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## Two French Tragedies of Saint Genest

*The Famous Actor or The Martyrdom  
of Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines

*The Veritable Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Jean de Rotrou

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Translated, with Introduction and Notes,  
by Richard Hillman

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# TRADUCTIONS INTROUVABLES

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# Introduction

## Two French Tragedies of Saint Genest

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Besides facilitating the access of English-language readers to two complementary yet contrasting French hagiographic tragedies which deserve attention in themselves—both created around 1644 and on the same subject, the conversion and martyrdom of Saint Genest<sup>1</sup>—the present volume is intended to complement a previous one on the somewhat earlier *théâtre dévot* of the Norman dramatist Pierre Troterel.<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, it purports to shed light in compact form on a traditionally flourishing, albeit increasingly precarious, sector of French theatrical activity as it evolved further in the mid-seventeenth century, especially in Paris.

That phenomenon has not attracted a great deal of interest on the part of English literary historians. Yet on the premise, which I would like to think is increasingly accepted, that the early modern theatrical cultures of England and France never existed in total isolation from each other, it might be postulated that the French theatre's predilection for saints' lives and miracles could not have been a matter of total indifference on the other side of the Channel. With respect

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- <sup>1</sup> Details of the editions which serve as the basis of the present translations are as follows: Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines, *L'Illustre Comédien ou le Martyre de Saint Genest, Tragedies hagiographiques: Le Martyre de saint Eustache, L'illustre Olympie, L'illustre Comédien*, ed. Claude Bourqui and Simone de Reyff (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2004), pp. 383-543 (Introduction, pp. 385-444); Jean de Rotrou, *Le Véritable Saint Genest, tragédie* (1647), ed. Pierre Pasquier, *Théâtre complet*, gen. ed. Georges Forestier, 13 vols, IV (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 2001), pp. 157-369 (Introduction, pp. 159-250). I have greatly profited from the editors' work in both cases.
  - <sup>2</sup> Pierre Troterel, *Pièces de dévotion (Hagiographic Plays): La Tragédie de sainte Agnès (1615), La Vie et sainte conversion de Guillaume Duc d'Aquitaine (1632)*, Édition des textes français avec introductions et notes par Pierre Pasquier, English Translations with Introduction and Notes by Richard Hillman (Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2023).

to the official closure of public theatres in England under Puritan auspices from 1642 to 1660, might the functioning of devotional theatre in France as an instrument of Counter-Reformation theology—and, more broadly, ideology—have added to the multiple dangers that the English Parliamentary faction perceived theatre generally as posing?

There would have been a conjuncture, in any case, with the English theatre's occasional veering, real or perceived, towards sympathetic treatments of Roman Catholic subjects: witness *The Virgin Martyr* of Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger (1620), as well as the latter's *The Renegado, or The Gentleman of Venice* (1630), which features a positive Jesuit figure. At once more subtly and more deeply significant, perhaps, was *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (Shakespeare, probably with George Wilkins, 1607-8). F. D. Hoeniger, who first brought out that work's saint-play affinities, could affirm, "There are few plays by Shakespeare for which as much evidence is available to testify to their popularity on the stage during the early decades of the seventeenth century."<sup>3</sup> More recently, attention has been paid to the play's perceived suitability for an official occasion (in 1619) in honour of the French ambassador, to its adaptability to Roman Catholic sensibilities, even to its possible use as an instrument of proselytising.<sup>4</sup>

Part of the pre-Revolutionary climate, too, was the active (French) Catholicism, coupled with extensive dramatic engagement, of Queen Henrietta Maria (i.e., Henriette Marie), who was forced to flee England—in, as it happened, the "Saint Genest year" of 1644.<sup>5</sup> Worth singling out in this regard is the Catholicism (by conversion) of James Shirley, who was for a considerable period the Queen's favoured dramatist. And if Shirley's tragedy *The Cardinal* (1641) hardly paints a positive portrait of its ecclesiastical protagonist, the unmistakable allusion to Richelieu in its Prologue not only bespeaks the unremitting hostility of the Queen (and her mother, Marie de' Medici) to that particular churchman, but tellingly assumes the audience's familiarity with French

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3 William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. F. D. Hoeniger, The Arden Shakespeare, 2nd ser. (London: Methuen, 1963), Introduction, pp. lxvi-lxvii; on the affinities with the "miracle play", see pp. lxxxviii-xci.

4 See William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. Suzanne Gossett, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd ser. (London: Thomson Learning, 2004), Introduction, pp. 86-88, and Richard Hillman, "Laughing (Last) in the Brothel: Comedy and Sanctity across the Channel in the Wake of *Pericles*", *Notes and Queries*, ns 68.266 (2021): 121-27, 123.

5 Much salutary attention has latterly been paid to this important subject. See, notably, Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), and "Queen Henrietta Maria's Theatrical Patronage", *Henrietta Maria: Piety, Politics and Patronage*, ed. Erin Griffey, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 57-72, as well as, in the same volume, Malcolm Smuts, "Religion, European Politics and Henrietta Maria's Circle, 1625-41", pp. 13-37; also Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and Court Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

affairs: “The Cardinal! ’Cause we express no scene, / We do believe most of you, gentlemen, / Are at this hour in France.”<sup>6</sup>

## I

This is hardly the place to engage the elusive and complex issue of English Protestant feelings about French theatre, nor others that hover in the background to the plays at hand. Hovering most closely among these, paradoxically, is the roughly parallel hostility within certain French Counter-Reformation circles, ecclesiastic and moralist, to theatre in general and religious theatre in particular.<sup>7</sup> This attitude, traceable both directly and indirectly (mainly through defences of theatre) had been formalised by the Council of Trent (1545-63), which forbade clergy from attending theatrical performances, a position upheld by synods throughout the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> It would find its fullest expression, by another paradox, during the 1660s, when the theatre had been restored in England under Charles II.<sup>9</sup> And it would pointedly extend to French theatre professionals, who, at least at various times and in certain places, found themselves excluded from the Christian sacraments.<sup>10</sup>

Intertwined with this issue were evolving aesthetic criteria. Already by mid-century, the medieval tradition of saint and martyr plays, which had persisted side-by-side with other dramatic forms, especially in the provinces, and had allowed considerable formal freedom to Troterel, for example, began to reflect the disciplinary influence, according to Parisian tastes, of neo-classical theatrical precepts: the neo-Aristotelian “unities” of time, place and action, the “*bienséances*” governing what was acceptable to display on stage, the challenge of portraying changes in dramatic character—such as, precisely, conversion.<sup>11</sup>

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6 James Shirley, *The Cardinal*, ed. Elizabeth M. Yearling, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), Prol. 1-3.

7 See Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 181-83, but also p. 241 on the positive value accorded the theatre by influential members of the “*milieu dévot*”. For a balanced overview with a long perspective, see Jean Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre: 1550-1850*, pref. Bruno Neveu (Grenoble: Presses Universitaire de Grenoble, 1997). See also Simone de Reyff, *L’Église et le théâtre: l’exemple de la France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Histoire du Christianisme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), and, for a thematically organised survey of the *querelle du théâtre*, Henry Phillips, *The Theatre and Its Critics in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

8 Dubu, p. 84.

9 This particular anti-theatrical current was chiefly associated with the abbey of Port-Royal, a stronghold of Jansenism; see Laurent Thirouin, *L’Aveuglement salutaire. Le réquisitoire contre ce théâtre dans la France classique*, *Champion Classiques, série “Essais”* (Paris: H. Champion, 1997).

10 See Bruno Nevo, Preface to Dubu, pp. 5-6.

11 See Pierre Pasquier, “L’option martyrologique des dramaturges parisiens de dévotion (1636-1646), heurs et malheurs d’un choix”, *Littératures Classiques*, 73 (2010): 169-81, and, on the challenge of

Under the further pressure of religious conservatives, however sporadic, the writing was on the wall (as it were) for hagiographic drama generally, at least on the Parisian stage, and its demise received impetus from the hostile reaction to Pierre Corneille's *Théodore vierge et martyr* in 1645-46.<sup>12</sup>

This context undoubtedly adds a dimension to the sudden French manifestation of interest in Saint Genest as the patron saint of actors, hence implicitly as the defender of *théâtre dévot*, and indeed theatre in general, on the grounds of its power to effect, not merely moral reformation, but spiritual conversion.<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, it emerges as significant that Rotrou's play—to a degree far beyond that of Desfontaines—imparts value to the impact of theatre on its audience, as measured notably by the Emperor Diocletian himself, and to the practical artistry involved in dramatic production, including the process of rehearsal and the role of the Decorator, and indeed the prompter (at IV.vi.1298). Even the portrait of the *prima donna* Marcèle, with her vanity flattered by adoring fans, while it serves as a significant counter-point to Genest's piety, supports the play's project of evoking the theatrical world with convincing multi-dimensionality—indeed, with a “realism” that accentuates its distancing from a higher, “true” reality.

The project of defending the theatre by way of its patron saint may also have been energised, as Pasquier further proposes, by the publication, also in 1644, of a hagiographic document by the enormously prolific polyglot translator and early member of the Académie Française, Jean Baudoin (1584?-1650).<sup>14</sup> *Les Saintes Metamorphoses* gives notable prominence to the instance of Saint Genest.<sup>15</sup> Baudoin's work may have particu-

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portraying character changes, his Introduction to *La Vie et sainte conversion de Guillaume duc d'Aquitaine*, Pierre Troterel, *Pièces de dévotion / Hagiographic Plays*, pp. 165-66. On the other hand, in a comprehensive recent study Pasquier has thoroughly documented the persistence of medieval hagiographic traditions in the provinces and nuanced the picture of reception of *théâtre dévot* in both the provinces and Paris, and in both performance and print; see Pierre Pasquier, “La Réception du théâtre de dévotion au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France”, *Divertir, instruire, célébrer. Études sur le théâtre et la théâtralité dans l'Europe prémoderne à la mémoire d'André Lascombes / To Entertain, Instruct and Celebrate: Studies in Early Modern Theatre and Theatricality in Memory of André Lascombes*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bordier, Juan Carlos Garrot Zambrana, Richard Hillman and Pierre Pasquier, Regards Croisés sur la Scène Européenne (Tours: Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, 2023), publication online, <<https://sceneeuropéenne.univ-tours.fr/sites/default/files/regards/pdf/RCSSE10-14-PASQUIER.pdf>>; pp. 245-89.

**12** For a thorough discussion of this phenomenon, its contexts and the issues involved, see Christian Biet, “La Sainte, la prostituée, l'actrice: l'impossible modèle religieux dans *Théodore vierge et martyr* de Corneille”, *Littératures Classiques*, 39 (2000): pp. 81-103.

**13** See Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 208-13, 241-43.

**14** See Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 211-13.

**15** Jean Baudoin, *Les Saintes Metamorphoses, ou les Changemens miraculeux de quelques grands saints, tirez de leurs Vies* (Paris: Pierre Moreau, 1644), pp. 129-51 (Discours 6, “Saint Genest, de Comedien

larly contributed, I will be suggesting, to the distinctive treatment of identity in relation to the profession of acting which constitutes one of the key features of Rotrou's play, indeed perhaps part of its claim to be "*véritable*". Yet the precarious status of *théâtre dévot* as a genre was not necessarily reinforced, to judge from the limited existing evidence, by the implicit case made for it by the dramatic treatments of Saint Genest. The respective modern editors of the plays—Pasquier (for Rotrou), Claude Bourqui and Simone de Reyff (for Desfontaines)—have been struck by the absence of indications that either was favourably received by its Parisian audiences, and neither enjoyed an especially distinguished critical reputation in its own time, although both received multiple re-editions.<sup>16</sup>

## II

Inevitably engaged by the present volume, although indirectly, and without a proposed resolution, is a critical debate as to the priority and direction of influence between the two Saint Genest plays. Some such influence is highly probable, although they share a principal source, whether independently or perhaps (in Desfontaines's case) at second hand. That source is Lope de Vega's dramatic treatment in three parts (i.e., over three days) of the story of the actor-saint Ginès (Lat. Genesis), *Lo fingido verdadera* (The Feigned Proved True), which was published in 1620. The modern editors of the two French plays offer opposing arguments for the priority of their respective authors. Pasquier, on the side of majority opinion, essentially endorses the argument of Georges Forestier,<sup>17</sup> who proposes that Rotrou was commissioned by the Troupe Royale, which performed at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, to produce a version of the story of Genest to compete with that of Desfontaines (*L'Illustre Comédien*), mounted by rival players at L'Illustre Théâtre.

This hypothesis makes obvious sense of Rotrou's claim that his play presents the "*véritable*" Saint Genest, although the term also echoes the title of Lope's work and highlights the interplay exploited by both Lope and Rotrou—less actively by Desfontaines—between notions of truth and feigning. In this view, moreover, Rotrou was effectively responding not merely to a single work of Desfontaines but to the latter's series of three hagiographic tragedies (the first two being *Eustache* [*privilège* 1643] and *L'Illustre Olympie ou le Saint Alexis* [*privilège* 1644]). In any case, Rotrou's venture into the genre entails

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fait Martyr").

<sup>16</sup> On the question of reception, see Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 163-65; Desfontaines, ed. Bourqui and de Reyff, Introduction, pp. 401-2; and Pasquier, "La réception du théâtre de dévotion", p. 281.

<sup>17</sup> Georges Forestier, "*Le Véritable Saint Genest* de Rotrou: enquête sur l'élaboration d'une tragédie chrétienne", *XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*, 45 (1993): 305-22; Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 159-61, 242-43.

a striking departure within his extensive and diverse oeuvre, which was dominated by comedies and tragicomedies (including seven additional adaptations of plays by Lope<sup>18</sup>).

On the other hand, Desfontaines's editors make a contrary case for *L'Illustre Comédien* as a reaction to Rotrou.<sup>19</sup> That case substantially rests on the argument that nothing suggests a direct acquaintance with Lope's work on the part of Desfontaines, and that the only textual source the French author might have drawn on apart from Rotrou's play is the sixteenth-century account of Genest by the German hagiographer Surius.<sup>20</sup> Surius' narrative is, in fact, quite rudimentary, as is that in the major hagiographic source for French contemporaries, the *Flos Sanctorum* of the Spanish Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira (1526-1611) in its vernacular translation.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, neither leaves room for anything approaching a sub-plot.

The specific textual parallels adduced by Bourqui and de Reyff are convincing. Nevertheless, a broader perspective on the relation among the works of Lope, Desfontaines and Rotrou may be in order, taking account of the very different approaches of the two French playwrights to some less-often remarked aspects of their common material. While the issue of priority no doubt remains insoluble, such a perspective arguably points up a closer essential affinity between Desfontaines's tragedy and the Spanish precursor text.

### III

The more significant points of contact, and contrast, with regard to the three plays' treatments of their central preoccupation, the protagonist's acquisition of sainthood, have been abundantly documented, even if interpretative consensus remains elusive.<sup>22</sup> Yet less central elements may also prove revealing. Perhaps surprisingly, the clearest glimpse of Desfontaines's affinity with Lope, and of Rotrou's divergence, is perhaps afforded by the plays' respective treatments of worldly love-relations—a conventionally appealing dramatic element, and one which found its way into a surprising number of hagiographic

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**18** See Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, p. 167, n22.

**19** Desfontaines, ed. Bourqui and de Reyff, Introduction, pp. 400-6. (De Reyff has therefore changed her position since 1997, when she spoke of Rotrou as offering a response to Desfontaines [*L'Église et le théâtre*, pp. 56-57].)

**20** I.e., Laurentius Surius [Lorenz Sauer], "De S. Genesio romano martyre, etc.," *De Probatis sanctorum historiis, etc.*, 7 vols, vol. IV (Köln: apud G. Calenium et haeredes Quentelios, 1579), pp. 916-17.

**21** For convenience of reference, I cite Pedro Ribadeneira [*sic*], *Les nouvelles fleurs des vies des Saints, et fêtes de l'année, etc.*, trans. René Gaultier, André Du Val *et al.* (Lyons: Claude Carteron, 1707), available on Gallica; see "La Vie de Saint Genest, Comédien, & Martir. 25. Aoû.", pp. 780-81.

**22** For Desfontaines, see Forestier, pp. 314-14, and Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, Introduction, pp. 403-6; for Rotrou, Pasquier, ed., Introduction, pp. 167-70, and Léonce Person, "*Le Véritable Saint-Genest de Rotrou et Le Fingido Verdadero de Lope de Vega: Conférence*" (Paris: Noizette, 1886).



dramas,<sup>23</sup> but which certainly has no place in the underlying accounts of the “historical” Genest’s conversion and martyrdom.

A major component of the much-amplified three-part version produced by Lope involves the intermingling of the future saint’s theatrical activities with a romantic subplot of a kind which would seem more at home in comedy, tragicomedy or indeed tragedy of a secular kind. Genès suffers from love for the actress Marcela, who rejects him for their fellow player Octavio. The ensuing complications enter into, and indeed disrupt, the first play that the company mount for the emperor Diocleciano in celebration of his wedding—to the point where an initial confusion between fiction and reality baffles the emperor, when Ginès, in despair, demands justice against Octavio for eloping with Marcela. All of this is prelude to the second inset piece, in which Ginès has been asked to play the role of a Christian martyr and in which his on-stage conversion—the centre-piece of the legend—will take place. Prior to that performance, it is revealed that Octavio has actually married Marcela, and Ginès must accept the *fait accompli*.

What distinctively links this aspect of Lope’s tragedy with that of Desfontaines is the latter’s similar supplying of Genest with a love-interest within his troupe in the person of Pamphilie, to whom he effusively expresses his devotion. Not only is this passion returned, however, but in the crucial and remarkably powerful scene of their reunion after his conversion (IV.iii), when Pamphilie has undertaken to persuade him to recant, it is his love, which now takes the form of a desire for her salvation, that transfigures hers and makes her resolve to share his martyrdom. This is to take Lope’s treatment of terrestrial love, which Ginès, in accepting the painful loss of Marcela, effectively renounces as a prelude to his discovery of the divine, a significant step further—or perhaps, from a strict theological angle, backward. For Desfontaines gives the impression, at least, of recuperating the traditional spiritual apparatus of neo-Platonism, by which earthly love, inspired by terrestrial beauty, may serve as a vehicle of transcendence. The point is backhandedly confirmed by the contrasting failure of the amorous relation between Aristide and Luciane—introduced without forewarning in V.i.1315 ff.—to rise above commonplace jealousy and its destructive consequences.

At any rate, the force of the double martyrdom of Genest and Pamphilie is shown to resonate throughout the rest of the play-world—from the whirlwind of futile passions that provokes the deaths of their fellow-actors to the repentant distress of Diocletian himself, who dimly intuits, across an access of conscience and political insecurity, that the deities to whom he has sacrificed the innocent martyrs are false inventions. The con-

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23 In drawing attention to this phenomenon, Pasquier, “La réception du théâtre de dévotion”, cites the example of Desfontaines’s *L’Illustre Olympie ou le Saint Alexis* (p. 282).

trast with the curt dismissal of Rotrou's unshaken Emperor following Genest's death is particularly striking: "*Ainsi reçoive un prompt et sévère supplice / Quiconque ose des Dieux irriter la Justice* [Let such swift and bitter punishment be the end / Of any who dares the gods' justice to offend]" (Rotrou, V.vii.1743-44).

Bourqui and de Reyff, in their illuminating Introduction to *L'Illustre Comédien*, convincingly demonstrate (following the lead of Henry Carrington Lancaster) the significant indebtedness of Desfontaines to a recent contribution of Pierre Corneille to the corpus of hagiographic drama, *Polyeucte martyr* (1641).<sup>24</sup> Their central point of comparison is none other than the relation between the eponymous protagonist, destined for martyrdom, and his love-interest, in that case his non-Christian wife, Paulina. As in the treatment of Genest and Pamphilie, there is a major confrontation scene, but one in which Paulina vainly opposes the claims of her terrestrial love to those of the divine love to which Polyeucte has been converted.

