholy love. While he reflects on this ignoble intention, Bélissaire appears, kissing the letter he has written to Antonie in hopes of restoring “une amour si parfaite et sainte” (italics added). The contrast between sacred and profane love could not be greater. Philippe kneels before the triumphant hero, as if in obeisance (“Incliné, sous couleur de lui baiser la main”) but really to plunge a knife into “ce miracle animé par tant d’exploits insignes.” This almost sacrilegious intention is checked at the sight of the ring he himself gave to his rescuer earlier.
J’y proposais un mal et j’y médite un bien;
Le dessein d’un affront à des vœux y fait place,
J’y tentais un outrage et j’y cherche une grâce;
Ma cruauté m’y rend et ma fureur s’y perd,
Mon bras vous y menace et mon œil vous y sert;
J’y pèche et m’y repens, je m’y souille et m’y lave,
J’y viens votre ennemi, j’y deviens votre esclave.

(III.2; italics added)

Once again, a ring has worked a sanctifying grace on a perfidious lover. But this time the ring is not invested with any special power, as in La Bague de l'oubli; instead, it is the “infidel’s” own token of faith. Its grace inheres in the world of which it is a natural convention.

Bélisaire forgives Philippe as he forgave Léonse and Narsès. In the first three acts of this play, with their independent A-B-A pattern, Heaven does justify the hero’s frequently reiterated faith in its immanent power: “Le Ciel en ma faveur fera crever l’envie” (I.2); “Le Ciel dessus les siens veille soigneusement” (II.7); “... J’espère au bon œil dont le Ciel me regarde,/ La bonne conscience est une sûre garde” (III.1). Thinking Bélisaire asleep, the emperor muses, addressing his words more to himself than to the tranquil figure:

Quelque lieu d’où ton sang tire son origine,
Tu dois être un rayon de l’essence divine,
Puisque ce port céleste et ce divin aspect,
Impriment à la fois l’amour et le respect.

(III.4)

Vassal and emperor are both “rayons de l’essence divine,” we remember. In the emperor’s application of this key phrase both to himself and to his vassal, we see the spiritual expression of an identification on which the emperor insists throughout. Giving the vassal one of his royal rings, he says, “Tiens, avec celui-ci, comme un second moi-même,/ Prends dessus mes sujets un em-
pire suprême” (I.6). These two are not really in a master-slave relationship. They are “frères amis,” both examples of a higher self, both emanations of the divine essence. In the long run, Theodore will convert them into “frères ennemis” precisely by accusing the lowborn one of sales désirs. However, before he fatally believes an ambiguous sign, the emperor now knows how to read the clear signs of Bélissaire’s virtue and Théodore’s treachery.

He learns of this treachery through a device that seems to anticipate the play-acting in Le Veritable Saint Genest. Yet, I think it misleading to see Bélissaire’s relation to his “false dreamer” as analogous to Genest’s relation to Adrien in the formal play. The ontological character of Bélissaire’s feigning differs radically from all other intercalated structures in Rotrou: the “actor” really portrays himself in a “part” that does not reflect a true reality in another plane of being but presents a reality obscured within a single plane of being. The ontological unity of these “independent” planes of being is apparent in the psychology of the dream that the emperor gives here:

Le songe est un tableau des passions humaines
Qui dans le repos représente nos peines;
Un confident sans peur, un parleur peu discret,
Qui des plus retentissants évente le secret.

(III.4)

The unity of personality and of being is important. However ingenious this detour, in adopting it Bélissaire breaks the very codes by which he lives. According to chaste desire, virtue is its own reward, and générosité impels its adherents to give themselves always for what they are. The imperative to deal fairly and openly with all applies to vassals as well as kings.