The differences between the two confrontations and their outcomes, however, again throw into relief Desfontaines's attempt, at least anticipated if not inspired by Lope, to integrate romantic love conventions into hagiography. First, and most obviously, Paulina fails to deter Polyeucte from his martyr's trajectory; in fact, she is herself finally converted, though only after his death, by the blood he has shed in the divine cause. But another point which Bourqui and de Reyff may undervalue, even as they develop it, relates to the theatricality of Desfontaines's "*grande scène*", which originally, as they convincingly maintain, was designed to exploit the widely admired virtuoso talents of the company's leading actress, Madeleine Béjart, in the role of Pamphilie.<sup>25</sup> Arguably, this is where the metadramatic element built into Genest's original story, and reproduced by Lope, seems to have been, in effect, redirected by Desfontaines—in a way Rotrou might plausibly have considered to be less than "*véritable*".

Somewhat strangely, Bourqui and de Reyff reduce the character of Pamphile in Act III, Scene iii, to that of a "*nouvelle Médée* [new Medea]" who "*nourrit un sentiment de vengeance* [nurtures a thirst for vengeance]".<sup>26</sup> This is to take at face value the profession of absolute outrage by which, deflecting Diocletian's anger from her fellow actors, she induces him to grant her a private interview with Genest:

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**24** Desfontaines, ed. Bourqui and de Reyff, Introduction, pp. 419-23. Cf. Henry Carrington Lancaster, *A History of French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century. Part II, The Period of Corneille, 1635-1651*, 2 vols (1932; rpt. New York: Gordian, 1966), II: 536, who also affirms that Desfontaines owed nothing to Lope.

**25** Desfontaines, ed. Bourqui and de Reyff, Introduction, p. 435.

**26** *Ibid.*, p. 420.

... *je me veux venger aussi bien que nos Dieux.*  
*César, si cet ingrat ne change de courage,*  
*Épargne tes bourreaux, il suffit de ma rage.*

[Vengeance I seek—for me and our divinities.  
 Caesar, if that ingrate reveals no change of heart,  
 Spare your tormentors—my rage will tear him apart!] (III.iii.923-25)

Especially as it might have been inflated by a great actress, this fury is surely suggestive in context of overacting—an attempt, at least, to deny contrary feelings.

Next, prior to the confrontation itself, which pivots on Pamphilie’s conversion through acceptance that Genest’s love for her soul is truer than his love for her person, she is accorded an extraordinary soliloquy, which occupies the whole of Act IV, Scene ii, and strikingly departs in form from the Alexandrines comprising the previous text: unexpectedly—with considerable dramatic effect—Pamphilie unfolds her inner struggle, her futile attempt to force herself to hate the man she loves, over some thirty lines in intricately rhymed stanzas dominated by octosyllabics and culminating, as he enters, with “*Mais voici cet ingrat, cachons notre faiblesse, / Ah! cet abord me tue.* [But the ingrate’s here—let me my weakness control. / Oh, this encounter kills me!]” (IV.ii.1002-3). Against this background, which would in itself be a gift to a gifted actress, the climactic confrontation, and especially Pamphilie’s vindictive hostility, would surely play out on two levels, to the point where her sudden surrender to her feelings of love, and through them to her lover’s Christian faith, releases powerful tensions but does not surprise. Unquestionably, this sequence represents the high point of Desfontaines’s dramatic writing in *L’Illustre Comédien*, and this in itself is telling, since the martyrological *raison d’être* tends to fade into the background.

#### IV

Rotrou, by contrast with both Lope and Desfontaines, and contrary to dramatic opportunism, if not audience expectation, gives Genest no terrestrial love-interest at all, whether to set off or to enhance his conversion. Instead, as if in pointed response to both the Marcela of Lope and the Pamphilie of Desfontaines, Rotrou represents Marcèle, the only female member of the troupe, as a shallow coquette, thriving on the adoration of her fans and notably impervious to the spiritual significance of the lines she speaks in the role of the Christian Natalie, the loving wife of the martyr Adrian. There is a pointed contrast between Genest’s palpable anticipation of his “*véritable*” identity even in his initial rehearsal of Adrian’s lines in Act Two, Scene Two—which is crassly interrupted by Marcèle’s falsely modest complaint about the “*importuns* [pestering throng]” (II.iii.350)—and her own rehearsal (373-84), which he finds deeply moving but which she

frankly dismisses, in effect, as well-executed imitation: “*Vous m’en croyez bien plus, que je ne m’en présume* [You have greater faith in me than I myself do]” (389).

Marcèle is concerned about Genest’s fate simply because it threatens her livelihood, and her allegiance to the pagan gods remains unshaken. The climactic scene of her confrontation with Genest in prison (Act Five, Scene Two) could not more strikingly depart from the dramatically affecting encounter of Pamphile with Genest in *L’Illustre Comédien*, and it issues ironically in a selfishly bitter “*Adieu cruel* [Adieu, cruel one]” on her part, echoed by his simple “*Adieu*” (V.iii.1)—simple, but informed by the profound meaning embedded in that formula.

I have elsewhere explored in some detail the way in which the female characters in *Le Véritable Saint Genest* function as foils in support of the treatment of conversion and martyrdom.<sup>27</sup> Marcèle, in this view, has a counterpart and foil of her own in the person of Valérie, Diocletian’s daughter and wife of the “Caesar” Maximin (Maximian in the translation). Initially married against her will, given her husband’s lowly origins, she is soon reconciled to him by his military and political power, so that she, too, becomes an index of spiritual obliviousness—all the more so because she because she evinces a passing openness to the world of the theatre and shows recognisably “womanly” sympathy with Marcèle over the latter’s loss of her vocation.<sup>28</sup> Allowed to resound at the play’s conclusion, together with Maximin’s glib consolation, this attitude only reinforces the total isolation of Genest’s discovery of spiritual verity from the continuing blindness of the pagan world, which the audience well knows, from its historical knowledge, is living on borrowed time.

## V

This is perhaps as good a route as any by which to confront what Forestier identifies as the play’s “*grande ironie céleste* [great celestial irony]”<sup>29</sup>—a dimension conspicuously absent from Desfontaines’s version—and the essential role played by meta-theatricality in constructing it. The venerable conceit of *theatrum mundi*, which figures the world as a stage on which human beings merely act their transitory parts, is persuasively applied by Forestier to Rotrou’s method and message: Genest’s translation to a higher—“*vérita-*

27 Richard Hillman, “‘Enter [...] a Boy Dressed for a Lady’: (Meta)Theatricality, Tyranny and *Theatrum Mundi* in Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (1629) and Jean de Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest* (1644)”, *Modern Language Review*, 117.4 (2022): pp. 535-59, esp. 552-54.

28 “*Vous voyez de quel soin je vous prêtai les mains: / Mais sa grâce n’est plus au pouvoir des humains* [You see how earnestly I presented your case, / But his pardon now lies beyond the human race]” (V.vii.1745-46).

29 Forestier, p. 322.

*ble*—reality exposes the world of pagan belief and power as idle imitation and, given the impossibility of salvation within it, as true tragedy, contrasted with divine comedy.

The mechanism of the play-within-the-play in effecting Genest’s conversion by supernatural intervention at the moment of a feigned baptism—hence, Lope’s label of “The Feigned Proved True”—is an unavoidable component of the legend. It is also indispensable, one might suppose, to validating the claim of theatre to function as an instrument of salvation. *L’Illustre Comédien*, however, both complicates this moment, by enfolding it within the protagonist’s familial and amatory affairs, and renders it elusive, if not ambiguous, by presenting it indirectly, through Genest’s narration: he must insist, for both on- and off-stage audiences, that “*je vous dis des choses véritables* [the things I recount are veritable]” (III.ii.658).

From the first, Rotrou’s approach focuses sharply on the issue of the actor as entering entirely into his role, with the intrigued Valérie testifying to his power of total conviction:

*Mais on vante surtout, l’inimitable adresse  
Dont tu feins d’un Chrétien le zèle et l’allégresse  
Quand, le voyant marcher du Baptême au trépas,  
Il semble que les feux soient des fleurs sous tes pas.*

[But most praised is the inimitable address  
With which you feign a Christian’s zeal and joyfulness,  
When, as he strides from baptism his death to meet,  
It seems the fires are flowers beneath his feet.] (I.v.293-96)

To Maximin’s more sceptical remark, “*L’épreuve en est aisée* [That is readily ascertained]” (297)—rich with irony at his own expense, as are a number of his pronouncements—Genest counters that a performance of the conversion and martyrdom of his former officer Adrian on Maximin’s orders will furnish an ample demonstration, if only the Roman will allow himself to be represented on stage. The proposition piques the latter’s curiosity but does not impinge on his detachment.

This makes for a suggestive introduction to Rotrou’s major metadramatic innovation and supplement to Lope: his choice as the medium of Genest’s conversion of a faithful adaptation (at some points closely translated) of the neo-Latin drama (pub. 1630) by the Jesuit Louis Cellot depicting the martyrdom of Saint Adrian.<sup>30</sup> The power of theatrical

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**30** *Sanctus Adrianus Martyr, Ludovici Cellotii Parisiensis e societ. Iesu, Opera Poetica* (Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy, 1630), pp. 1-100. On the adaptation of this work, see Rotrou, ed. Pasquier, Introduction, pp. 170-73. Person strangely opines that Rotrou’s incorporation of Cellot’s tragedy “*n’a pas d’importance dans l’agencement du drame* [is of no importance in the organisation of the play]” (p. 4).

performance to destabilise identity is thereby put in play, in keeping with the Emperor's own tribute to Genest in initially commending his performances: "*Avec confusion j'ai vu cent fois tes feintes, / Me livrer malgré moi de sensibles atteintes* [Stupefied, I have often known your imitations / To affect me despite myself with real sensations]" (I.v.233-34). In this context, the fact that only Genest, by profession the instrument of provoking emotions in others, is affected by his enactment of Adrian—neither the onstage audience nor his fellow actors, and most conspicuously not Marcèle-as-Natalie—emphasises the arbitrary nature of the gift of divine grace, which, in theological terms, is merited, not by its inevitably sinful recipient, but by the expiatory sufferings of Christ.

The part played by Baudoin's 1644 narrative presentation of Genest in guiding Rotrou's composition fully warrants Pasquier's attention, I believe, not simply for its insistence, in the context of the *dévo*t milieu, on the mysterious and miraculous operation of divine grace, but for its explicit integration into Genest's legend of the notions of *theatrum mundi* and theatricality itself.<sup>31</sup> Here is Baudoin's general reflection:

*Ce n'est pas une mauuaise pensé que celle de quelques Stoïiens, qui disent que le Monde est un grand theatre, où toutes les actions de la vie humaine se voyent diuersement représentés. Les hommes en sont les Comediens, qui tirent les principaux sujets de leurs pieces des passions différentes. [...] Aussi est-ce d'elles-mesmes, et particulièrement de la Haine, de l'amour, de la Crainte, et de la Jalousie, que se forment des Avantures estranges, où la Tragedie a beaucoup plus de part que la Comedie.*

[The idea of certain Stoics was not a bad one, when they said that the world is a great theatre, where all the actions of human life are seen represented in their diversity. Men are its actors, who draw the different subjects of their plays from different passions. [...] So it is from these, and especially from hate, love, fear and jealousy, that strange adventures are formed, in which tragedy has a much larger part than comedy.]<sup>32</sup>

And with specific regard to Genest's "holy metamorphosis", Baudoin finds pertinent an actor's natural delight in assuming different identities and imitating divers passions, "*des mouuemens desquels, selon qu'ils sont violens, troublent souuent la Raison, & mettent l'Ame en desordre* [whose changes, inasmuch as they are violent, often trouble the reason

**31** On the apparent influence of Baudoin, see Hillman, "Enter [...] a Boy Dressed for a Lady]", esp. pp. 556-59, where it is suggested, with due caution, that this prolific polyglot translator, with a demonstrable knowledge of English texts, may have pointed Rotrou towards *The Roman Actor* of Philip Massinger (1626), a tragedy which deploys analogous issues of identity and *theatrum mundi* in the context of pagan Roman tyranny.

**32** Baudoin, pp. 129-30.

and cause disorder in the soul]”.<sup>33</sup> He might as well have been scripting Diocletian’s avowal of “*confusion*”.

Grace lifts Genest out of the stage of this world. The physical opening of the heavens with the angelic voice, which he at first suspects may be a practical joke, a “*feinte*”<sup>34</sup>—and which is ultimately, after all, by a further irony, a theatrical device—is the promise of this transcendence, by which he will leave behind those non-Christians who are acting illusory parts, unbeknownst to themselves. Their ignorance, which effectively puts that of Rotrou’s real audience to the test, is constantly made apparent through the unconscious doubleness of their language, for their down-to-earth speech resonates willy-nilly with spiritual meanings. This is a pervasive metadramatic effect wholly absent from Defontaines’s approach.

The effect is actually signalled (in lines adapted from Lope but also echoing Baudoin<sup>35</sup>) following Genest’s declaration that his “*feint*” is a “*vérité*” (Rotrou, IV.vii.1373-74). When Camille rebukes him, “*Simple, ainsi de César tu méprises la grâce* [Simpleton, how little you care for Caesar’s grace!]”—meaning “favour”, “pardon”—he retorts, “*J’acquiers celle de Dieu!* [I acquire that of God]” (1395-96). And that double meaning of “*grâce*”, which in a sense encompasses all the double meanings throughout the text, carries through to Valérie’s sympathetic words for Marcèle at the conclusion, through which a glimpse of a higher truth momentarily flickers: “*Mais sa grâce n’est plus au pouvoir des humains* [But his pardon now lies beyond the human race]” (V.vii.1746). That glimpse, along with her sympathy, is immediately foreclosed by Maximin, but in terms whose own resonance—reaching as far as the passion of Christ—confirms his blindness:

*Ne pleignez point, Madame, un malheur volontaire,  
Puisqu’il l’a pu franchir, et s’être salulaire;  
Et qu’il a bien voulu, par son impiété,  
D’une feinte, en mourant, faire une vérité.*

[Don’t mourn, Madam, an ill that must wilful be deemed,  
Since he could have passed through it and himself  
redeemed,  
And he instead preferred, in his impiety,  
By his death to forge, by feigning, a verity.] (V.vii.1747-50)

33 Baudoin, pp. 131-32.

34 “*Quelqu’un s’apercevant du caprice où j’étais, / S’est voulu divertir par cette feinte voix* [Someone who perceived me wavering in my choice / Saw fit to amuse himself by feigning that voice]” (II.iv.435-36).

35 See the translation, IV.vii,1396 and n. 89.

The play's last line thus redeploys Lope's title in a richly ambiguous (and of course metadramatic) way, involving both deliberate irony on Maximin's part and irony at his expense, since, in his cynical dismissal, he speaks more truly than he supposes. Also to the point, as elsewhere, is Baudoin, whose language amounts to a direct refutation of Maximin:

*ce que l'on croit n'estre qu'une Fable en luy, devient maintenant vne vraye Histoire. . . . et de rendre visible aux Romains vne Verité qu'ils tiennent pour vn Mensonge.*

[What one believed to be nothing but a fable in him now became a true history. . . . a means of making visible to the Romans a Truth which they held to be a Lie.]<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, the insistent application of the theatrical metaphor to Genest's martyrdom by the Prefect Plancien (Plutianus in the translation), as he reports it, ironically recoils against himself and the onstage audience. The ultimate expression of his secular power—more largely of secular power itself—is his appropriation of the language of Genest's profession when he opposes the latter's imitation of famous heroes, his status as the glory of the Roman theatre, to his incapacity to *act* to avert tragedy in the “reality” of his own life:

*. . . ce glorieux Acteur,  
Des plus fameux Héros, fameux imitateur,  
Du Théâtre Romain, la splendeur et la gloire,*

. . . . .

*A du courroux des Dieux, contre sa perfidie,  
Par un Acte sanglant, fermé la Tragédie.*

[ . . . that glory-covered actor,  
Of the most famous heroes famous imitator,  
Of the Roman theatre the splendour and the glory,  
But such a wretched actor in his own history,

. . . . .

Has, of the gods' outrage against his perfidy,  
With a bloody act concluded the tragedy.] (V.vii.1717-24)

What is intended here by the Prefect as irony—linguistic feigning—could not more clearly evoke true speaking at his own expense. And his ultimate act of appropriating Genest's profession as part of putting him to silence in this world could not more clearly

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36 Baudoin, pp. 136-37.



assimilate that world to tragedy and confer upon his supposed victim the power of blessing God eternally:

*J'ai mis la Tragédie, à sa dernière Scène,  
Et fait, avec sa tête, ensemble séparer,  
Le cher Nom de son Dieu, qu'il voulait proférer.*

[I carried the tragedy to its final scene,  
And caused, at the same instant as his head, to sever  
His god's dear name, which he sought to repeat forever.]  
(V.vii.1740-42)

Thus the purported power of the pagan persecutors over language itself, as over life and death, functions precisely as an index of their unwitting powerlessness, speaking truth despite and across their presumptuous feigning. There could be no more basic evidence of the pervasiveness of meta-theatre as both tenor and vehicle in Rotrou's work.

### Note on the Translations

In keeping with my usual practice, I render the Alexandrines of the original into hexameter couplets, which (at their best) can come close to imitating the effect of the originals. In the present cases, Alexandrines are all but universal. There are no choruses to complicate matters (the fashion had passed), and only occasionally is the versification varied for special effects. These are, however, especially significant moments: in *L'Illustre Comédien*, the entire scene of Pamphile's literally pivotal soliloquy (IV.ii), then her defiant and inspired declaration of true faith, delivered before Diocletian in intricate stanzas (IV.v.1259-98); in Rotrou's tragedy, the quatrain (three octosyllabics plus one hexameter) with which the heavenly voice addresses Genest (II.iv.421-24) and the latter's prison soliloquy in octosyllabic stanzas (V.i.1431-70). I have attempted to preserve these forms.

The names of characters have been normalised to approximate Roman equivalents, where these are evident; otherwise, the French forms are retained in order to preserve the flavour of the originals.

The original punctuation has been freely modified in the interest of clarity, while phrasing has often been rearranged within, and sometimes between, verses. Additions to the text, including occasional proposed stage directions beyond those in the editions of reference, are placed in square brackets.





Scène  
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Traductions  
introuvables

## Two French Tragedies of Saint Genest

*The Famous Actor or The Martyrdom  
of Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines

*The Veritable Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Jean de Rotrou

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Translated, with Introduction and Notes,  
by Richard Hillman

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## Référence électronique

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# Translation

*The Famous Actor or The Martyrdom of Saint Genest:  
Tragedy by Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines*

**Richard Hillman**  
CESR - Université de Tours

THE FAMOUS ACTOR

OR

THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT GENEST:  
TRAGEDY

By

Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines

*Actors*<sup>1</sup>

Diocletian, Emperor of Rome  
 Aquilinus, favourite of the Emperor  
 Rutilius, Councillor of State to the Emperor  
 Genest, actor  
 Aristide, [actor, who plays the brother of Pamphilie,  
 confidant of Genest,  
 Anthéonor, [actor, who plays the] father of Genest  
 Pamphilie, [actress,] mistress of Genest  
 Luciane, [actress, who plays the sister of Genest<sup>2</sup>]  
 Two Guards

Scene: Rome, a room in the Emperor's palace.<sup>3</sup>

- 
- 1 Orig.: "Acteurs", a term overlapping with the profession of several, who are confusingly identified in the original list by their roles in the play-within-the-play; see Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 6.
  - 2 The original specifies "sœur d'Anthéonor" without warrant in the text, as observed by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 6.
  - 3 As this suggests, and indeed as the text seems self-consciously to assert, the staging perfectly observes the neo-classical "unity of place". In contrast with Rotrou's play, there is no need for a separate structure to accommodate the play-within-the-play. Genest announces that the troupe will rehearse and perform in the same space where the Emperor has received them (I.iii.204-7), while the intrusion of the supernatural that later converts him takes place off-stage. For his climactic confrontation with Pamphilie, which corresponds to Marcèle's visit to Genest in prison as depicted by Rotrou (V.ii), a change of scene is likewise obviated: Diocletian leaves Pamphilie after an exchange with her and has the prisoner brought in chains to where she awaits him (III.iii.936).

# Act I

## Scene i

Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius, two Guards

### AQUILINUS

1 At last, Caesar, none with your power can compete:  
 2 In crowning you, Rome puts the whole world at your feet,  
 3 While so encompassing your destiny with glory  
 4 That only the gods may pretend to rivalry.  
 5 Like them, you may doom all, or full pardon bestow;  
 6 Your eagles are armed with thunderbolts here below.<sup>4</sup>  
 7 Which, as desires move you, you can take in hand  
 8 And use, like Jupiter, mortals to reprimand.  
 9 Your power to command is of the same proportion:  
 10 If he reigns in heaven, the earth is your own portion,  
 11 And if his laws control a hundred deities,  
 12 You see a thousand kings, when you like, on their knees;  
 13 Whose power before your greatness supreme bows down  
 14 And alters to respect at the sight of your crown.  
 15 The Persians conquered, no Carinus to oppose,<sup>5</sup>  
 16 Apart from a few Christians, you have no more foes;  
 17 And that impious sect, although it may conspire,  
 18 Aims only at the gods, and not at your empire.

### DIOCLETIAN

19 Pointless, Aquilinus, to paint as less severe  
 20 An evil that this empire is right to fear,  
 21 For to go against the gods, of crowns the defenders,  
 22 Undermines the state's most solid and surest pillars.  
 23 Great I am, it is true: all things to my laws bow,  
 24 And I may count some kings among my subjects now;

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4 The eagle was the emblem and standard of the Roman legion.

5 Marcus Aurelius Carinus, who reigned briefly as emperor (283-85 C.E.), disputed Diocletian's rise to power and perished in a battle with him, killed by his own officers. Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 9, point out that the challenge from Carinus and a Persian uprising are mentioned as early troubles faced by Diocletian within two pages of Nicolas Coeffetau, *Histoire romaine* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1623).

25 But if even a single sect in Rome defies me,  
 26 I live a slave—the show of Emperor belies me.  
 27 Is it subjugation of the whole of mankind  
 28 In the midst of my court other sovereigns to find?  
 29 They don't aim, you say, the empire to reverse—  
 30 They hate the gods only: what evil could be worse?  
 31 And why would you imagine that they grant respect  
 32 To kings, if they audaciously the gods reject?  
 33 No, no: already too great when it shows its head,  
 34 This evil we must stifle before it can spread,  
 35 And avenge, by strictly applying our just laws,  
 36 Of both the earth and the heavens the common cause.

## RUTILIUS

37 Suspend a little, my Lord, a decree so dire;  
 38 Moderate somewhat the force of your righteous ire.  
 39 Spare Rome at last, and by other expedients  
 40 Bring its citizens to lawful obedience:  
 41 Your hangmen have sufficiently on them wreaked carnage;  
 42 Tortures have sufficiently made proof of their courage;  
 43 And so far your eyes, equitable Emperor,  
 44 Have only seen too many spectacles of horror.  
 45 It's not that the course of the rebels I affect:  
 46 I have too much aversion to that upstart sect;  
 47 The Christians I condemn, detest them as you do;  
 48 Your wish is mine; I worship the same gods as you.  
 49 But given that the errors which inflame that crew  
 50 In the end are inward faults which the soul imbue,  
 51 I find that we expend our efforts uselessly  
 52 To heal their spirits by harming them bodily.  
 53 That higher faculty, more noble and erect,  
 54 By such inferior means is not rendered subject:  
 55 It views with contempt its irons, laughs at its prison,  
 56 Following no laws but the principle of Reason<sup>6</sup>—  
 57 Reason that alone tames the soul, acts as its queen,

---

6 Cf. symbolism of chains and prison in Rotrou, esp. I.iii.126-28, II.viii.556 ff., III.ii.701-6, III.iv.815-18.



58 And over its impulses as sovereign is seen.<sup>7</sup>  
 59 To direct these Christians to a dutiful course,  
 60 Just this once, O Caesar, make the most of her force:  
 61 Cause Reason to do her work; with examples feed them;  
 62 Attempt by gentle means to the temples to lead them,  
 63 And without more compulsion, offer them calm space  
 64 In which to reflect somewhat on the choice they face.  
 65 Your torturers' aspect makes their souls shut up tight;<sup>8</sup>  
 66 Swords only turn them savage; blood fills them with  
     spite,  
 67 While you by your goodness may restore their good sense  
 68 And cause them to offer the gods due prayers and  
     incense.

#### DIOCLETIAN

69 Rutilius, your counsel offers a fair prospect,  
 70 But let us see your notions put into effect,  
 71 And since such small success has been produced by pain,  
 72 Try those fine means you mention for what they may gain.  
 73 I entrust you with this affair of consequence:  
 74 Your wit is clever, your tongue rich in eloquence;  
 75 You'll have done no mean feat if, while calming my furor,  
 76 You can also by your reasons conquer their error.

#### AQUILINUS

77 The hope is fair indeed, but will be hard to realise.

#### RUTILIUS

78 Quite true that nothing may come of the enterprise,  
 79 And I can offer no absolute guarantee  
 80 That the outcome with all our wishes will agree.  
 81 But this approach we can try without detriment,  
 82 And the trustworthy counsels that heaven has sent,

---

**7** Ll. 57-68: the original presents some confusion in its use of pronouns and personification, due to the fact that "raison" ("reason") and "âme" ("soul") are both feminine nouns and often allegorised accordingly. The translation attempts to clarify.

**8** "[M]akes their souls shut up tight": orig. "rend leur âme interdite". The point is that the soul must be in a state to admit the effect of Reason.

83 First, to calm their furious spirits, which estrange  
     them,  
 84 Then orderly, in service to the gods, to range them.  
 85 Of our worldly affairs those prudent arbiters,  
 86 Omnipotent as they are, wish us as their helpers,  
 87 And often find a use for instruments less perfect  
 88 To produce here below a marvellous effect.  
 89 Know then, O Caesar, what I purpose to attempt:  
 90 You will think it at first deserving of contempt,  
 91 But after due reflection by Your Majesty,  
 92 It will appear surprising in its subtlety.

DIOCLETIAN

93 What might this precious and novel stratagem be  
 94 You wish to use?

RUTILIUS

That—right here—you're going to see,  
 95 And provided you to my method give consent,  
 96 I'll well acquit myself, and furnish you amusement.

DIOCLETIAN

97 Whatever it takes their stubborn hearts to reform.

RUTILIUS

98 The scaffolds into fine theatres you must transform,  
 99 And cause to be displayed there, with all due derision,  
 100 The errors and the abuses of their religion.  
 101 You know how fully the illustrious Genest  
 102 Excels in grace and skill, whatever he may play;  
 103 And that, by his voice and actions in diverse fashions,  
 104 He can at will produce in us his changing passions—  
 105 Enliven our spirits or render them depressed,  
 106 Loving, disdainful, by pity or wrath possessed,  
 107 And by a power sovereign and marvellous,  
 108 Imprint upon our hearts all that he shows to us.  
 109 Command him, my Lord, to display on stage for you  
 110 The superstitions of a crass unwholesome crew,  
 111 Who feed themselves on hope and, lulled by idle charms,

112 Shun pleasure that pursues and waits with open arms.  
 113 If you still doubt the striking power of his skill,  
 114 Experience it in your palace, if you will,  
 115 And by putting to the trial that marvellous art,  
 116 Feel within yourself what to them it can impart.

DIOCLETIAN

117 Have him summoned, Aquilinus; we will proceed  
 118 At once.

AQUILINUS

I obey.

RUTILIUS

Of such trouble there's no need.  
 119 That he is wanted that guard there can let him know.

DIOCLETIAN

120 He's here?

RUTILIUS

Yes, Lord, I left him just a while ago  
 121 Along with his companions in the next apartment,  
 122 Where I believe some time in pacing he has spent,  
 123 Waiting for both the means and opportunity  
 124 To come and offer service to Your Majesty.

DIOCLETIAN

125 Bid him enter.

AQUILINUS

Guard . . .

[*Exit Guard.*]

RUTILIUS

The troupe is pleasant to view  
 126 And full of zeal, what's more, to give pleasure to you.

GUARD [*re-entering*]

127 He's here.

DIOCLETIAN

Let him approach.

Scene ii

Genest, Pamphilie, Luciane, Anthenor,  
Aristide, Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius, Guard

GENEST

Invincible Emperor,

128 Because Your Majesty will vouchsafe us the honour  
129 Sometimes to divert with a stage representation  
130 Of this presence August,<sup>9</sup> worthy Rome's veneration,  
131 Permit us today to display for you the story,  
132 Crudely given form, of some of your deeds of glory,  
133 And that by their recital, marvellous to hear,  
134 Of the people and the court we may charm the ear.  
135 I can offer you, O Caesar, no fairer show  
136 Than by making of yourself a splendid tableau;  
137 Without falling back on the common histories,  
138 Permit me to speak of your famous victories  
139 And through your rare exploits to the Romans explain  
140 How fortunate they are to live beneath your reign.  
141 Permit me your diverse qualities to expose:  
142 So many famous laurels won from Persian foes;  
143 Barbarians defeated, Carinus subdued,  
144 At last the whole world conquered, or with fear imbued.  
145 In that high cause I will make viewers me admire,  
146 So that all will hold you in adoration, sire:  
147 Even to those jealous of you you will seem perfect.

DIOCLETIAN

148 No, friend, I seek from your art another effect.  
149 Fame discourses here sufficiently of my glory,

---

9 "August" (identical in original): the capital letter in Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, following the early texts, highlights Genest's allusion to Diocletian's imperial status.

150                   And Rome will hardly lose my deeds from memory.  
 151                   My will I leave to Rutilius to express;  
 152                   Aquilinus, order all put in readiness:  
 153                   See they lack nothing.                   [*Exit Diocletian with Aquilinus.*]

### Scene iii

Rutilius, Genest, Pamphilie, Luciane, Anthenor, Aristide

#### RUTILIUS

If the wish to please moves you,

154                   Then learn, my friends, what it is that you have to do.  
 155                   Caesar is the enemy of those craven mortals  
 156                   Whom the incense we owe to our altars appals,  
 157                   And who, approving an upstart prophet's imposture,  
 158                   Adore him as the author of the whole of nature.  
 159                   Render visible their abuse, reveal their error,  
 160                   Make them of humanity the shame and the horror;  
 161                   Poke fun at their beliefs, laugh at their mysteries,  
 162                   Their superstitions and imposed austerities,  
 163                   And their deceiving lures, abounding in illusions,  
 164                   Which mislead their senses and distort their opinions.  
 165                   In short, to ridicule them all occasions seize—  
 166                   But also Jupiter exalt, our Hercules,  
 167                   Our Mars, Apollo, all the other gods besides,  
 168                   Whose age-old worship from our ancestors abides.  
 169                   I cannot bestow on you advice more astute.

#### GENEST

170                   Nor assign us a simpler task to execute.  
 171                   Those rebels—types by both men and the gods reviled—  
 172                   Forced me from my father, and fatherland, exiled.  
 173                   Unable their perverse precepts to tolerate,  
 174                   I fled here, from their crimes myself to liberate.  
 175                   So that, stirred by the righteous anger they produced,  
 176                   I'll flout the abusive charms by which they're seduced,  
 177                   Show how the idle hope that flatters and unites them  
 178                   Is a dream, a chimera, mere folly that blights them,  
 179                   Which, having managed their feeble minds to suborn,

180                      Makes them the universe's laughing-stock and scorn.  
181                      Is any quirk more droll in their mad extremism  
182                      Than a novel mystery that they call baptism,  
183                      Whereby, thanks to three water-drops lightly aspersed,  
184                      They think they have already the heavens traversed?  
185                      Surely, one cannot over-marvel at their follies,  
186                      When they fancy two words and a few ceremonies  
187                      May in a single instant render them glorious,  
188                      Purporting partly to own the sky that covers us!  
189                      It's with just such eminently risible action,  
190                      Which the best minds have always greeted with detraction,  
191                      That the sort of entertainments I'll introduce  
192                      Which Caesar wishes our discourses to produce.  
193                      A more likely subject we would search for in vain.  
194                      By that very approach, giving myself free rein,  
195                      I will in such a bad light the Christians present  
196                      That they will be out of their minds not to relent:  
197                      By such means, though mild, more than by torture one  
  gains,  
198                      And often shame has a greater effect than pains.

## RUTILIUS

199                      That is the hope I've led the Emperor to share.  
200                      Don't lose any time, then: go and yourselves prepare—  
201                      And do your best to meet such a high expectation.

## GENEST

202                      We'll content His Majesty with our presentation.

## RUTILIUS

203                      If Caesar is contented, then you will be too.

## GENEST

204                      We can rehearse without moving—this space will do.  
205                      For staging, no need of technical preparation:<sup>10</sup>

**10** L. 205: orig. “Et sans qu'il soit besoin d'apprêts ni de théâtre” – that is, what Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 25, term the “infrastructure matérielle [material infrastructure]” (stage, scenery, etc.) normally deployed for a performance. As for the editors' speculation as to whether the point is to

206 Caesar right here, who holds our art in adoration,  
 207 Most potent pleasure can derive from our performance,  
 208 Which well beyond his hopes and wishes will advance.<sup>11</sup>

RUTILIUS

209 May the gods grant it! But adieu, I'll leave you  
 till . . .

GENEST

210 In two hours at most you will witness our skill. [*Exit Rutilius.*]

### Scene iv

Genest, Pamphilie, Luciane, Anthenor, Aristide

GENEST

211 Friends, the time has come when, depending on our wits,  
 212 An emperor will decide whom the prize best fits,  
 213 And each of us, aspiring as we do to glory,  
 214 Seeks from his rival's hands to snatch the victory.<sup>12</sup>  
 215 This glorious employment may alter our fate:  
 216 Let us combat like heroes its rigours ingrate,<sup>13</sup>  
 217 And with a spectacle that common fare transcends,  
 218 Acquire both Caesar and Fortune as our friends.  
 219 That happy result depends on our work today:  
 220 You know as well as I what role we have to play,

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highlight the actors' skill or the author's adherence to the unity of time, it seems evident that both purposes are served.

**11** Ll. 207-8: orig. "Peut voir nos actions avec tant de plaisirs / Qu'ils passeront l'espoir et vaincront ses désirs." The promise of pleasing Caesar presumably encompasses his intention of producing a political impact but implicitly goes beyond it.

**12** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 26, doubt the pertinence to the contemporary French theatre of this evocation of professional rivalry. On the other hand, such is strongly implied by the virtually simultaneous representation by different troupes of two tragedies of Genest, one of them arrogating the label of "véritable".

**13** L. 216: orig. "Combattons ses rigueurs par un illustre effort." "Illustre [celebrated]" plays ironically (and untranslatably) on both the work's title (*L'Illustre Comédien*) and the troupe actually performing it (*L'Illustre Théâtre*). The translation sustains the martial metaphor initiated by "[C]ombattons" and reinforced by "effort", a word which here, as elsewhere in the period, carries military connotations.

221                   And without much effort we'll hit on a device  
222                   To put into action Rutilius' advice.

## ANTHENOR

223                   But what story, then, can provide us with a subject  
224                   Fitting and adapted to such a splendid project?

## ARISTIDE

225                   That of Porphyry or that of Ardaleon,<sup>14</sup>  
226                   Both by the Empire's masters well looked upon,  
227                   Who were by the Christians' abuses so suborned  
228                   That they pledged themselves to the doctrines they had  
  scorned,  
229                   And by thus embracing a madness without peer,  
230                   Did in the whole world's eyes mere shameful fools appear.

## LUCIANE

231                   Both of them, as it happens, practised our profession.

## PAMPHILIE

232                   And baptism was the first act of their transgression,  
233                   Which, while those fools' laughable longing it surfeited,  
234                   Ensured that both property and life they forfeited.<sup>15</sup>

## GENEST

235                   Such principles have often, exposed to the great,  
236                   Entangled their authors in a contrary fate.  
237                   From their example, for our purpose, we can learn  
238                   Theatrically, even if their temple we spurn,  
239                   Where their blindness caused them in mere water to find  
240                   Grim poison by which they were to the tomb consigned.  
241                   But without seeking help from a distant history  
242                   To inspire our mind and feed our memory,  
243                   We may recuperate from our own former days

---

**14** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 29, observe that these two earlier actor-martyrs, converted while performing mockeries of Christianity, are cited at the end of Ribadeneira's account of Genest.

**15** Porphyrie's imitation of baptism is singled out by Ribadeneira (p. 781) as sparking his conversion, but the mysteries mocked by Ardaleon are not specified.



244 Matter well assured to gain Caesar's ample praise,  
 245 If, by a skilful stroke, drawn out with industry,  
 246 He learns that we have left behind our native country,  
 247 Our parents, and all that we owned to travel here,  
 248 Distant from his enemies, his gods to revere.  
 249 Let me then the order of this mystery<sup>16</sup> state:  
 250 It falls to Anthenor my father to incarnate,  
 251 And in a soothing, though deceitful, interview  
 252 To feign to wish me to become a Christian too.  
 253 With my sister, who drew me to that erring sect,  
 254 Luciane here, you know, shared a likeness near-perfect,  
 255 And will know how—I am certain—on this occasion  
 256 To imitate her turns of humour and affection.  
 257 Aristide, moreover, to counteract her folly,  
 258 We shall present as the brother of Pamphilie,  
 259 Who will conjure me, by the brilliance of her eyes,  
 260 Not to betray her—and the gods we authorise.  
 261 There is our subject—all, at least, you need regard;  
 262 Then . . . But what does Aquilinus want, and that Guard?

### Scene v

Aquilinus, Genest, Pamphilie, Luciane, Aristide,  
 Anthenor, a Guard (*carrying gifts*)

#### AQUILINUS

263 Heaven favours you, my friends; Fortune's smiles appear;  
 264 The people admire you; Caesar holds you dear.  
 265 Of that these gifts I bring you are the certain marks:  
 266 Receive these presents from the most mighty of monarchs,  
 267 And believe at all events that these precious objects  
 268 Of his bounties are but the most trifling effects.

#### GENEST

269 These magnificent gifts from one the whole world knows

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16 “[M]ystery”: orig. “mystère”; in the context, the term, which can apply both to religious rites and religious theatre, must be employed by Genest with pointed irony. Cf. Rotrou, IV.viii.1396 and n. 90.

270                   Betoken the dignity of him that bestows;  
 271                   And we are aware that in his power it lies  
 272                   To extend his benefits beyond all surmise.  
 273                   But of all Caesar's favours of which we may boast,  
 274                   His presence is the one that we value the most,  
 275                   And the wish to please him by plying my profession  
 276                   Is the limit of my desires and ambition.<sup>17</sup>

## PAMPHILIE

277                   There is no one here who would say the contrary:  
 278                   Our zeal is enormous towards His Majesty,  
 279                   And every one of us is thrilled to ravishment  
 280                   With the wish to make him, by our service, content.

## AQUILINUS

281                   Such fine civilities compel us to confess  
 282                   That our court has no monopoly on politeness,  
 283                   Since we see it in you, brought to such perfect state  
 284                   That wonder, in speaking with you, it must create.<sup>18</sup>

## ARISTIDE

285                   Ah, but my Lord, your good will by itself suffices,  
 286                   Without confusing with your eloquent devices  
 287                   Those who, with such favours and benefits suffused  
 288                   From Caesar and yourself, are already confused.<sup>19</sup>

## LUCIANE

289                   Yes, my Lord . . .

**17** Ll. 275-76: the rhyme "profession/ambition" (identical words) is present in the original.

**18** The self-conscious trading of (literally) courtly compliments between the actors and the courtiers is taken by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 38, at face value as a defence of the respectability of actors, and it certainly makes this impression on Aquilinus: cf. his exalted analysis of theatrical art at II.i.305 ff. There is room, however, for admiring the actors' verbal dexterity ironically as adroit imitation, given their previous speech among themselves. For a nearly contemporary spoof (1637) of refined compliments as a minor genre in a self-consciously theatrical context, cf. Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, *The Visionaries*, trans. Richard Hillman, introd. Michel Bitot (Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, 2021), II.iv.543.

**19** Ll. 286-88: The repetition of "confusing"/"confused", in the sense of "overwhelmed", is modelled on the original ("confondiez"/"confus").