Were the play to end at the end of Act III, Bélissaire’s stratagem might be dismissed as an excusable casuistry of the kind we have seen in earlier plays. The concluding moment of Act III is filled with the familiar eschatological motifs of the semi-political plays of the first half of the theater. The ravages of sacrilege
have proved illusory; grace has triumphed; an illuminated king makes an adjudicatory speech in which he condemns the vicious and elevates the virtuous to even higher material station; and so on. Placing the scepter the emperor offers him at the empress' feet, Bélissaire gives a supreme example of his Christian charity. He also provides an occasion for a grace-ful gesture to produce its sacramental effect on the worst “sacrilege” of this universe. (This is, in fact, what happens in the last act of Desfontaines' Bélissaire.) But even if Théodore is not converted, we have what has been seen in previous plays of Rotrou: the utterly sacrilegious figure has been either banished, exiled, or imprisoned without impairing the festive mood of the happy ending with its “heureux mariage” and long reign. The example of Hermante comes to mind, naturally. Though Théodore is an empress, imprisonment or exile would not be completely out of place in a plot ending with such lines as Narsès’ “Quelle rage tiendrait contre tant de bonté” or Bélissaire’s words closing Act III, “Arrête ici, Fortune, arrête ici ta roue” (III.7).

But in the lexicon of the play, Fortune is a woman. In a gloomy paradox, Fortune’s wheel comes to a stop in the very persistence with which the woman Théodore holds out against such goodness through two more acts. The A-B-A structure of the first three acts proves itself part of the prolonged B portion of the larger structure of the play. In the latter the empress’ rage is the “false datum.” Her final confession shows it to be a folly, a deprivation of reason, a fall from grace. The consequences of this false datum are very real: Bélissaire is executed; emperor and empress are permanently separated as man and wife. The sinful rage of Théodore is relieved too late; it is a real datum of the B portion. But that portion is only a part of a larger structure in which both the initial A and final A portions define Théodore’s rage as Heaven’s way of bringing Bélissaire to his place of true rest. He will rest not in the arms of Antonie, as physical support of the throne of César, but in the arms of God, as spiritual support of His heavenly throne. In this play with a historical Christian setting, God is used in the singular, but His oneness with the plural gods of previous pagan or secular plays is clear in the
relation between “Les Cieux” and “Fortune.” There is a rift between them as in previous plays, with Heaven the source only of good and Fortune the source of evil or misfortune. But here the rift is not repaired. The fatal imperfection turns out to be a deprivation of reason inhering in the sinful just as pure grace inheres in the saintly.

In such a world pure grace cannot long abide, for “Fortune . . . est femme,” an “instable Déesse” who raises the lowly not to their glory but to their “malheur” (V.10). Bélissaire is finally trapped by Théodore through her profanation of the tenets of chaste desire. She hypocritically claims that she would have earlier preferred his pretended love for her instead of his refusal because he considered himself of too low birth for her. She even claims to renounce all concerns of station for his sake now:

Mais depuis vos bontés rétablissant vos lois;
Achevez mes soupirs qui me coupiez la voix,
Puisque vouloir forcer cette ardeur obstinée
Est lutter vainement contre ma destinée,
Témoignons-lui: Mais lâche! à quoi te résous-tu?

(IV.2)

I give the original stage direction here, for in the most widely known edition of Rotrou to date, Viollet-le-Duc has mistaken the sense of this moment (and perhaps the whole scene) with his “à part” as Théodore turns in on herself.31 The original says “un peu bas”: that is, she is only pretending to turn in on herself, pretending to struggle with a shameful but irresistible love for her “inferior.” She uses the triumph of love over station as a means of satisfying an affront to station. (Even with respect to that affront, Bélissaire is obviously doctrinally pure: it is the empress who sinned by loving out of place.) This diabolical creature is the enemy of grace itself: “Quelque part d’où l’injure ou la grâce procède” she begins her attack on Bélissaire for placing the scepter at her feet. Compared to this gesture, demeaning by the very lowliness of its source, “Mon exil m’aflligeait
bien moins que cette grâce” (IV.1). Grace may inhere in this world in Bélisserie, but through the dis-grace of Théodore that inherence is driven back to its source.