## AQUILINUS

290                   Let us leave off there. My ears and eyes,  
 291                   So charmed to see and hear each marvellous surprise,  
 292                   Caused me to linger, regardless of my intents,  
 293                   And consequently robbed you of some precious moments.  
                   The Emperor is waiting.

## ANTHENOR

That is all we ask.

## GENEST

294                   You may assure him we are ready for the task,  
 295                   And that we are merely waiting for his command  
 296                   To offer him diversion right here where we stand.

## Act II

### Scene i

Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius, *and followers*

## DIOCLETIAN

297                   Rutilius, we shall see now if that high rate  
 298                   You give our actors is just and legitimate,  
 299                   And if these great spirits that you esteem so perfect  
 300                   Will produce in my own a similar effect.  
 301                   To take you at your word, my court can boast no grace  
 302                   That theirs does not easily surmount and efface,  
 303                   To the point where one would suppose that all perfections  
 304                   Have their origin in their words and in their actions.<sup>20</sup>

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**20** Ll. 303-4: The rhyme “perfections”/“actions” (identical words in French) is present in the original.

## AQUILINUS

305 Whatever praise Rutilius on them confers,  
 306 His sentiment is just, and mine wholly concurs.  
 307 Although certain dullards deem their art a disgrace,  
 308 Within it vulgar minds have not the slightest place,  
 309 Nor bodies ungainly,<sup>21</sup> nor any whose appearance  
 310 May not at least promise to gain a hopeful glance.<sup>22</sup>  
 311 The theatre is severe, and seeks those qualities  
 312 Which may induce the great to admire its bounties.  
 313 The charm of the voice becomes its mere weakest link  
 314 If it is not matched with ability to think,  
 315 And gesture can lend it nothing but feeble forces,  
 316 If a ray divine does not govern its discourses.  
 317 Besides judgement, subtlety and strong memory,  
 318 Assurance is indispensable for its glory,  
 319 And elegance even in the manner of dress  
 320 Is no trivial matter for actor—or actress.<sup>23</sup>

## DIOCLETIAN

321 Well, then, we shall soon realise the experience:  
 322 Have them begin, and let us lend them our silence.

## Scene ii

Luciane, Genest

## LUCIANE

323 Ah, brother, if nothing can shake your stubborn state,  
 324 Then consider my tears . . . [*kneels*]

## GENEST

. . . which will carry no weight.

**21** “[U]ngainly”: orig. “mal composés”.

**22** L. 310: orig. “Ne puisse au moins donner quelque belle espérance”. The “hope” in question would seem to be that of visually engaging the spectator’s interest.

**23** “[A]ctor – or actress”: The original “acteur” would have been understood as inclusive, but I take the liberty of the addition, given the attention paid by Rotrou, by way of Marcèle, to a distinction that must have been commonplace; cf. Rotrou, esp. II.ii.349 ff. and III.viii.1029-30.

325 Ah, that's too much—now get up! Luciane, in vain  
 326 You think I can be brought beneath that law profane  
 327 Of which a new prophet—and poor expositor<sup>24</sup>—  
 328 Made himself some time ago the ludicrous author.  
 329 I have no taste at all for those vain fantasies  
 330 With which he knew how our forefathers' minds to seize.  
 331 I can make better use of my reason's rich foison<sup>25</sup>  
 332 And detect, in the midst of the nectar, the poison.

## LUCIANE

333 May Heaven please . . .

## GENEST

Your wishes, like your tears, you'll find  
 334 Quite useless as weapons to overcome my mind.  
 335 Do you think that to be by relations upbraided  
 336 Could render me by their idle raptures persuaded?  
 337 No, no, my judgement—firmer, on more solid ground—  
 338 Could not brook counsel so treacherously unsound  
 339 And follow someone put in bonds, a type unknown,  
 340 Who was in his sad fate abandoned by his own.

## LUCIANE

341 But that abandoned one, whom your spirit abhors,  
 342 Is the almighty God even Heaven adores,  
 343 Who fills all with glory at His august aspect  
 344 And makes the angels above tremble with respect.  
 345 He was born without grandeur or pomp, without light,  
 346 But in the obscurity His cradle shone bright,  
 347 For scarcely was He present when all feared His law,  
 348 And though still a child, kings trembled with fear and  
 awe.<sup>26</sup>  
 349 To trust the greatest sages known to former ages,

**24** “[A]nd poor expositor”: orig. “et trop faible Docteur”.

**25** “[M]y reason's rich foison”: orig. “des droits de ma raison”.

**26** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 45, note the allusion to Herod's fear at the prophecy of a future king of Judea; in keeping with the following reference to the *magi*, obviously evoked is the contrast between divine omnipotence and illusory worldly power.

350 From Princes of the East He received the homages,  
 351 And the star which guided the magi in that case  
 352 Was a token that they sought a God's dwelling-place.  
 353 He lived, as the story has it, and as you say,  
 354 In ignominy, and died in a shameful way—  
 355 Sold, denied, slighted by those who with Him had stood,  
 356 At last nailed in disgrace on some pieces of wood.<sup>27</sup>  
 357 But by that very means, though it's hard to believe,  
 358 He purports by His shame your glory to achieve,  
 359 And with His precious blood being the only price,  
 360 Will buy on your behalf a share of paradise.

GENEST

361 How your soul is seized by deceitful expectation,  
 362 If that futile idea is its only foundation,  
 363 And how false is happiness which, by a sad blow,  
 364 From death accompanied by shame is thought to flow!  
 365 Rally to the party of those exalted powers  
 366 Through whom rich recompenses for our vows are ours;  
 367 Who make themselves adored in many climes diverse,<sup>28</sup>  
 368 And make our Caesars masters of the universe.  
 369 To follow their example, we cannot go wrong:  
 370 Our duties in temples, as in their courts, belong:  
 371 And since by destiny we have been made their subjects,  
 372 Let us not direct our vows to different objects.  
 373 But let us change our speech. Anthenor, who approaches,  
 374 Would find in our discussion matter for reproaches.  
 375 Undoubtedly, stricken by the same dart as you,  
 376 He comes now to assail me and add his blows too.

[Enter Anthenor]

---

**27** “[I]n disgrace on some pieces of wood”: orig. “Sur un infâme bois”. The translation respects the apparent intention to avoid evoking the cross as symbol of redemption; Luciane is repeating anti-Christian denigration prior to repudiating it.

**28** “[M]any climes diverse”: orig. “cent climats divers” – similar poetic exaggeration.

## Scene iii

Anthenor, Genest, Luciane

ANTHENOR

377 Well, then, has that rebel spirit yielded at last?

LUCIANE

378 As little as the rock, resisting the storm's blast,  
379 Which scorns the assaults of both the wind and the sea,  
380 And to our eyes still more solid appears to be.

GENEST

381 Indeed, it is well chosen, that comparison:  
382 My spirit and the rock have quite a lot in common.  
383 For if one by the winds can by no means be shaken,  
384 Sighs to move the other, too, are pains vainly taken.

ANTHENOR

385 Ah son, if that spirit did not keep you from seeing  
386 That speaking to you is the author of your being,  
387 If it were far more solid, harder than a rock,  
388 By rights that obligation would deal it a shock.

GENEST

389 Yes, I owe you for my birth, for seeing the light;  
390 My body owes you obedience by that right.  
391 But the spirit that moves me heaven makes me know,  
392 And to the gods alone that high tribute I owe.

ANTHENOR

393 No, to that God of power . . .

GENEST

394 You formerly denounced. Merely a pretence

ANTHENOR

Whom now I reverence.

GENEST

395 Say, rather, a god your fatuous dreams have feigned.

ANTHENOR

396 A God by whom everything lives and is sustained,  
397 And who, an immortal life on you to bestow,  
398 Agreed to have his ravished from him here below.

GENEST

399 On me? I beg no gift from his last gasp of breath  
400 And do not view my life as coming from his death.

ANTHENOR

401 Horrible impiety! Hateful blasphemy!

GENEST

402 But of which baptismal water can make me free.<sup>29</sup>

ANTHENOR

403 Yes, my son, follow me there . . .

GENEST

Ah, not so much haste!

ANTHENOR

404 What, will you now turn back, on such a fair road placed?

GENEST

405 Yes, just as from a precipice I'd turn away,  
406 Where you would have me with you to destruction stray.

ANTHENOR

407 No, I want to save you with me, not have you die.

GENEST

408 Just mind your own business and let me be.

---

**29** He is leading his father on by mocking his belief, as the sequel shows.



ANTHENOR

Why?

GENEST

409 Because, subjected to your constant idle chatter,  
410 I'm weary of so many words, so little matter.

ANTHENOR

411 Well, then, since my voice has no good effect on you,  
412 Do not just stop listening—stop seeing me, too!  
413 Go, monster! I'll follow the rule that you decree  
414 And will abandon you, as you abandon me!<sup>30</sup>

LUCIANE

415 Brother—

ANTHENOR

416 Leave that object there in his loathsome state,  
His gods at leisure for succour to supplicate.  
417 They will exalt his fortunes to the greatest heights,  
418 While your true affection, which troubles him, he  
                    slights.                     [*Exeunt Anthenor and Luciane.*]

### Scene iv

Genest, Pamphilie, Aristide

GENEST

419 This storm, Anthenor,<sup>31</sup> leaves my spirits quite intact;

30 As Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, point out (n. 52), and as the ensuing references to his “fortunes” confirm, the threat of paternal disinheritance now hangs over Genest.

31 While it is normal for the names of the actors in the play-within-the-play to figure in the scene and speech headings of the published version, instead of the names of the characters they play (cf. the practice of Rotrou), it seems strange to have Genest integrate Anthenor’s name into this apostrophe addressed to his (unnamed) father. Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 53, note the anomaly but do not really explain it. It seems possible to detect a signal that the re-enactment of Genest’s break with his family is now over, and that the scene shifts to his subsequent history, with both him and Pamphilie “playing” themselves.

420                   Expecting it, I was not surprised by the fact,  
 421                   And for some little while, I had myself resigned:  
 422                   I'd seen the lightning, knew thunder not far behind.  
 423                   But just like the dazzle of that heavenly light  
 424                   Which after the storm shows fairer and shines more  
                           bright,  
 425                   The brilliance divine of the eyes of Pamphilie  
 426                   Came to dispel the despond of my melancholy  
 427                   And by those stars of love, with many a sweet glance,  
 428                   In affliction the beauty of my days enhance.  
 429                   Marvellous example of precious constancy,  
 430                   Dear object of my vows, my hope's expectancy,  
 431                   It is at last from you alone, who rule my fate,  
 432                   That the verdict of life or death I now await.<sup>32</sup>  
 433                   All betrays me, Madame; by all I'm persecuted;  
 434                   Heaven has me its victim of worst ills deputed.  
 435                   Yet the hardest blows caresses to me would seem,  
 436                   If they left me still the honour of your esteem.  
 437                   That hope weighs well against my fortunes in the scale:  
 438                   It is the only succour that may me avail,  
 439                   And since your heart is expansive and generous,  
 440                   I dare not yet declare my anguish onerous.

PAMPHILIE

441                   What is your sorrow, and of what are you so scared?  
 442                   Already, without knowing, your hurt I have shared,  
 443                   And my love has such force that you would do it wrong  
 444                   To think it, when matched with whims of fortune, less  
                           strong.  
 445                   Your cherished qualities, with your vows and your flame,  
 446                   For much too long have to my soul enforced their claim.  
 447                   And in spite of your suspicions, you may be sure  
 448                   There is no hardship it cannot, unchanged, endure.  
 449                   But please tell us, at last, where your misfortune lies.

---

**32** While the language of religious devotion is of course commonplace in contemporary expressions of secular love, the context throws Genest's near-idolatry here into relief.

## GENEST

450 In a passion repugnant to my sacred ties,  
 451 In zeal without reason, wilfulness unconfined—  
 452 The power, in sum, of a spirit wholly blind.

## PAMPHILIE

453 A father, no doubt, would force you to make a change,  
 454 And have you inconstantly your vows rearrange?

## GENEST

455 He would, Pamphilie, he certainly would—but learn  
 456 That unjustified desires I coldly spurn,  
 457 And that before my heart his rash demands will meet,  
 458 My love will sacrifice my poor life at your feet.

## PAMPHILIE

459 I am far from wishing such a horrid effect.  
 460 And perhaps, in the end, his choice is so far perfect  
 461 It moves him to take this mildly coercive measure,  
 462 Which provokes in you such transports—or feigned  
       displeasure.

## GENEST

463 Ah, of the hard misfortunes whose blows on me fall,  
 464 This is the most hurtful, the rudest of them all!  
 465 What, with all things fatal to me, when all reject me,  
 466 Today does even Pamphilie herself suspect me?  
 467 No, no, Madame, no—all suspicion put away  
 468 Of wanting my vows, or your beauties, to betray.  
 469 This unhappy change my father would force on me  
 470 Concerns our altars, and not you personally.  
 471 He does not disallow that your eyes I adore,  
 472 But for his god's sake I must worship ours no more,  
 473 And as if I, too, his abusive error prized,  
 474 I am supposed to get myself, like him, baptised.  
 475 But rather than prove in love or belief ingrate—  
 476 Rather than either my vows or faith violate—  
 477 May those powerful hands that the thunder produce  
 478 With a red streak of fire to dust me reduce;

479 May I become of both the gods and men the horror,  
 480 Of all the elements experience the furor,  
 481 And if to that point my judgement gives out on me,  
 482 May I be forever hated by Pamphilie.

## ARISTIDE

483 What, is this the reason for your troubled abstraction?  
 484 Is this the occasion that causes your distraction?  
 485 And a sister's and father's importunity  
 486 Is the ill behind your despair and misery?  
 487 Let your heart, my dear friend, manifest greater vigour;  
 488 Treat with scorn all their speeches and reject their  
                   rigour.  
 489 It's in trials and great storms, where courage is  
                   required,  
 490 That the most constant spirits makes themselves admired.  
 491 Let thunder and lightning rage—of them take no care,  
 492 As their futile blows strike nothing but empty air.  
 493 The gods concerned by these menaces made in vain  
 494 Will soon put a stop to the slights that you sustain,  
 495 And to see them over with is Fate's own desire:  
 496 It only brings you down so as to raise you higher—  
 497 Soon to render your soul a measure of content,  
 498 Your low fortune lifted, made a bright ornament.  
 499 And it will make you confess that it was severe  
 500 Just to bring a happier day with sunshine clear.  
 501 The sun quits his dark couch daily to show his flame,  
 502 And often the road to glory passes through shame.  
 503 It is true that when with unjust power you deal,  
 504 You can lose your property, but hope you still feel,  
 505 Because the immortals' heavenly providence  
 506 Your losses can redeem with ample recompense,  
 507 And, far from your father's angry society,  
 508 Yield you the fruits of your courage and piety.

## GENEST

509 Aristide, please believe me: concern for my fortunes  
 510 Is not, among my hardships, what most importunes,  
 511 Since, as you affirm, I can find elsewhere with ease

512 Both hopes that are sweeter and better destinies.  
 513 But can you think the love that binds me faithfully  
 514 Could ever permit me to desert Pamphilie?  
 515 Can you imagine that it lies within my might,  
 516 My love being boundless, to live out of her sight?  
 517 No, no, far from her graces with their godlike powers,  
 518 Mere harsh thorns to me would be the loveliest flowers;  
 519 I would detest a throne, and sceptres as my gains  
 520 Would please me much less than the honour of my chains.  
 521 But if a father's cruelty inexorable  
 522 Makes me today to myself unrecognisable—  
 523 If I must remain in this miserable state,  
 524 Which of friends, goods and spirit leaves me desolate  
 525 (Excuse me for such speech, due to my melancholy)—  
 526 What will become our passions, dear Pamphilie?  
 527 I well know that your heart is large and generous,  
 528 But you're a woman, and my sadness is onerous.

## PAMPHILIE

529 It is true, I am a woman: in that I glory,  
 530 Because today that name will mark my victory,  
 531 When in my sex enough spirit I demonstrate  
 532 To best you in defeating the shrewd turns of Fate.  
 533 I will hardly repeat in this place that I love you,  
 534 That my love is as strong as your manifold virtue:  
 535 By my eyes and sighs it's been a thousand times spoken,  
 536 And they are much better than my voice as a token.  
 537 But whatever the rigours inflicted by Fate—  
 538 If you were in a still more deplorable state—  
 539 Of fidelity unequalled I you assure,  
 540 Which is certain as far as the tomb to endure.

## GENEST

541 Well, then, in my affliction's pain I will believe  
 542 That nature in you a prodigy did conceive,  
 543 And that, in giving birth to you, it caused to be  
 544 A perfect miracle of love and constancy.  
 545 Even if your bountiful soothing of my feeling  
 546 Displays your skill in speaking rather than in healing,

547                    Nevertheless, I am willing, to calm my furor,  
 548                    My spirit to deceive with such a lovely error.  
 549                    Yes, Madam, I could wish that my spirit were vain  
 550                    Enough to suppose yours touched and moved by my pain,  
 551                    And be persuaded that a flame of love thus kindled  
 552                    Will in your soul outlast your days, and not have  
                                dwindled.  
 553                    But while you may be generous to that degree,  
 554                    Can I consent to see you live in misery,  
 555                    And that it would be tacitly insinuated  
 556                    That your prosperous hopes by me were dissipated?  
 557                    Well, Madam? Grant that in the chaos that afflicts me,  
 558                    My reason on this one occasion contradicts me,  
 559                    And that today, for your good, it reveals to you,  
 560                    Though in surprising fashion, a love that is true.

## ARISTIDE

561                    Of your flame, dear friend, we are well enough aware.  
 562                    I see in these speeches of yours your soul laid bare,  
 563                    And amid so many passionate perturbations,  
 564                    I find it easy to discern your inclinations.  
 565                    I well know your heart's constancy and faith are  
                                real,  
 566                    For what it adores showing always the same zeal,  
 567                    And that you'd find an empire an irksome care  
 568                    Without that precious happiness that we, too, share.<sup>33</sup>  
 569                    But equally well I know that your noble courage  
 570                    Balks at consenting to concede the least advantage,  
 571                    So that those two motions, successively in play,  
 572                    Of love and glory,<sup>34</sup> combat in you for the sway.  
 573                    But would you free yourself from this uncertainty,  
 574                    Which feeds both your transports and your anxiety,

**33** L. 568: orig. "Si ce rare bonheur ne nous était commun". As noted by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, ll. 567-78 are "peu limpides [not really clear]" (n. 64), and Aristide might be referring either to his feelings for Pamphile as her brother or to his own love for Luciane. The translation allows for a simpler third meaning – namely, that Genest's amorous happiness is infectious.

**34** "[G]lory": orig. "gloire". As often, the word attracts military imagery even in the general sense of "honourable reputation".

575 Listen to the advice that I'll bestow on you:  
 576 You say that Anthenor wants to abandon you  
 577 And deny your hope for your rightful heritage,  
 578 Unless in his own error your soul you engage;  
 579 Inform him, to attain the object of your will,  
 580 That his prayers and desires you wish to fulfil,  
 581 And by a clever ruse, for that purpose devised,  
 582 Pretend that you are eager to be, like him, baptised.  
 583 According to their far-fetched law, they represent  
 584 That mysteries are vain unless belief is present,  
 585 So that, within your heart despising their strange  
                   notions,  
 586 You'll merely have gone through the ceremony's motions,  
 587 Which, not having brought the baptism to conclusion,  
 588 Will just produce in you a ludicrous illusion.<sup>35</sup>  
 589 Acquire, then, true wealth by means of empty forms:  
 590 And thus, dear friend, a little water calms great  
                   storms.<sup>36</sup>  
 591 Act so that which harms all those who believe in it  
 592 For you at least today will bring a benefit  
 593 And transform itself to the very kind of water  
 594 That poured from heaven on Acrisius's daughter.<sup>37</sup>

#### GENEST

595 But to follow that advice will the gods insult.

#### ARISTIDE

596 To follow this advice will glorify their cult,  
 597 Since to your aversion to this doctrine new-coined  
 598 The contempt that your heart feels for it will be joined,  
 599 And thus to our sacred altars' honour assure  
 600 Immortal vows coming from a soul that is pure.

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**35** As observed by Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 66, Aristide strangely seems to allow here for the ritual's potential power for believers.

**36** Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 98, aptly cite the proverb, "petite pluie abat grand vent [a little rain defeats strong wind]", which Aristide is wryly adapting.

**37** I.e., Danaë, on whom Zeus descended in a golden shower.

GENEST

601 What's your view, dear Pamphilie, of this business?

PAMPHILIE

602 I fear.

ARISTIDE

What do you fear?

PAMPHILIE

Everything.

ARISTIDE

Gods, what madness!

603 You say you fear. What? Can two water-drops put out  
604 His flaming torch of love, whose ardour's not in doubt?

PAMPHILIE

605 No, but this error might at last on him prevail,  
606 And for us that would grave consequences entail.

GENEST

607 Ah, that my mind is so unsound do not suppose!

PAMPHILIE

608 All right, then, go ahead and do as you propose.

GENEST

609 This affair must be managed with dexterity.

ARISTIDE

610 Leave everything to me; your father I'll go see,  
611 And so subtly I can his understanding bend  
612 That, blinded by the bait of the scheme we intend,  
613 He'll never, as my words will be shrewdly arrayed,  
614 In the least suspect the trap that for him is laid.  
615 But, to put an end to our speeches over-lengthy,  
616 Go, you two, to the Chistians' temple—wait there for  
me. [*Exeunt separately.*]



## Act III

### Scene i

Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius

#### DIOCLETIAN

617 Rutilius, I grant they are incomparable,  
 618 And all they represent I find quite admirable:  
 619 How the agreement of their voices with their actions  
 620 Skilfully expresses the whole range of their passions!<sup>38</sup>  
 621 How well they can lament, or anger imitate!  
 622 What power their love-talk has to ingratiate!  
 623 And how they apply themselves with graceful appeal  
 624 To depicting a torment which they do not feel!  
 625 Did it not strike you when you heard Luciane plead  
 626 In favour of the Christians and their profane creed?  
 627 She defended their error with such cogent art  
 628 That I sometimes imagined she spoke from the heart,  
 629 And that the stroke she then appeared to have sustained  
 630 Was quite real in its effect and not at all feigned.

#### RUTILIUS

631 True, my Lord, but did it not also strike your sense  
 632 To hear Genest arguing in his own defence?  
 633 With how much deft intelligence, courage and verve  
 634 Did he the higher claim of our altars preserve!  
 635 And, finally, with what artistry and invention  
 636 He bears himself to bring contempt on their religion!<sup>39</sup>  
 637 Yes, his great subtlety has never had its equal!

#### AQUILINUS

638 Wait, Sire, you'll soon see many a miracle,<sup>40</sup>

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**38** Ll. 619-20 are calculated to echo II.i.303-4; the rhyme “actions/passions” (identical in French) is present in the original.

**39** Ll. 635-36: The rhyme “invention”/“religion” (identical in French) is present in the original.

**40** “[M]any a miracle”: orig. “des merveilles”. There is evident irony in the way Aquilinus’ figurative use of the term anticipates its literal realisation.

639                   Which will ravish your senses with so much delight  
640                   You will not believe it, though it is in your sight.

### Scene ii

Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius, *and followers*.  
Genest, Pamphilie, Aristide, Luciane, Anthenor

GENEST [*entering*]

641                   Where am I? What have I seen? What heavenly flame  
642                   First dazzled my eyes, then into my spirit came?  
643                   What ray of light, able to purify my soul,  
644                   Dispelled the error that by stealth had seized control.<sup>41</sup>  
645                   I believe, I am Christian, and that extreme grace  
646                   Whose effects I feel is baptism's holy trace.

PAMPHILIE

647                   Christian? Who did that?

GENEST

I am.

ARISTIDE

Some dream you recall . . .

GENEST

648                   An Angel made me so.

ANTHENOR

In front of who?

GENEST

Of all.

---

41 "[B]y stealth had seized control": orig. "surpris [surprised]"; the term was often used in a military context for capturing someone or something (cf. the expression "surprise attack").

## LUCIANE

649 And yet not a single person saw this adventure.

RUTILIUS (*to the Emperor*)

650 Now he will serve up to them some far-fetched imposture.

## AQUILINUS

651 How well he feigns!

## DIOCLETIAN

652 Quite true—his feigning takes the prize,  
And surely he charms the ear as well as the eyes.

## GENEST

653 What? Did you not see that brilliant illumination  
654 Whose marvellous effects, beyond my expectation,  
655 With such sudden radiance burst into this place,<sup>42</sup>  
656 When the minister of a God filled it with grace.

## ARISTIDE

657 What minister, what god? You're telling us a fable.

## GENEST

658 No, my friends, the things I recount are veritable.  
659 Here a while ago, when by you I was discovered  
660 Down on my knees, eyes raised to heaven, head uncovered,  
661 I saw—oh, what a marvel scarcely conceivable!—

---

42 “[T]his place”: orig. “ce lieu”, in which “ce” could mean “this” or “that”. The latter might seem more logical, given that the audience has seen nothing of the kind, but “ici” in l. 559 unequivocally means “here”. Genest’s narrative thus presents the fundamental interpretative puzzle observed by Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 75. Two possibilities, neither capable of proof, might be added to their analysis: 1) Genest’s epiphany was indeed a “dream” (l. 649) or “fable” (l. 657), as Aristide asserts, in the sense of a wholly interior experience of divine grace; 2) a scene of divine baptism was indeed staged, as in Rotrou’s analogue (cf. Rotrou, IV.v.1251 S.D.), where, however, the angel (termed a “minister” [l. 1251], as in Desfontaines [l. 656]), remains invisible to both on- and off-stage audiences. Was such a scene removed from Desfontaines’s play, perhaps as performed as well as published? Might supplying that omission be part of Rotrou’s claim to furnish a “veritable” version, thereby supporting the assertion of Genest in Desfontaines that his experience was “veritable” (l. 658; orig. “véritables”)? Also supported, in that case, would be the prior existence of *L’Illustre Comédien*.

662 Through that vault above a prodigy admirable:<sup>43</sup>  
 663 An angel a thousand times fairer than the sun,  
 664 And who, promising happiness second to none,  
 665 Declared that he came, if I would believe his story,  
 666 Expressly to enfold me in rays of his glory.  
 667 Then all my senses, charmed in hopeful ravishment,  
 668 Carried my spirit to this state of high content,  
 669 Which, overflowing my heart with infinite joy,  
 670 Made before my eyes this ceremony deploy:  
 671 The angel, whose appearance there my mind astonished,  
 672 In one hand an imposing book with writing brandished,  
 673 Where, as heaven's grace seconded my ardent eyes,  
 674 The sins of my life I was quick to recognise;  
 675 But with drops of water, which his other hand poured,  
 676 At once I saw the words erased, white space restored,  
 677 And by an effect which surpasses those of nature,  
 678 My heart became more calm, my soul was made more pure.  
 679 There it is: that is what I saw, those my emotions,  
 680 And what delivered me to such rapturous motions.  
 681 Far from me from now on, figments of fantasy,  
 682 Scourges of weak minds, unable deep truths to see!<sup>44</sup>  
 683 To you, false gods, no more tribute of fear I yield,  
 684 Nor to vain thunderbolts, which in paintings you wield;  
 685 I no longer know you, I detest you—retire!  
 686 And my heart, enkindled by celestial fire,  
 687 Adores a living God, whose overwhelming power  
 688 Shows itself everywhere and causes all to cower.<sup>45</sup>

DIOCLETIAN

689 This feigning, Aquilinus, I find discontents me.

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**43** The repeated rhymes on "...able" (ll. 657-58, 661-62) are imitated from the original, where they are part of the rhetorical effect.

**44** L. 682: orig. "Fléaux des faibles esprits, et des Ames vulgaires", with "vulgaires" in the sense of "common", as the translation attempts to convey. While Genest's discourse might be dismissible as a parody of the arrogance attributed to Christians, Diocletian's reaction in ll. 689-90 suggests irritation at the insults aimed at pagan believers, and not least at himself, especially given his quasi-divine position as emperor. It is to the point that Genest declares his new faith in terms of the Christian god's omnipotence and capacity to inspire universal fear – see esp. below, ll. 687-88.

**45** L. 688: orig. "Se fait craindre partout, et partout se fait voir."

690 Stop it.

GENEST

It's not yet time, O Caesar, to silence me!

691 That Lord of Lords, who is almighty King of Kings,  
 692 Whose law the whole universe to reverence brings,  
 693 Beneath whom hell trembles, whom the heavens adore,  
 694 Wills me to continue and prompts me to say more.  
 695 Know, Emperor, that the God who can all command,  
 696 Whose power I felt myself, and His mighty hand,  
 697 When I had it in mind to mock at His decrees,<sup>46</sup>  
 698 Has caused the greatest of miracles me to seize,  
 699 Turning an idolater into His worshipper  
 700 And making a subject out of His persecutor.<sup>47</sup>  
 701 Supposing I would entertain—oh, strange event!—  
 702 Only simple mortals, I made angels content,  
 703 And with the sole intention of pleasing your eyes,  
 704 Unawares I pleased the Emperor of the Skies.<sup>48</sup>  
 705 It is true that, deprived of that ultimate grace,  
 706 I once spewed a thousand blasphemies in His face,  
 707 But in the lying speeches that my tongue unrolled,  
 708 It was not myself speaking but hell that controlled—  
 709 That common enemy of all things that bear life,  
 710 Which wholly builds its empire on sin and strife,<sup>49</sup>  
 711 And, having fooled my senses and seduced my reason,

46 “[D]ecrees”: orig. “oracles”.

47 Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 80, point out that the notion of Genest’s theatrical practice of mocking Christian rites, as found in the sources, infiltrates this passage in a way beyond his presentation by Desfontaines. Still, such mockery is explicitly the object of the command performance (see above, I.i.109-10, I.iii.159 ff.), while ll. 705-6 below do not restrict his “blasphemies” to stage performances. The act of ridicule immediately at issue is, of course, the pretended baptism.

48 Cf. Rotrou, IV.vii.1365-66. The close resemblance is one of those noted by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 80 and Introduction, p. 404, who also cite the common source in Surlus (p. 917). Cf. Ribade-neira, p. 917: “J’ai tâché de plaire à l’Empereur de la terre; & celui du Ciel m’a regardé d’un bon œil, & reçu en sa grace.” As elsewhere, Baudoin offers a more dramatic rendering: “Je me suis jusques icy rendu complaisant à vos passions, ô puissant Empereur de la terre; et cependant celui du Ciel a bien daigné me regarder d’un œil fauorable” (p. 142).

49 “[S]in and strife”: orig. “crime”, which here clearly carries a broad meaning. The divine empire is now opposed to both the earthly and the infernal ones – discourse hardly likely to please Diocletian.

712 In my heart had implanted that dangerous poison.<sup>50</sup>  
 713 But the infinite bounties of my God at last  
 714 All those horrible thoughts from my soul have outcast,  
 715 And, Caesar, be it known, to the end of my days  
 716 I have no more voice but what serves to speak His praise,  
 717 To proclaim to the two ends of the earth this wonder:  
 718 That He is sole sovereign, sole lord of the thunder,  
 719 Of heaven, angels, mortals and the elements—  
 720 In short, alone worthy of our altars and incense.

## DIOCLETIAN

721 He has lost his senses, and his distracted soul  
 722 Sends his tongue, like his mind, spinning out of control.

## GENEST

723 No, no—never did I reason with sounder judgement  
 724 Than when I turned against your gods and your intent;  
 725 And if I lost it, it was when my guilty speech  
 726 Basely agreed your idols' favour to beseech.

## DIOCLETIAN

727 Ha! Don't anger me—enough of your insolence,  
 728 Or we'll have you treated like those who have no sense.

## GENEST

729 That's not at all the treatment that I have in view,  
 730 For then I'd be treated in the same way as you.

## DIOCLETIAN

731 To Caesar, Rome's Emperor, they don't so behave.

## GENEST

732 You're not treated as a sovereign but as a slave,  
 733 For, far from willing that high Goodness to obey—  
 734 That God from whom all royalty derives its sway—  
 735 Often you pay homage, at some courtier's whim,

---

50 It seems important to retain the original's near-rhyme "reason/poison" (identical in French).

736 To an image some poor craftsman had made for him,  
 737 Who followed his fancy, or that of such false men,  
 738 To fashion gods for you, who are your masters then.

## DIOCLETIAN

739 Just look at him! Moved by such audacious outrage,  
 740 He'd try to bring Achilles or Hector on stage.

## GENEST

741 No, no, my soul, which reason now can well restrain,  
 742 No longer lets within it an idea so vain.  
 743 I know myself, Caesar, and know what I am, too.

## DIOCLETIAN

744 But do you know, traitor, what I'm able to do?

## GENEST

745 Yes—the fact of your power cannot be ignored:  
 746 I know that you are feared, and in Rome are adored.  
 747 Yet I well know, too, my role by a God assigned—  
 748 My body is yours to torment but not my mind.

## DIOCLETIAN

749 We shall put to the proof that lofty constancy.

## GENEST

750 Do it now, and right away the result you'll see:  
 751 Order your torturers to weigh me down with chains.

## DIOCLETIAN

752 They'll teach you the respect your perfidy disdains,  
 753 If you do not make up your mind your speech to alter.

## GENEST

754 One never changes while one's courage does not falter.

## DIOCLETIAN

755 Yet nevertheless one must perish or comply.

## GENEST

756 Then here you see me ready, tyrant—let me die!<sup>51</sup>  
 757 Bring on, bring on at once those blessing-bearing<sup>52</sup>  
       chains,  
 758 Instruments of my glory, as well as my pains.  
 759 And for hateful fetters as of now take back these—  
       (*throwing his scarf<sup>53</sup> back at him*)  
 760 Which once made me the slave of your divinities.  
 761 Let those who did not see that miracle divine,  
 762 Which only now ravished these eyes and ears of mine,  
 763 Abjectly adhere to your vain magnificence  
 764 And look with an envious eye upon your presents.  
 765 As for me, who have just seen the most splendid marks  
 766 Of the power of Him who gives commands to monarchs,  
 767 I no longer have desires so criminal:  
 768 Your gifts are transitory, while His are eternal;  
 769 His favours are those of a God, yours of a man,  
 770 And heaven's honours well worth any merely Roman.  
 771 Give the order, Emperor, and hasten my torment:  
 772 You are deferring my glory and my content.  
 773 Cause my body the most extreme pains to endure;  
 774 Stir up your tormentors, invent new kinds of torture:  
 775 And, following an impulse that quite well you know,  
 776 Avenge a little water with a bloody flow,  
 777 For its divine effect has given me such grace  
 778 That today I brave your menaces to your face.

---

51 “[L]et me die”: orig. “allons mourir”, a formula elsewhere associated with heroic resolution to face death. Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 89, cite the verbatim repetition of lines from Desfontaines’s own *Martyr de Saint Eustache*, but the expression was also associated with pagan suicide in sixteenth-century “Humanist” tragedy, notably in the representations of Cleopatra by Étienne Jodelle and Nicolas de Montreux. See Richard Hillman, *French Reflections in the Shakespearean Tragic: Three Case Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 99.

52 “[B]lessing-bearing”: orig. “bienheureuses” – a word with strong religious associations, thanks principally to its recurrent use in the “Beatitudes” in the sense of “blessed” (Mat. 5:3-11).

53 “[S]carf”: orig. “écharpe” – an ancient Roman mark of allegiance or party affiliation, in this case of imperial loyalty. Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 90, plausibly suggest that it may be among the tokens of Diocletian’s esteem delivered by Aquilinus at I.v.266. The word is singular but Genest speaks of “ces liens odieux” in the plural (hence “these”), imagining the scarf as truer chains than those just mentioned.



## DIOCLETIAN

779 You may brave me, rebel, but for your treachery  
 780 Fire along with iron will compensate me.  
 781 Take him out of my sight, soldiers, drag him away;  
 782 Put him to the torture without the least delay,  
 783 And there let him feel such excruciating pains  
 784 That he will think death less horrid than what he  
                   sustains.                    *[Exeunt Genest and guards.]*  
 785 Follow, Rutilius— see if it is possible  
 786 To quell the arrogance of that heart invincible:  
 787 Threaten, flatter, beg, importune— anything vow;  
 788 Offer him treasure—yes, even that I'll allow—  
 789 Offices, honours, and all that Rome can supply  
 790 A man's greatest hopeful wishes to gratify.  
 791 If he is willing to concede and quit his error,  
 792 His true remorse may even now disarm my furor.  
 793 But if he keeps on playing the rebel, unruly,  
 794 Let him be exposed to a fire most cruelly,  
 795 Which, as to his traitor's flesh it's slowly applied,  
 796 With countless tortures will burn him till he has died.

## RUTILIUS

797 I shall obey that order.

## DIOCLETIAN

Go.

*[Exit Rutilius.]*

## Scene iii

Diocletian, Aquilinus, *[enter, guarded,]* Anthenor,  
 Pamphilie, Luciane, Aristide

DIOCLETIAN<sup>54</sup>

Base instruments!

798 It is you I destine for the most bitter torments.  
 799 By you he was suborned, by your speeches seduced,

---

54 The speech-heading is given in the early texts, though not in Bourquin and de Reyff, eds.

800 But you'll find the fruit of your treason now produced.  
 801 Yes—I'll be revenged for such a palpable outrage,  
 802 And not distinguish among you by sex or age,  
 803 With no pity present my anger to appease.  
 804 Aquilinus.

LUCIANE

Ah, Caesar I embrace your knees.

DIOCLETIAN

804(a) Impertinent!

ANTHENOR

Caesar . . .

DIOCLETIAN

Your tears in vain pretend<sup>55</sup>

805 To disarm my righteous rigour, which will not bend.  
 806 After flaunting in my palace such disrespect,  
 807 What favour can you possibly dare to expect?  
 808 Might you suppose that, having been so insolent,  
 809 All you need do today is beg me to be clement?  
 810 No, no—crimes as heinous as yours are never pardoned  
 811 With the same facility with which they were done,  
 812 And lenity would bring forth others free from fear,  
 813 If I did not make your own punishments severe.  
 814 And so . . .

PAMPHILIE

Oh, Caesar, what extreme unhappiness

815 Can render us today mistrusted by Your Highness?  
 816 Against your power, my Lord, what is our offence?  
 817 Are we made criminals by our obedience?  
 818 You gave the order, and we hastened to obey you:  
 819 To carry out your wishes—is that to betray you?

---

55 The editions of 1645 and 1646 confirm that this is a complete verse-line and should be both printed and counted as such, as is not the case in Bourquin and de Reyff, eds. To maintain conformity with the modern edition, I consider the line as 804(a).

820 For what crime, then, can we be accounted culpable?  
 821 Of what treasons do you consider us capable?  
 822 We have not aimed a blow at the gods or the state;  
 823 Our own misfortune is all that we perpetrate.  
 824 It's not that I would seek, by speaking in this way,  
 825 To turn back the anger that holds you in its sway.  
 826 In the wretched muddle to which fate relegates me,  
 827 I don't dream that calm seas or a safe port awaits me,  
 828 And I would blame myself for desire too base  
 829 If my voice for my life were to present a case.  
 830 No, don't expect from me such craven sentiments:  
 831 Pronounce, if it suits you, my fatal punishments;  
 832 You will see me perish both constant and content.  
 833 But spare, O Caesar, a troupe that is innocent,  
 834 Who have always prudently in each single action  
 835 Considered both their duty and your satisfaction.

DIOCLETIAN

836 So, then, your duty consists in displeasing me?  
 837 In promising one thing, performing the contrary?  
 838 In coming to suborn—before my eyes!—a subject,  
 839 And then forcing him at last our gods to reject?  
 840 Perhaps you dismiss such an act of impudence  
 841 As mere amusement, sport that is quite innocent?  
 842 But trust me, if this stroke meets with impunity,  
 843 Then I am short on both rancour and memory.  
 844 No, no, traitors, after such a savage attack,  
 845 Don't you suppose that fighting spirit<sup>56</sup> I will lack!  
 846 You are joined by your crime, as well as by your fate:  
 847 Your destinies, therefore, I shall not separate.  
 848 You share the same purpose and the same point of view,<sup>57</sup>  
 849 And you shall endure identical vengeance, too.