“This soumission, ce pardon généreux, / Est moins une pitié qu’un effet amoureux” (V.8), says the emperor of Bélissaire’s earlier forgiveness of Théodore when he reads the “note to his wife.” Claiming to be insulted by Bélissaire’s base desire, Théodore splits the “selves” making up the “moi-même” of emperor and vassal. The emperor believes her. The evidence may not seem strong, but the belief nonetheless expresses the spiritual character of this play. Like many recent kings and lovers, the emperor prizes amitié over amour. There may even be signs of the homosexual motif of the early plays between the two men. The emperor calls the sleeping Bélissaire “la moitié de moi,” a term applied elsewhere in Rotrou by heterosexual lovers or married characters to their beloved and mate. Later, having read the fatal letter, the emperor tells Bélissaire: “Vous avez mal usé de mon affection” (IV.9; italics added). Affection is the term used in the early plays to express the emotion felt between heterosexual lovers. Finally, discovering the depths of his wife’s perfidy in her very act of contrition at the end, the emperor punishes her by denying her forevermore “de part en mon lit” (V.8). Remaining latent, this homosexuality seems all the more “normal” in this play with its extremely spiritual emphasis. It adds to the many doubts cast on the “world as thing” in the last two acts. The “normal sexuality” of denouements in plays of the first half of the canon is condemned here. The pure lovers are never mated in body and, as reported by Philippe, Bélissaire died more the pure hero than the faithful lover, with no word for Antonie apparently. In the whole fifth act, Antonie is a pale figure whom her lover seems to have forgotten. Again, both in her old love and her present false charge of Bélissaire’s base desire, Théodore presents physical union as “un bien source de mal.” In the emperor’s separation from his wife, we are far from the beautiful Alphrède’s eloquent defense of sacramental marriage. Here, in annulling a license, the emperor seems to annul the order of the flesh itself. In his own way, like those heretics
whom the historical Justinian brought under imperial ban, the emperor becomes Manichaean in his view of his wife and perhaps all women.

Heaven appears to be the only place of justice, and its light shines only for a short time on this dark earth. Like many other precepts of the theater of immanence, in this play the precept of rehabilitative time is rejected. Removing the emperor's ring and surrendering it to Léonse, Bélissaire declares:

Le plus cher favori n'est rien qu'un peu de boue,
Dont l'inconstant fait montre et puis après s'en joue;
Et ses honneurs ne sont que des sables mouvants,
Qui servent de jouet aux haleines des vents:
Il n'est si haut crédit que le temps ne consomme,
Puisque l'homme est mortel et qu'il provient de l'homme;
Ce qui nous vient de Dieu, seul exempt de la mort,
Est seul indépendant et du temps et du sort.

(V.2)

Human time is not real. Only divine timelessness is real. The unreality of human time is beautifully rendered in the structure of these last scenes. They reverse the early moments of the play: each of the would-be assassins whom Bélissaire had forgiven earlier now comes in the same order (Léonse, Narsès, and Philippe) to take back from his savior some sign of Bélissaire's own worldly elevation. Léonse takes back the ring of office, Narsès, the papers of office, and Philippe actually arrests the saintly Bélissaire.

In the first three acts, with their independent "plot," we found Bélissaire casuistically falling away from his own ethical imperatives. Here, too, in his last moments he borders on a similar fall from virtue. In one of the longest speeches in Rotrou's theater, this champion of virtue for its own sake makes an impassioned plea for a recognition of his services to the emperor. He begins his speech of one hundred twenty four verses with an apostrophe to the emperor as "Prince l'espoir des bons et l'effroi des pervers/ Vive image de Dieu, Roi du bas univers." The
separation of worlds has never been so stark in Rotrou: there is this *bas univers* and, by implication, there is the *haut univers*. Bélissaire gives us a splendid sacramental vision in the very feats of prowess for which he now seeks recompense. The emperor remaining silent, the long speech finally turns to condemnation of this *bas univers*:

En me faisant du bien vous me fûtes barbare,
En m'obligeant, cruel, en me donnant, avare;
Le Crocodille, ainsi, tue en versant des pleurs,
La sirène en chantant, et l'aspic sous les fleurs.