ARISTIDE

850 Caesar, in the name of the gods, hear my advice:

---

56 “[F]ighting spirit”: orig. “courage”.

57 “[P]oint of view”: orig. “intelligence”.

851 See what the objects are that you will sacrifice.  
852 If your righteous anger makes victims necessary,  
853 At least take care to chose those who deserve to be,  
854 And let no cruel sentence, hastily assigned,  
855 See innocence with guilt to destruction consigned.

## AQUILINUS

856 It is true that one might, with plausibility,  
857 Distinguish between their crimes considerably.  
858 Anthenor and his daughter...

## ANTHENOR

Mighty Emperor,

859 Permit me, in a few words, to correct your error.  
860 Luciane was not my daughter, my Lord, in life:  
861 I never had children, nor do I have a wife.  
862 And however the Christians we have imitated,  
863 We have no other gods than those you have mandated.  
864 All those fictive names of son and father supposed—  
865 His pretended wishes, feigned anger when opposed—  
866 Were merely effects that, as directed, we furnished  
867 To please that traitor, whose change likewise us  
astonished.

## LUCIANE

868 No, my Lord, if Genest, as we could not expect,  
869 Changed his belief and lost all dutiful respect,  
870 His alone was the crime, and today he alone  
871 On the present occasion must for it atone.  
872 Of his audacity we never bore a trace,  
873 And we should not be made to share in his disgrace.  
874 If, in his madness, he manifests mutiny,  
875 Need his unhappy failing change our destiny?  
876 And must we needs be as his accomplices numbered,  
877 If we were never with his caprices encumbered?  
878 The very instant that he took the Christians' part  
879 From all his interests we set our own apart,  
880 And, our souls from his passions thoroughly estranged,  
881 Pitied, and also deplored, his thoughts so deranged—  
882 Condemned his arrogance, execrated his furor,

883 And viewed his insolence with a deep sense of horror.

DIOCLETIAN

884 How were those blameworthy precepts to you supplied  
885 Which just now the crimes of the Christians justified?

LUCIANE

886 By a curious desire, which cannot shock,  
887 Since I entertained it only so I might mock,  
888 And still today those egregious lies, as it seems,  
889 Are accounted in my spirit nothing but dreams.

DIOCLETIAN

890 If you abhor, as you say, the Christians' abuses,  
891 Put the discourse you maintain to practical uses:  
892 Go and seek out Genest, and do your best to daunt  
893 His obdurate heart with those reasons you now flaunt.  
894 A nimble wit, united with bodily grace,  
895 Generally puts remarkable force in place;  
896 Assist a little your eloquence with your eyes:  
897 A fair object always a rebel mollifies.  
898 Thus my anger ceases, and yields to your allurements.<sup>58</sup>  
899 Behave so that Genest welcomes your blandishments,  
900 And that his heart, made a conquest by such fair arms,  
901 May render us indebted to your potent charms.

LUCIANE

902 I am quite prepared, O Caesar, to carry out  
903 Your wishes and commands, without the slightest doubt,  
904 Although I am far from being so presumptuous  
905 As to dare to expect the end will be glorious.  
906 But I will not hold back, because it is your will,  
907 And for want of attractions, will employ my skill.  
908 But then, my Lord, do not forget that Pamphilie  
909 Has long exerted over him her mastery,  
910 And that the glory of that happy feat was due  
911 To her alacrity of tongue and her eyes, too.

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58 Diocletian's language turns notably "courtly" here.

## PAMPHILIE

912 Oh, change your speech, Luciane, and cease to endow  
 913 Me with a power that the results disavow!  
 914 His morbid<sup>59</sup> project has made it only too plain  
 915 That I am, in his eyes, an object of disdain,  
 916 And that the passion you imagine keeps him tame  
 917 Is feeble fire glowing only to my shame.  
 918 So what would you have me do at the present hour?  
 919 What? Simply give way to faintheartedness and cower?  
 920 After his change, should I praise his audacity?  
 921 Or should I pour forth tears, or implore his clemency?  
 922 No, no—his treason shatters all affinities:  
 923 Vengeance I seek—for me and our divinities.  
 924 Caesar, if that ingrate reveals no change of heart,  
 925 Spare your tormentors—my rage will tear him apart!  
 926 You cannot inflict upon him a crueller blow  
 927 Than I—just leave the task to me—will make him know.  
 928 And you will recognise that fell iron and fire  
 929 Are nothing when compared with a fierce woman's ire,  
 930 When she, whether from rashness or frivolity,  
 931 Has been slighted in love, or in fidelity.

## DIOCLETIAN

932 I like your spirit and appreciate your zeal.  
 933 All right—to that faithless lover make no appeal.  
 934 But if, in his madness, he remains obstinate,  
 935 I wish him to be handed over to your hate.  
 936 He shall be brought to your feet, with heavy chains  
 weighted,  
 937 Then, unless he yields, to your rage be immolated.<sup>60</sup>

59 “[M]orbid”: orig. “funeste”.

60 “[T]o your rage be immolated”: orig. “qu'on l'immole à ta haine”. In the context, the language of sacrifice is deployed with pointed irony.

## Act IV

### Scene i

Pamphilie, Aristide

PAMPHILIE

938 What? Can that obstinate heart by nothing be bent?

ARISTIDE

939 No. He will be brought before you at any moment.  
940 I give you fair warning.

PAMPHILIE

Where?

ARISTIDE

941 In this very place,  
942 So that—if he can (tainted by treason so base)—  
943 He may renounce his error in the same location  
Where Caesar and the gods saw his abomination.

PAMPHILIE

944 How do you know this?<sup>61</sup>

ARISTIDE

945 By Rutilius' command,  
946 Who, seeing him able all attempts to withstand,  
947 And that our best efforts had not the least effect  
948 In curing his blinded spirit of its gross defect,  
949 Informed me that he would send that rebel to you,  
950 And that I should come ahead to make sure you knew,  
951 So that your mind a ready supply might provide  
Of shafts to hurl at him which he can't turn aside.

---

61 Pamphilie's ignorance and Aristide's explanation here seem somewhat out of joint with the end of the previous scene – perhaps a suggestion of a certain artifice on her part? (Cf. the Introduction, pp. 10-11.)

PAMPHILIE

952 And what shall I do, Aristide, when that occurs?

ARISTIDE

953 You know far better than I do that traitor's humours.

PAMPHILIE

954 Yet me, as much as you—or more—he has betrayed.

ARISTIDE

955 It is of your anger that he is most afraid.

PAMPHILIE

956 He fears me?

ARISTIDE

So I believe.

PAMPHILIE

On what evidence?

957 Does he not treat me with supreme indifference?

958 And am I not for him a contemptible object?

ARISTIDE

959 Your name, however, has a powerful effect.

960 For he could never, when your beauties were evoked,

961 Stifle his ardent sighs, and on his tears he choked.

PAMPHILIE

962 After his rank treasons and such egregious slights,

963 His weeping and his sighs make unconvincing sights.

964 The ingrate has changed, and whatever one supposes,

965 What once he did for love, mere habit now imposes.

ARISTIDE

966 To comply with Caesar's will, you simply must try him—

967 Rutilius so orders.



## PAMPHILIE

Well, go notify him<sup>62</sup>

968 That, in order to tame that overweening heart,  
 969 My hate and my love to the full will play their part.  
 970 Go—let me mull over this troubling task I face.

## ARISTIDE

971 Farewell. In a moment you'll see him in this place.

[*Exit Aristide.*]

## Scene ii

PAMPHILIE [*alone*]

972 Blind tyrants that my poor soul claim  
 973 And take your turns to dominate—  
 974 Contempt and vengeance, love and hate:  
 975 What ending will my furors have, what end my flame?<sup>63</sup>  
 976 Hate, must your laws be my choice?  
 977 Love, must I listen to your voice?  
 978 Must I rush to seek out vengeance?  
 979 Or, with a more noble disdain,  
 980 Should I dedicate my allegiance  
 981 To forgetting the ardours that cause my heart pain?  
 982 Oh gods, how within me contend  
 983 Choices and wishes—and surmise!  
 984 How a lover's weeping and sighs  
 985 Impose on my soul a suffering without end!<sup>64</sup>  
 986 No, eyes of mine, don't grant him sight;  
 987 Just leave him in his deadly plight  
 988 And our hatred thoroughly slake—  
 989 Or, since he called you by false names,

**62** I.e., according to the context, Rutilius, although the pronoun references in the passage waver indistinctly between him and Genest.

**63** L. 975: orig. "Où se termineront mes fureurs, ou ma flamme". Although it makes little difference to the translation, Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 102, suggest that the "ou [or]" of the early editions might also be taken as "où [where]". Such a reading would, I think, weaken the effect of Pamphilie's doubt at this moment about the nature of her feelings.

**64** At issue is the sincerity of Genest's signs of passion; cf. above, IV.i.962-65.

990                                   May you, once his life-stars, take  
991                                   Now rather the office of his funeral flames.  
992                                   But alas! What do I desire?  
993                                   Where am I being blindly sent?  
994                                   To his death may I consent  
995                                   And not in that instant myself from life retire?  
996                                   No, by no means: withdraw, my furor,  
997                                   Despite his crime, despite his error.  
998                                   That I love him still I sense  
999                                   And today acknowledge quite  
1000                                   I arm you at my own expense  
1001                                   When cruelly against him I try you to incite.  
1002                                   But the ingrate's here—let me my weakness control.  
1003                                   Oh, this encounter kills me!

### Scene iii

Pamphilie, Genest, Two Guards

PAMPHILIE

Well, treacherous soul!

1004                                   So, here you are in chains, and those degrading ties—  
1005                                   Are they gentler than mine, more precious in your eyes?  
1006                                   Perhaps for your sentiments my yoke was too rude;  
1007                                   I repaid your services with ingratitude.  
1008                                   My way of receiving your vows was all too cold,  
1009                                   Or I importuned you with ardour all too bold.  
1010                                   Oh yes, I said so—that your coward's inhibitions,  
1011                                   No less than your sighing, were merely feigned  
  conditions,<sup>65</sup>  
1012                                   And that your despair, born so strangely out of season,  
1013                                   Was the secret harbinger of some sort of treason!  
1014                                   But never presume I'll endure, unfaithful one,

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65 Bourquin and de Reyff, eds, n. 105, take this accusation of hypocrisy as necessarily referring – incongruously – to Pamphilie's role in the play-within-the-play. A simpler, more plausible reading may be that, in the heat of the moment, she is developing, in a chiastic structure, the two possible interpretations of his apparent infidelity proposed in ll. 1009-10 – that is, either that he felt his advances rebuffed or that he withdrew in the face of hers.

1015 That hurtful injury to my vows should be done.  
 1016 I wish that a punishment both prompt and severe  
 1017 In your perfidious blood that offence may clear,  
 1018 And show that thanks to me your fate will be more dire  
 1019 Than just for affronting the gods or the Empire.

## GENEST

1020 All right, then, execute your overflowing rage;  
 1021 Only for that I stand before you. Take advantage!  
 1022 Here I am ready, Madam, a victim enchained;  
 1023 My fate, dealt at your feet, will be gladly sustained.  
 1024 As you do so, your eyes, taking your rigour's part,  
 1025 Will point out to your hands the pathway to my heart.  
 1026 Or if they do not wish to give themselves such trouble,  
 1027 Take arms—here it is. Strike, cruel and beautiful!  
 1028 Futile as your gods' incapable thunderbolts,  
 1029 Their force is too feeble to give my senses jolts.<sup>66</sup>  
 1030 Perform it, Pamphilie, your fierce outrage perform!  
 1031 My heart scarcely trembles at such a trifling storm:  
 1032 You once saw it hot, with amorous fire glowing;  
 1033 For your better content now see it with blood flowing.  
 1034 But if even now I may hope some grace to see,  
 1035 Allow that, prior to the blow that threatens me,  
 1036 I may dare to enquire what egregious fault  
 1037 Is driving you, Madam, to this cruel assault.

## PAMPHILIE

1038 What fault, disloyal man? O gods, what impudence!  
 1039 He is virtue itself, the soul of innocence!  
 1040 He never fell short in love or fidelity;  
 1041 He never was false to the Emperor or me.  
 1042 Of baptism he never uttered words in favour;  
 1043 Never did language of his of blasphemy savour.  
 1044 Crimes, you righteous gods? He's done nothing to  
   displease,  
 1045 And you are simply wrong to be his enemies.

---

66 “[T]o give my senses jolts”: orig. “pour étonner mes sens”.

1046 Insolent man! Is that how you wish me to flatter?

GENEST

1047 No, no, you may let your anger against me shatter,  
 1048 And if, to fulfil your vengeance, that will not do,  
 1049 Add the Emperor and your offended gods, too.  
 1050 But when you brand me a traitor, call me forsworn—  
 1051 Neither of those injuries can by me be borne.  
 1052 For here, despite your words, the heavens are my witness  
 1053 That never did my love deserve those slanders less.  
 1054 Formerly, indeed, it could to my charge be laid  
 1055 That, in flattering your eyes, your soul I betrayed  
 1056 And transported your spirit into fair impressions  
 1057 Which actually were nothing but empty illusions.<sup>67</sup>  
 1058 Yes, I was betraying you when my blinded soul  
 1059 Merely burned for you with ardour out of control  
 1060 And, corrupting my heart with its unjust desires,  
 1061 Loved you far less than its own agreeable fires.  
 1062 But, Madam, today, when my flame burns much more pure  
 1063 Than that up above in its elemental nature,<sup>68</sup>  
 1064 When veritable love impels me you to cherish—  
 1065 So much that I wish to leave all for you and perish—  
 1066 Can you, and not commit a wrong, call me unfaithful,  
 1067 A traitor, a rebel, perjured, fickle, ungrateful?

PAMPHILIE

1068 What names, then, do you think yourself worthy of  
                     bearing,  
 1069 When we see you turning your back on all, uncaring?  
 1070 When, oppressed by those dark vapours of melancholy,  
 1071 For mere illusions you abandon Pamphilie?  
 1072 When you change your allegiance and no respect heed?  
 1073 When the gods you betray, and your prince, and your  
                     creed?

**67** The rhyme “impressions”/“illusions” (identical in French) is present in the original.

**68** The reference is to the sphere of fire, the highest sublunary sphere in the Ptolemaic concept of the universe, since fire is the purest element.

## GENEST

1074 Oh, how treason is beautiful and innocent,  
 1075 How blameworthy is fidelity, how delinquent,  
 1076 When they concern a tyrant and divinities  
 1077 That are nothing but horrible monstrosities!  
 1078 How sweet to be free of a yoke so detestable  
 1079 And choose the rule of a Monarch so adorable,  
 1080 Whose palace and court are in the heavens above,  
 1081 And who is all gentleness, all justice, all love!  
 1082 Oh, my precious Pamphilie, if only you knew  
 1083 What ignorant night, like a tomb, encloses you,  
 1084 And if, redeemed by that miraculous star's light  
 1085 Whose dazzle drew me from the blindness of my night,  
 1086 You might receive a ray of that sovereign grace  
 1087 That could within my heart such noble boldness place,  
 1088 How, compared with your own, would you my fortune bless,  
 1089 Which you would reckon as a Christian's happiness!  
 1090 And how, to wear of that state the glorious marks,<sup>69</sup>  
 1091 Would you make small account of the favours of monarchs!  
 1092 It is by that splendid means that I wish today  
 1093 Veritable love for you, Madam, to display,  
 1094 And make you confess that I did not break my vow  
 1095 Except in order to cherish you better now.  
 1096 Lord, if Your goodness deigns to listen to my prayer,  
 1097 Accord to Pamphilie . . .

## PAMPHILIE

Wretched man, stop right there!

1098 What would you ask?

## GENEST

That His bliss, which over all reigns,  
 1099 May save the other half of myself that remains,  
 1100 And permit at least that before death stops my effort,  
 1101 I may stretch out my hand to lead her safe to port.  
 1102 If over you I gain that brilliant victory,

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69 Evidently alluding to his chains.

1103 Let that happy outcome contribute to my glory!  
 1104 How sweet will be my fate, how I will die content,  
 1105 If I can bring to fruition that bold intent.  
 1106 Let us not put it off. Listen, Madam, if you—

## PAMPHILIE

1107 In vain you try with your ruses my soul to woo.

## GENEST

1108 Oh, only believe, and then the King of the Skies  
 1109 Will take away the blindfold that covers your eyes,  
 1110 And you will discover unequalled brilliant things,  
 1111 Marvels from which incomparable wonder springs.  
 1112 Make use here and now of the torch of faith's own flame—  
 1113 Or, if it dazzles you, hear me speak in its name.  
 1114 Just consider well my words and give them due weight:  
 1115 Tell me what effects these idols of yours create;  
 1116 What have they ever executed here below  
 1117 That causes us their power or godhead to know?  
 1118 Do you think that gods made of wood or gold or stone,  
 1119 Whose being is bounded by their shadow alone<sup>70</sup>—  
 1120 Gods that are nothing more than inanimate objects,  
 1121 Owing to a mortal's hand and iron their aspects—  
 1122 Could, with words that mighty miracles multiply,  
 1123 Have created man, the air, the land, sea and sky?  
 1124 Ruled the elements, strewed the heavens, star by star,  
 1125 Made all those beauties that shine for our eyes from far?  
 1126 And everywhere placed that order incomparable  
 1127 Which keeps the universe in a state admirable?  
 1128 No, all those demons, those gods in their impotence,  
 1129 Upon whom, so uselessly, you squander your incense,  
 1130 Have never, whatever credit their fraud received,  
 1131 One single atom<sup>71</sup> in all of nature conceived—  
 1132 Which, to conclude, in its perfect magnificence

70 “[B]ounded by their shadow alone”: orig. “borné dans l’ombre qui l’enserre” – that is, presumably, having no existence beyond the shadow surrounding the physical object.

71 “[A]tom”: orig. “atome” – a term which, as observed by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 118, had warrant in Aristotelian, as well as Epicurean, tradition.

1133 Is a brilliant work of the God I reverence.  
 1134 Yes, Madam, He is the master who all composed:<sup>72</sup>  
 1135 I was ignorant, but that knowledge He imposed;  
 1136 And, provided that your soul desires to see,  
 1137 That same benefit lies in your capacity.  
 1138 By no means refuse it, my precious Pamphilie:  
 1139 Let your soul thereby with mine in alliance be,  
 1140 And grant that today, by such a splendid bond tied,  
 1141 Our two hearts may thus be forever unified.  
 1142 Now you perceive how extreme is my love for you.

## PAMPHILIE

1143 You love me.

## GENEST

Yes—and far more than myself, it's true,  
 1144 Since to come to your rescue, and to make you sure,  
 1145 Whatever brutal torments I'll have to endure—  
 1146 Whatever horrid tortures their rage can deploy—  
 1147 I'll be seen to run to them with abounding joy,  
 1148 As long as with my blood I can for you acquire  
 1149 Happiness that, with me, you are bound to desire.

## PAMPHILIE

1150 Alas!

## GENEST

You sigh. Oh, doubtless a timorous mind  
 1151 Strives against your desire and keeps it confined.  
 1152 You are afraid of death—a tyrant makes you quail.<sup>73</sup>

**72** “[T]he master who all composed”: orig. “l’auteur et le maître”, which likewise carries a suggestion of artistic creation.

**73** “[A] tyrant makes you quail”: orig. “un Tyran vous fait peur”. One can imagine different ways of delivering this half-line, some of which would sway the identity of the “tyrant” from the Emperor towards Death itself. But the reference below in l. 1160 is unambiguous.

## PAMPHILIE

1153 No, no—do not suppose my heart's courage<sup>74</sup> can fail:  
 1154 That sigh, expression of a holy tenderness,  
 1155 Is proof of my repentance, not my feebleness.  
 1156 I follow you, dear love—I believe and I yield:  
 1157 Your God reigns in my heart, from me has won the field.<sup>75</sup>  
 1158 Already that great happiness ravishes me,  
 1159 Gazing at your chains with an eye of jealousy:  
 1160 I burn till a tyrant his torturers commands  
 1161 With these glorious burdens to weigh down my hands;  
 1162 I cannot seize them—let me help them to sustain;<sup>76</sup>  
 1163 Yes, these fetters are my fetters, this my own chain,  
 1164 Since by the effects this sweet rigour can impart,  
 1165 It passes even now from your hands to my heart.