Earlier, Bélissaire had defended his fidelity as a rare “droit inviolable et pure,/ Dans le commun débris de tout la nature” (IV.8). Nature in the world of *Les Sosies* and of the early theater was sacramental in its beauty. That beauty was a visible sign of the providential order of both divine conventions and human institutions. Here, the hero describes his moral situation as an existing natural disorder of the kind unsuccessfully called for by Hermante at the end of *L'Innocente Infidélité*. In such a world, “les Rois ne sont plus Rois depuis que leur puissance/ Laisse à la calomnie opprimer l'innocence” (V.5).

Innocence is oppressed: Bélissaire does die. “C'est à vous, justes Cieux! à vous que je me plains;/ Voyez mon innocence et rendez témoignage/ De l'injuste riguer dont la terre m'outrage” (V.5). When he died, testifies Philippe, “son âme s'envolant par la brèche des yeux,/ D'un invisible effort a pris sa route aux Cieux” (V.8). The effort was invisible, but no less real, as the familiar repentance of both emperor and empress makes clear. All believe in Heaven as a Christian concept. In ascending to it, Bélissaire completes the final A portion of the drama that had its beginning in God’s creation of the world. Through this ascension, the hero makes of this play, designated a *tragédie* on its title page, what it is called in the running heads of the printed version: *tragi-comédie*. We have already alluded to this expressive editorial discrepancy in *Iphigénie*, but Bélissaire is a tragi-comedy of an even greater spiritual tendency. Key themes of Rotrou—frères-amis who become frères-ennemis, suspicion of
the flesh per se, the instability of fortune—all come to spiritual focus in the hero's derisive view of "ce bas univers." The contrast with the apotheosis of "ce bas élément" in Les Sosies, the "high point" of Rotrou's theater of immanence, could not be greater. Here, God is no longer "consubstantially" available within the universe but only transcendentally accessible through it. Naturally, listening to the emperor pray to the intercessionary figure of the ascended Bélisaire in the closing lines of the play, we realize that God is not totally inaccessible (as he is in Racine, according to some critics). Though in its most somber mood thus far, Rotrou's Tridentine Christianity is still characteristically "beyond tragedy." God is obviously not hidden from the world. Nevertheless, more than in any of the plays thus far, He seems beyond it.

Bélisaire is followed by two comedies, Célie, ou le Vice-roy de Naples (1644 or 1645) and La Sœur (1645), and the famous tragicomedy with which we began, Le Véritable Saint Genest. In varying degrees, the comedies retreat from the extreme transcendental concepts of Bélisaire. Indeed, though La Sœur still shows marked influences of the spiritual stresses of the theater of transcendence, in mood, at least, it differs rather sharply from that theater. For this reason I shall discuss it in my next section.33 As for Le Véritable Saint Genest, returning to it now in light of the analyses to this point, it is clearly a play marked more by transcendental than immanentist concepts. Nevertheless, the temptation to surrender to an extreme transcendence is obviously resisted both in the inner and outer plays of this remarkable work. This is a characteristic of Rotrou's theater, obviously. Again, the Christian specificity of the Saint Genest can now be seen to be as old as La Pèlerine amoureuse, a play showing the effects of a strong pull toward immanence but seeking a balance. This is to remind us that the moments of Rotrou's theater up to this point are not to be divided into the "profane" and the "sacred" but into two different religious moments. Beyond this point, as we shall see, the influence of both moments, of immanence and transcendence, endures in an ambivalent fashion.34