## GENEST

1166 Pamphilie! Oh, transports that fill me full of glory!

## Scene iv

Diocletian, Aquilinus, Rutilius, [Pamphilie], Genest, Anthenor,  
Aristide, Luciane, and the Guards

## RUTILIUS

1167 My Lord, she has no doubt obtained the victory:  
 1168 In her eyes there sparkles a visible elation.

## DIOCLETIAN

1169 Well, what you have you done for our gods' gratification?

## PAMPHILIE

1170 More than I ought to have.

74 “[H]eart’s courage”: orig. “cœur”.

75 “[F]rom me has won the field”: orig. “triomphe de moi”.

76 L. 1162: orig. “Ne pouvant les ravir qu’au moins je les soutienne”. She may (or may not) make a gesture towards removing his chains before simply helping to bear their weight; the following lines seem to imply physical contact. One wonders whether any reaction is envisaged for the two Guards present.



## DIOCLETIAN

That may be arrogance,  
 1171 Subject to reprimand and deserving of penance—  
 1172 The more so since you fell short of the end you sought.<sup>77</sup>  
 1173 Yet you declare that you have done more than you ought:  
 1174 True, one does too much when a spirit is culpable  
 1175 And sets his will against becoming reasonable,  
 1176 For once it is clear that he refuses to yield,  
 1177 By extreme rigour must the argument be sealed.  
 1178 But although your reasons in combatting this rebel  
 1179 Have not rendered his heart more loyal or more humble,  
 1180 I am far from wishing to rob you of the prize  
 1181 We owe you for your efforts in the enterprise.  
 1182 Just like you, Luciane, Aristide, and Anthenor  
 1183 Applied their efforts in vain to persuade that traitor,  
 1184 And yet I paid their portion with a hand so free  
 1185 That they will not complain against the gods or me.

## ARISTIDE

1186 No, my Lord, the value placed on us by your splendour  
 1187 Bears witness to your magnificence and your grandeur,  
 1188 And we would be ungrateful to the gods and you  
 1189 If ever we lacked the zeal or faith that are due.  
 1190 Yes, command us, Caesar, to your will we incline,  
 1191 And a thousand times would lay our lives on the line,  
 1192 And seek, in a brutal combat's bitterest throes,  
 1193 With glory to perish in the midst of your foes.  
 1194 Let wonder, Pamphilie, you too, like us, astound  
 1195 At the Emperor's precious<sup>78</sup> bonds in which we're wound:  
 1196 Of gifts for us his treasury is never short;  
 1197 We are honoured with choicest places at his court;  
 1198 And by special bounty, which I can scarcely credit,  
 1199 We rise out of nothing to glory's very summit.

**77** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 123, plausibly propose that Diocletian reacts to the fact that Genest is still in chains. I follow their elucidation of this elliptical passage.

**78** L. 1195: orig. "Les adorables nœuds dont l'Emperour nous lie". The image depends on the contrast with Genest's chains, as Pamphilie's rejoinder confirms (ll. 1214-21). Regrettably, English "adorable" here would lend Aristide's servility an incongruously fey quality.

## PAMPHILIE

1200 Compliant slave and fearfully servile flatterer,  
 1201 Who make yourself even of gross faults the worshipper!  
 1202 I am ashamed of the grovelling you display  
 1203 To gain false felicity and your soul betray.  
 1204 If on a potentate's favour you stake your hope,  
 1205 Beware of advancing on a slippery slope;  
 1206 At a great mountain's base may gape a great abyss,  
 1207 And regret quite often follows hard upon bliss.  
 1208 Blame, instead of praising, this criminal largesse,  
 1209 Which will gain you an eternity of distress,  
 1210 And with a steadfast heart that pomp behind you leave,  
 1211 Whose morbid glitter lures you only to deceive.  
 1212 Or, if you simply cannot tear yourself away  
 1213 From these shameful honours' and abject pleasures' sway,  
 1214 Adore<sup>79</sup> the chain that fetters you, if you so wish,  
 1215 But look—here are the bonds that Pamphilie will  
         cherish—  
 1216 Bonds that, even as I do, you ought to desire,  
 1217 And in which we'd be more than happy to expire.  
 1218 Yes—there is my hope, and there is my recompense:  
 1219 Bestow them on me, Caesar, in my great impatience;  
 1220 And by that fair gift—you've said one to me is due<sup>80</sup>—  
 1221 You will do more for me than they have gained from you.  
 1222 I am a Christian.

## LUCIANE

Alas!

## ANTHENOR

It's that traitor's spell.<sup>81</sup>

**79** "Adore": original "Adore", which picks up "adorables" in l. 1195.

**80** "[W]hich you've said to me is due": orig. "que tu dois à mes vœux". The reference must be to the promise made by Diocletian in ll. 1180-81; cf. Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 126. The translation aims to clarify this.

**81** The accusation that Christians practised magic was widespread among their pagan persecutors.

## DIOCLETIAN

1223 What rage<sup>82</sup> inflames my soul—O you gods, can you tell?  
 1224 What? Instead of service, we meet with mockery!  
 1225 We are deceived, defied—oh, I am wild with fury!  
 1226 There's no retaining it—let thunder be produced;  
 1227 Let those insolents be blasted, to dust reduced!  
 1228 Go, Rutilius.

## RUTILIUS

Where?

## DIOCLETIAN

1229 You know my orders. Take that rebel away.

## RUTILIUS

Come.

## GENEST

1230 My Pamphilie, farewell!<sup>83</sup> At last the happy day!

## Scene v

Diocletian, Pamphilie, Luciane, Anthenor, Aristide, Aquilinus

## PAMPHILIE

What's this? Must we be parted?

## DIOCLETIAN

1231 Oh no—you'll follow him.

## PAMPHILIE

1232 Do you not let me his paces accompany? Why, then, savage hard-hearted,<sup>84</sup>

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**82** “[R]age” (identical in French): the word is key to a reminiscence of the raging devils of the mysteries.

**83** “[F]arewell”: orig. “Adieu”, which of course is charged with religious significance.

**84** “[S]avage hard-hearted”: orig. “ô Barbare”.

1233 Do you suppose these splendours have appeal for me?  
 1234 No, no—these false pleasures upon me cast no spell.<sup>85</sup>  
 1235 He will finish his days—finish my life as well.  
 1236 So you will see, whatever he must undergo,  
 1237 That what love has joined, separation cannot know.<sup>86</sup>

## DIOCLETIAN

1238 You'd be better advised to beg me to be clement.

## PAMPHILIE

1239 Your fury for my taste is scarcely violent.  
 1240 Why do you delay, tyrant, to have it applied?

## DIOCLETIAN

1241 Then that's your desire? It shall be satisfied.  
 1242 But after this refusal, no pardon expect:  
 1243 The same fate will follow from your joint disrespect,  
 1244 For since one crime in common sufficiently ties you,  
 1245 The self-same punishment is able to chastise you.

## PAMPHILIE

1246 Along with the same torments, we'll share the same glory.

## AQUILINUS

1247 But before the combat you sing of victory.  
 1248 Death is, to the staunchest spirit, a thing of terror.

## PAMPHILIE

1249 In cowards like you it always inspires horror—  
 1250 Its mere name strikes fear; but a heart noble and hale  
 1251 Looks it squarely in the face without turning pale.

## DIOCLETIAN

1252 Perhaps you count on that god's succour to appear,

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**85** The translation points up her accusation that, contrary to Anthenor's declaration in l. 1222, it is her erstwhile companions who have fallen victim to enchantment.

**86** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 127, note the reference to Matthew 19:6, which forms part of the marriage service.

1253 Which a scoundrel like him<sup>87</sup> dared to promise you here.  
 1254 But in your extreme peril you would hope in vain  
 1255 For such help as he did not for himself obtain  
 1256 To save you from a death that he could not prevent,  
 1257 And my power should make you fear as imminent.

## PAMPHILIE

1258 Colossus of mud and clay,<sup>88</sup>  
 1259 Whom a timid people obey,  
 1260 Do you really dare those criminal words to speak,  
 1261 Between your grandeur and His own to make equation?  
 1262 And do you not know, you mortal wretched and weak,  
 1263 That His bounty is your foundation,  
 1264 And that you'll be dust tomorrow at God's command,  
 1265 If He withdraws His hand?<sup>89</sup>

1266 You, whom He has made in His image;  
 1267 You kings, who take from Him the homage  
 1268 Which is owed to His altars by rightful respect,

**87** “[A] scoundrel like him”: “un fourbe comme lui”. Genest is assimilated to Christ, designated in the common pagan manner as an outlaw and imposter. Cf. above, II.ii.353-56, as well as Rotrou, II.vi-ii.591 ff.

**88** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 128, point out the allusion to Daniel 2:31-45. The context is Daniel's prophecy to Nebuchadnezzar of the future of Babylon, the archetype of earthly glory – hence a prototype of Rome – which is ephemeral, in opposition to the heavenly city of God, the New Jerusalem. The stanzaic pattern of Pamphilié's speech supports its inspired prophetic quality, which makes it a quasi-typological pendant to her stanzas of anguished inner conflict at IV.ii.971-1001 and helps to carry it beyond a direct rebuke of Diocletian's tyranny.

On the popularity and uses of interpolated stanzaic lyrics in the period's dramaturgy, by Desfontaines particularly, see Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, *Tragédies hagiographiques*, Introduction, pp. 29-30. Cf. the effusion of the imprisoned Genest in Rotrou, V.i.1431-70. A thorough technical analysis of the convention is furnished by Jacques Scherer, *La Dramaturgie classique en France*, rev. ed. Colette Scherer (Saint-Genouph: Nizet, 2001), pp. 284-97, who does not, however, mention Desfontaines's *L'Illustre Comédien*; Marie-France Hilgar, *La Mode des stances dans le théâtre tragique français, 1610-1687* (Paris: Nizet, 1974), does include this example (p. 166) but does not go beyond basic description. No critic seems to have appreciated the contrast between Pamphilié's conventional earlier lyric, focused on terrestrial love, and the present exalted one.

For a parody of the stanzaic mode in a quite different context, see Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, *The Visionaries*, trad. Hillman, III.iv.921-70.

**89** The idea of God as present in and sanctioning his creation is a familiar one; Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 129, aptly cite the book of Wisdom (Sapientia), which was apocryphal for Protestants; see Wisdom 11:21-27 (Douai-Reims version).

1269 Just because you crown your heads with a little circlet,  
 1270 Do you dare, pride-swollen, His power to neglect,  
 1271 And your condition forget,  
 1272 And make comparison between your quality  
 1273 And His high majesty?

1274 Salmoneus' mere effigies,<sup>90</sup>  
 1275 Would you govern destinies?  
 1276 Is it your place to rule over men and their fate?  
 1277 Are you at all able with life them to inspire—  
 1278 Whose power presumes their deaths to precipitate  
 1279 Just to satisfy your desire?  
 1280 And what right permits you to sustain your own projects  
 1281 With the blood of His subjects?

1282 The earth he suspended in place—  
 1283 Does it contain within its space  
 1284 Any bodies whose motion your voices can cause?  
 1285 Yet you, who are unable in the whole of nature  
 1286 To make one solitary atom by your laws,  
 1287 Work the destruction of His creature.  
 1288 Daily before His eyes the cruellest means you take  
 1289 The work of His hands to break.

1290 But the mixed blood and tears that flow  
 1291 From those whom your weapons lay low  
 1292 Cry out for justice to His lofty tribunal,<sup>91</sup>  
 1293 While His subjects their unjust oppression lament,

**90** Orig.: “vous petits Salmonées”. In mythology, Salmoneus, King of Elis, imitated the thunder and lightning of Zeus and was punished by him; Pamphilie thus denigrates kings as petty imitators of a blasphemous imitator. See *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), *s.v.*; henceforth cited as *OCD*. He is depicted by Virgil as punished in the underworld (*Aeneid*, VI,585-94).

**91** Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 132, compare the appeal to God of Abel's blood after his slaying by Cain (Genesis 4:10). More immediately to the point in the hagiographical context is the typological fulfilment of that first murder in the evocation of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9-10:

I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? (Authorised Version)

1294                   And at their plaint He will open his arsenal  
 1295                                To draw from it such punishment  
 1296                   That constrained then and there<sup>92</sup> to confess you shall be  
 1297                                Your God is only He.

DIOCLETIAN

1298                   And my righteous anger ample proof will afford  
 1299                   That I, despite him, am your master and your lord.  
 1300                   Aquilinus, take her, for she's sung her last note,<sup>93</sup>  
 1301                   And with her lover watching, have them cut her throat.

## Act V

### Scene i

Anthenor, Luciane, Aristide

ANTHENOR

1302                   So close to yet another precious benefit,<sup>94</sup>  
 1303                   Your desire's fruition, of your hopes the surfeit,  
 1304                   At such a high degree of glory and of favour,  
 1305                   What is the cause of Aristide's troubled<sup>95</sup> behaviour?  
 1306                   What sudden change occurred to pull your spirits down?  
 1307                   Your gaze turns upward to the sky, you smile and frown,  
 1308                   You sigh.

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**92** “[T]hen and there”: orig. “en ce lieu”.

**93** “[F]or she's sung her last note”: the translation presumes to add this image to the original, where Diocletian simply orders her instant removal (“Dépêchez ... qu'on l'ôte promptement”), so as to link his fearful sense of menace (anticipating his reaction at the play's conclusion) to her lyrical outburst. In this context, to cut her throat is not merely to punish but specifically to silence her.

**94** Orig. “Si proche d'ajouter à tant de récompenses”. The translation employs “precious” ironically to recall Aristide's previous attitude; cf. above IV.iv.1195.

**95** “[T]roubled”: orig. “rêveur” (lit. “dreamy”), but the sense here extends to serious disquiet.

## ARISTIDE

Alas!

## ANTHENOR

So what can be the explanation

1309 Of your manifesting such a great alteration?  
 1310 Destiny, which once hard against you barred the gate,<sup>96</sup>  
 1311 Now harbours towards you neither anger nor hate,  
 1312 Its fondness such, by the gods' generosity,  
 1313 That others are jealous of your prosperity.  
 1314 To complete your happiness, what else would be due?  
 1315 The Emperor holds you dear; Luciane loves you,  
 1316 For indeed that object divine of your affections  
 1317 Responds with ardour to your amorous intentions.<sup>97</sup>  
 1318 What then is causing your uneasiness of mind,  
 1319 Which so out of keeping with your fortune we find?  
 1320 Please, dear Aristide, at least our worries dispel:  
 1321 Do it for Anthenor, and Luciane as well.

## ARISTIDE

1322 Oh, how ridiculous is your request, and vain!  
 1323 Can you be unaware of the cause of my pain?  
 1324 The arrows that wounded me—have they passed you by?  
 1325 Your actress comrade<sup>98</sup>—O gods!—is about to die,  
 1326 And he whose charms you were accustomed to revere  
 1327 Goes with her to death, and in your eyes not a tear.  
 1328 O heavens, let the slightest fillip change our fate,  
 1329 If it can't for one morning keep a constant state!  
 1330 And so, then, splendid Genest and rare Pamphilie,  
 1331 They let you die—what's more, forget you instantly!  
 1332 And by traits of cowardice I cannot endure,  
 1333 My weeping to see you perish attracts their censure.  
 1334 I'm even expected a joyful brow to show.

**96** As pointed out by Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 134, Anthenor alludes to the marginal existence of the players prior to their installation as favoured courtiers.

**97** Since there has been no previous mention of this relationship (Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 135), it is implicitly presented as accompanying the actors' accession to new status and wealth.

**98** "[C]omrade actress": orig. "compagne".



1335 But before you see Heaven's lightning launch a blow  
 1336 And pierce with its dread bolts this insensible heart,  
 1337 Let me never seem to play such an unkind part.  
 1338 No, no—this heart aims high<sup>99</sup> but is not barbarous,  
 1339 And the fate of those from whom they now will sever us  
 1340 Is too atrociously appalling not to shock  
 1341 With more grief than might be expected from a rock.<sup>100</sup>

## LUCIANE

1342 Indeed, these sentiments great tenderness distill,  
 1343 Expressed, unless I mistake, with all the more skill  
 1344 Because today they can hide, in such able fashion,  
 1345 Beneath a mask of pity your ruse and your passion.  
 1346 But it's in vain, ingrate, that your soul, so ill-  
                     tuned,<sup>101</sup>  
 1347 Hopes to conceal from me the dart that dealt its wound.  
 1348 Your alteration only makes me too aware  
 1349 Of the cause of your flame, and so of your despair.  
 1350 When strokes as sharp as that afflict a heart with pain,  
 1351 It's difficult indeed to suffer and to feign;  
 1352 The tongue from time to time may maintain a disguise,  
 1353 But when it falls silent, speech still comes through the  
                     eyes,  
 1354 And the heart, overwhelmed by the heat of its flame,  
 1355 By its sighs manifests those wounds that the soul maim.

## ANTHENOR

1356 So it once was that, when I dared not to declare  
 1357 My ardour, which sent endless sighs into the air,  
 1358 My eyes and my transports gave you a way to see,  
 1359 Much better than my speeches, what you caused to be.

99 “[T]his heart aims high”: orig. “ce cœur est grand” – in the sense of being ambitious (Bourqui et de Reyff, eds, n. 137).

100 Ll. 1340-41: orig. “Est trop infortuné pour ne pas arracher / Des regrets qu'ils pourraient attendre d'un Rocher”. The expression is elliptical, but Anthenor's bitter irony at the expense of his fellow actors is clear.

101 “[I]ll-tuned”: orig. “insensé”.

## LUCIANE

1360             So it once was that your falsely pretended passions  
1361             Deceived my simple innocence, and my affections.<sup>102</sup>  
1362             So it once was that Luciane, fooled by trickery,  
1363             Was nothing to your mind but a theme of mockery,  
1364             While in secret your heart, firmly anchored elsewhere,  
1365             On another beauty lavished its ardent care.  
1366             But now at last, my reason, in better array,  
1367             Tears off the blindfold that had made me lose my way,  
1368             And if in my breast any spark I still detect,  
1369             I will reserve its ardour for some other object.  
1370             Love, love, unfaithful man, love your Pamphilie—go!  
1371             Even when she is dead, the chain that links you follow,  
1372             And if for one fair deed your cowardice leaves room,  
1373             Go, unhappy lover, and join her in the tomb!  
1374             Go—what stops you? If you think you’ll surprise me,  
                            don’t!

## ANTHENOR

1375             Oh, Madam, listen.

## LUCIANE

  I can’t bear to hear—I won’t!  
1376             I’ve had more than my fill of that treacherous discourse,  
1377             Which formerly infused my heart with loving force,  
1378             And which, in the wake of too evident an outrage,  
1379             Produces there at present bitter spite and rage.  
1380             But follow me, you traitor, you’ll grasp my intent.  
1381             Up till now you’ve had only one loss to lament;  
1382             Soon you will be able for another to pine:  
1383             You know the fate of one; come and discover mine.  
1384             And if, as you maintain, your heart is nobly great,  
1385             Come and, with one bold blow, both of us imitate!  
1386             Adieu. [*Exit Luciane.*]

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**102** The rhyme “passions”/“affections” (identical in French) is present in the original.

## Scene ii

Aristide, Anthenor

## ARISTIDE

What thunderbolt upon my soul has burst!<sup>103</sup>

1387 So, then, for a simple plaint that my lips traversed  
 1388 And some sentiments, fully justified, of pity,  
 1389 Drawn out of my heart by long-standing amity,  
 1390 Luciane will—good gods!—as faithless me berate?  
 1391 Wait for Aristide, ungrateful beauty, just wait,  
 1392 And his heart torn out, which you accuse wrongfully,  
 1393 Will by my<sup>104</sup> death cause you at least my love to see.  
 1394 But I call in vain; let's follow the fugitive  
 1395 And disabuse her, or otherwise cease to live.  
 1396 Come on!<sup>105</sup>

## ANTHENOR

Oh, restrain this transport for your own sake;

1397 Let this flowing torrent pass by and rage forsake.  
 1398 Her pride swells ever higher, the more it's opposed,  
 1399 And to greater violence you'll find it disposed.  
 1400 Allow her turbulence the chance to take its ease;  
 1401 You will see these towering waves themselves appease  
 1402 And bring, in succession to this furious storm,  
 1403 A calm which greater happiness for you will form,  
 1404 Proceeding from a mind subservient to reason  
 1405 And not a flood of passions produced out of season.

## ARISTIDE

1406 Oh, that cruel one!—you don't know to what extent  
 1407 She has a proud, unfeeling, haughty temperament:

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**103** The image ironically recalls the heavenly punishment he anticipated if he failed to lament the fate of Pamphilie; cf. above, V.i.1335-36.

**104** The shift from third- to first-person here, an apparent mark of emotional agitation, is confirmed by both early texts; cf. Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 139.

**105** “[C]ome on”: orig. “Allons”; by rhetorical convention, he is probably exhorting himself as much as his companion, especially in putting his life on the line, but the following sequence confirms that he wants Anthenor's support.

1408 She will not let herself be tamed so easily;  
 1409 That disdain of hers will feed her hostility  
 1410 And doubtless provide her with certain confirmation  
 1411 Of all she believes that bolsters my denigration.  
 1412 Therefore, let's go, the more so because in this furor  
 1413 I don't wish to show myself before the Emperor.  
 1414 Here he comes. Quick, then!

ANTHENOR

Come on.

[*Exeunt.*]

### Scene iii

Diocletian, Rutilius, *and attendants*

DIOCLETIAN

So, Rutilius,

1415 The tortures have proved but of little use to us,  
 1416 And that desperate man bears without murmuring  
 1417 All that, short of death, one's capable of enduring?

RUTILIUS

1418 Yes, Caesar. All the torments he endures and slights;  
 1419 You'd say that in his heart he treats them as delights—  
 1420 Indeed that, with his blood gushing forth on all sides,  
 1421 Within a blissful bath amid pleasures he glides.  
 1422 There is no torment known that we have not employed:  
 1423 All he suffered, looking as if all were enjoyed.  
 1424 Both the flame and the iron that tore his flesh loose  
 1425 Could not force him the tiniest sigh to produce.  
 1426 His courage grows with his torments and stature gains;  
 1427 The torturers, more than he, are moved by his pains;  
 1428 And while everyone pities or weeps for his fate,  
 1429 He alone sees his death prepared, and gazes straight.

## DIOCLETIAN

1430 No doubt he is provided with strength by his charms.<sup>106</sup>  
 1431 But how did Pamphilie react amid these harms?

## RUTILIUS

1432 Is there, for me to tell, or you to hear, a way?  
 1433 I'm forced either to displease you, or disobey,  
 1434 And I fear, O Caesar, that my obedience  
 1435 May obligate me here to commit an offence,  
 1436 If a painful tale must make you visualise  
 1437 A spectacle at which I scarce could trust my eyes.  
 1438 But hear of an occurrence, since it is your pleasure,  
 1439 That is novel and unheard of in all of nature.  
 1440 According to the orders and decree you sent,  
 1441 Our criminals, already led to punishment,  
 1442 With torturers and populace following there,  
 1443 Were displayed one after the other in the square,  
 1444 When Genest, turning his eyes on every side,  
 1445 Rested his glances on Pamphilie, whom he spied,  
 1446 Who, without seeming troubled or at all affected,  
 1447 Mutually to him in turn her sight directed.  
 1448 These silent exchanges between spirits most agile<sup>107</sup>  
 1449 Having taken their voices' place a certain while,  
 1450 Then paused, so permitting within the tongue's full reach  
 1451 The power to proffer loudly this woeful speech:  
 1452 "See, O resplendent conqueror," said Pamphilie,  
 1453 "See, my dear love, if my courage is failing me.  
 1454 See if I tremble, as I look death in the eye:  
 1455 No, no, I fear nothing; together let us die.  
 1456 And since we shall be joined above in sacred union,<sup>108</sup>  
 1457 Let our blood, shed on this dear scaffold in profusion,  
 1458 Sign the contract and serve as the initial pledge  
 1459 We will have given in surety of our marriage.  
 1460 In the place of rich jewels, we'll have these chains

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**106** Cf. above, IV.iv.1222 and n. 81.

**107** "[S]pirits most agile": orig. "esprits plus adroits"; the wording suggests a literal and active meeting of minds in the space between them.

**108** "[S]acred union": orig. "saint Hymen", according to the familiar metonymy.

instead;

1461 These grim preparations make our delightful bed,  
 1462 The torturers to officiate and this presence  
 1463 To furnish ornament, pomp and magnificence.”  
 1464 At these words, her lover, his face perfect composure,  
 1465 Replied with a glance, and towards her made a gesture  
 1466 Signifying clearly just how much he approved  
 1467 Of that haughty<sup>109</sup> figure, astoudingly unmoved.  
 1468 At last, when both had been prepared for their ordeal,  
 1469 We saw them vie with each other first pain to feel  
 1470 And, as in a combat full of honour and glory,  
 1471 Dispute between them that sorrowful victory  
 1472 Whose bloody effect stuns the spirit through the eyes,  
 1473 And of which death is at once the end and the prize.<sup>110</sup>  
 1474 First, to strike fear into that arrogant young thing,  
 1475 The executioner raised a torch fiercely burning,  
 1476 Then finally to Genest directed his aim,  
 1477 Pitilessly to his body applied the flame:  
 1478 The fire caught, produced such pitiful<sup>111</sup> effect  
 1479 That all were touched by it—except that victim abject,  
 1480 Who with lively ardour, although half burnt alive,  
 1481 Instead of dying from it, seemed rather to thrive:  
 1482 The torturers lost heart, we wondered at the sight.

#### DIOCLETIAN

1483 And in my heart I'm perishing from rage and spite<sup>112</sup>  
 1484 That I cannot strangle him with my own hands' force!

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**109** “[H]aughty”: orig. “superbe” – Rutilius’ evocation of her overweening pride (cf. below, ll. 1474 and 1504-5) coexists with his admiration despite himself.

**110** With the torture sequence that follows, cf. *Rotrou*, III.ii.741-48 and V.vii.1731-38.

**111** The keynote of pity is likewise repeated in ll. 1477-78 of the original (“sans pitié”, “pitoyable”).

**112** L. 1483: orig. “Et je crève en mon cœur de dépit et de rage” – once again, recognisably the language of the mystery play devils. Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 145, signal a grammatical ambiguity in the relation between this and the following line, which they prefer to take as a separate exclamation (“Oh, I wish I could...!”). The diabolic echo emerges more strongly, however, if Diocletian’s inward fury is intimately linked to his actual impotence, as a reminder that the devil has no power over the truly faithful, whose model is the suffering Christ himself.

## RUTILIUS

1485 After the fire, to iron they had recourse:  
 1486 A soldier with the hooks of steel<sup>113</sup> into him tore,  
 1487 As he dragged them covered himself with spouting gore.  
 1488 But the self-same colour, as all was turned to red,  
 1489 The stupefied crowd in different ways affected:  
 1490 Some were stricken with pity to the very soul;  
 1491 Motions of fear or horror over others stole;  
 1492 And among so many transfixed to that degree,  
 1493 The guilty one remained unmoved—and only he.  
 1494 Seeing that our actions on that side were in vain,  
 1495 We subjected that ingrate to new forms of pain,  
 1496 And in order still harsher torment to impart  
 1497 Sought by way of his eyes to penetrate his heart.  
 1498 But that tactic to no avail did we employ:  
 1499 Pamphilie, like him, did nothing but thrill with joy,  
 1500 And, viewing the torturers' approach without horror,  
 1501 Did her best by her speeches to excite their furor.  
 1502 You would say that initially that beauty charmed them,  
 1503 That despite their severity her grace<sup>114</sup> disarmed them,  
 1504 And that the dauntless pride apparent in her aspect,  
 1505 Far from angering them, inspired their respect.  
 1506 Still, their duty (or my voice) dispelled that vain  
                                 whim,  
 1507 And, transforming their divinity to a victim,  
 1508 One of them raised his arm and dealt a sudden stroke  
 1509 Able the end of her life—and spell<sup>115</sup>—to provoke.  
 1510 Genest burned with impatience, longing her to follow;  
 1511 He said that to live was the worst pain he could know,  
 1512 And I believe, Caesar, that he was quite sincere.  
 1513 What's more, should he not die, he'll be a source of

**113** “[H]ooks of steel”: orig. “ongles d’acier” – a standard instrument of torture, usually “de fer” (“of iron”). See *Le trésor de la langue française* (online at <<http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>> [accessed 26 March 2023]), *s.v.* “ongle”, def. B.1.

**114** “[G]race”: orig. “grâce”, no doubt with unintended spiritual resonance.

**115** “[S]pell”: orig. “sort”, which might mean “fate” or “destiny” but in the context must refer mockingly to the magical effect she momentarily seemed to exert, and which ironically signals her true spiritual power, in keeping with the evocation of Christ’s passion in l. 1527. On this sense of “sort”, see *Le trésor de la langue française*, *s.v.*, def. E. Cf. above, IV.iv.1222 and n. 81, and below, V.iv.1527.

fear:  
1514 I'm afraid that his constancy just might incense  
1515 The people in the end to acts of violence.  
1516 That is the occasion that has brought me here now.

## DIOCLETIAN

1517 Return and finish him right away, anyhow.  
1518 See that Rome is delivered from that pestilence  
1519 Before our state suffers some dire consequence.  
1520 Go.

## RUTILIUS

I obey, my Lord. [Exit Rutilius.]

## Scene iv

Diocletian, and attendants

## DIOCLETIAN

So, then, this stark-mad race  
1521 Prefer to have their throats cut in the public place  
1522 Than to worship our gods and my pardon implore,  
1523 And amid the delights untroubled days<sup>116</sup> outpour,  
1524 To live pampered with pleasures, honours and possessions.  
1525 Ye gods, what stirs these Christians with such crazed  
obsessions?  
1526 They pour out their blood, simply throw away their lives,  
1527 And, impiously charmed, so that their false hope thrives,  
1528 By no torturing, no torment of any kind  
1529 Can they be torn from delusion and made less blind.  
1530 Yet we must either their audacity outface  
1531 Or down to the last of them extinguish the race.  
1532 But what does Aquilinus want? He seems distraught.

[Enter Aquilinus.]

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116 “[U]ntroubled days”: orig. “bonace”, whose literal meaning was calm weather at sea.





1557 A spectacle of horror, tenderness and fright.  
 1558 Luciane, by some profound inner wound distressed,  
 1559 Plunged into the Tiber just where the bridge is highest;  
 1560 Her body, some while tossed by the waves' revolutions,  
 1561 Caused the birth, though quite dead, of other  
                     resolutions:<sup>117</sup>  
 1562 Aristide, devastated when he saw she'd perished—  
 1563 She whom, even as dearly as himself, he cherished—  
 1564 Sought to share her destiny, and by a like blow  
 1565 To find within those waters his own death below.  
 1566 Anthenor foresaw his funereal intent,  
 1567 With feeble vigour<sup>118</sup> tried his furor to prevent,  
 1568 But since bodily strength with furor must accrue,  
 1569 The despair of one alone carried off the two:  
 1570 Grappled together they tumbled into the waves;  
 1571 Their fall caused to gape open deep watery caves,  
 1572 Which, having three times swallowed them, three times up-  
                     cast,  
 1573 Stifled forever their living spirits at last.  
 1574 That is what I saw. Judge whether it is possible  
 1575 To see such misfortune and remain insensible;  
 1576 No, Caesar, and anyone with a heart and eyes  
 1577 At such prodigies must feel strong pity arise.

DIOCLETIAN

1578 This strange occurrence, I will readily confess,  
 1579 To the most hardened soul would have caused much  
                     distress,  
 1580 And a barbarian's heart, challenged in such fashion,  
 1581 Would have echoed your sentiment and your compassion.  
 1582 But forget, Aquilinus, that pity so tender,  
 1583 Which towards a few subjects you could not but render,

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**117** “[R]esolutions”: orig. “complots”, which here cannot carry its usual modern sense of “conspiracy” and so must retain its more neutral medieval meaning of “Accord, engagement entre plusieurs personnes” (*Dictionnaire du moyen français [1330-1500]*, online at <<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/complot>>, def. B; accessed 25 March 2023).

**118** “[F]eeble vigour”: orig. “la vigour qui lui reste”/“his remaining vigour”. Anthenor, of course, as the actor who played Genest’s father, is an older man.

1584 And reserve your voice, your sighs and your lamentations  
 1585 Henceforth for pitying my flood of tribulations.  
 1586 Yes, keep your store of pity wholly for my fate:  
 1587 It could not have more matter more appropriate,  
 1588 Since those whom heaven regards with a hostile eye  
 1589 Comparison may deem more fortunate than I.  
 1590 Yes, despite grandeur, all pomp Rome bestows and can,  
 1591 I now know, Aquilinus, that I am a man—  
 1592 But a man abandoned, an outcast vilified,  
 1593 A man by whom men and the gods are horrified.

#### AQUILINUS

1594 What is this you're saying, my Lord? What pain so strong,  
 1595 Afflicting you so, could suddenly come along?  
 1596 All fear you, all bow down, all venerate your law:  
 1597 You alone are held by the Queen of Kings<sup>119</sup> in awe.  
 1598 Banish far from you, then, this soul-infecting care:  
 1599 The throne is a sanctuary—no fear comes there.  
 1600 The whole world's eyes upon you all dangers disperse:  
 1601 You could perish only with all the universe.

#### DIOCLETIAN

1602 Oh, to cure me of the ill that has me in thrall,  
 1603 How little serves flattering speech, or not at all!  
 1604 And how, to pull me free from the pains I'm now tasting,  
 1605 My subjects, in their efforts, those efforts are wasting!  
 1606 In vain I wield a sceptre, in vain was I crowned;  
 1607 In vain do great throngs follow me, and me surround;  
 1608 In vain am I a monarch who gains victories,  
 1609 If in my heart already lurk all my enemies—  
 1610 If I feel cruel war raging within my soul,  
 1611 If I myself rebel against my own control,  
 1612 And if I must drag along with me everywhere  
 1613 Horror and frightfulness, self-reproach and despair.  
 1614 All seems to me fatal, carrying deadly sense:  
 1615 Days streaked with lightning, air tainted with

---

119 "Queen of Kings" – i.e., Rome (Bourqui and de Reyff, eds, n. 149).

pestilence;

1616 The sky red with fires, with blood the earth red, too;  
 1617 The sun lacking its light and its placement askew.  
 1618 Gods! Do you not see those terrible ghosts surround me,  
 1619 Who pour out their horrible howlings all around me?  
 1620 Do you hear those long-drawn-out groanings, as I do,  
 1621 Whose mournful accents with gloom my feelings imbue?  
 1622 Oh rage, oh despair, oh pain that is killing me!  
 1623 But what new star, bright in that cloud, is this I see?  
 1624 What divinity more beautiful than the day  
 1625 Still deigns in this dark place to send its light this  
   way?

1626 Oh, my pain is eased, my fear slips from memory;  
 1627 Heaven!—I see Genest and with him Pamphilie:  
 1628 Countless beautiful objects both of them surround;  
 1629 Each bears a palm in the hand; both of them are crowned.<sup>120</sup>  
 1630 Dear shadows, pardon, and from the sky where you dwell,  
 1631 Calm the horrible tempests that my spirit swell.  
 1632 I was cruel towards you, and by my fury stirred,  
 1633 But amongst our gods you shall from this time be numbered.  
 1634 For you both I shall raise up illustrious<sup>121</sup> tombs  
 1635 Whose tops will touch the vaults of heaven's starry rooms  
 1636 And serve as a sign and witness for ages hence  
 1637 Both of my repentance and of your innocence.  
 1638 But alas! At once those bright images are torn  
 1639 From me, despair returns and my fears are reborn.  
 1640 O gods, unjust gods, who my troubles contemplate,  
 1641 Who see my torments and the horror of my state,  
 1642 Moderate, you cruel ones, the pains I endure:  
 1643 I avenged your altars, acted your wounds to cure.  
 1644 Then if you don't wish to be believed powerless,  
 1645 You must appease the agony of my distress.

---

**120** The traditional signs of martyrdom in Diocletian's vision contrast with his futile symbols of earthly victory and monarchy in ll. 1606-9 above. On the palm in particular, see M. Hassett, "Palm in Christian Symbolism", *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), New Advent, online at <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11432a.htm>> (accessed 25 March 2023).

**121** "[I]llustrious": orig. "illustres" – with an evocation, inevitably, of the "illustre comédien" and the "illustre théâtre".

1646

But if, unrighteous gods, my death at last is due,

1647

Finish with your torments, with haste my end pursue.

END





Scène  
Européenne

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Traductions  
introuvables

## Two French Tragedies of Saint Genest

*The Famous Actor or The Martyrdom  
of Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Nicolas Mary, sieur Desfontaines

*The Veritable Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
by Jean de Rotrou

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Translated, with Introduction and Notes,  
by Richard Hillman

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## Référence électronique

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# Translation

*The Veritable Saint Genest: Tragedy*  
*by Jean de Rotrou*

**Richard Hillman**  
CESR - Université de Tours

The Veritable Saint Genest: Tragedy

By

Jean de Rotrou

*Actors*<sup>1</sup>

Diocletian, Emperor  
 Maximian, Emperor<sup>2</sup>  
 Valérie, daughter of Diocletian  
 Camille, companion of Valérie  
 Plutianus,<sup>3</sup> Prefect  
 Genest, actor  
 Marcèle, actress  
 Octavius, actor  
 Sergestus, actor  
 Lentulus, actor  
 Albinus, actor  
 Decorator  
 Jailer  
 Page

[Roles within the tragedy of Adrian:]

Adrian, represented by Genest  
 Natalie, represented by Marcèle  
 Flavius, represented by Sergestus  
 Maximian, represented by Octavius  
 Anthimus, represented by Lentulus  
 Guard, represented by Albinus  
 Jailer, represented by Albinus  
 Soldiers and Guards

Scene: Nicomedia<sup>4</sup>

- 
- 1** Orig. “Acteurs”, which carries special resonance, given the play-within-the-play.
- 2** Maximian: orig. “Maximin” – historically, Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus, in 293 C.E. created “Caesar” of the East, with Constantius as “Caesar” of the West, as members of the Tetrarchy founded by Diocletian with his co-emperor Maximianus (see below, n. 8). He was eventually made emperor in his turn, but he had originally been a shepherd like his father and was nicknamed “Armentarius” (from *armentum*, “herd”). On his elevation to the rank of Caesar, Diocletian gave him his daughter Valeria in marriage. (See below, I.i.13-18.) On the historical persons and events, see *OCD* under individual names. Maximian is more generally known to historians as Galerius, but I prefer a version closer to Rotrou’s Maximin.
- 3** So identified in the first martyrological accounts. See Matthieu Pignot, *Cult of Saints*, E02497 – online at <<http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02497>>, *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database; accessed 26 March 2023), as well as Surius, p. 917. “Plancien” (perhaps due to a transcription error?) is the form from the earliest narratives in French (notably that of Ribadeneira, as translated by René Gaultier).
- 4** Nicomedia: city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), the site of numerous martyrdoms at the hands of Maximian (Rotrou’s Maximin), including that of Adrian (i.e., Hadrian), who was a member of the Herculian Guard at the time of his conversion. Cf. below, I.v.305-6 and n. 22. As for the staging,

# Act I

## Scene i

Valérie, Camille

CAMILLE

1           What, can you not overcome a fear that is vain?  
2           A dream, a mere vapour, is the cause of your pain—  
3           You, to whom heaven all its treasures has consigned,  
4           In such a worthy body placed a worthy mind?

VALÉRIE

5           The first of the Caesars learnt all too well that dreams  
6           Are not always false, nor always the lies one deems,  
7           And the strength of mind he proudly took as his mainstay,  
8           Because he trusted it, cost him the light of day.<sup>5</sup>  
9           Heaven may please to speak without an obstacle:  
10          It may make the voice of a dream its oracle.  
11          And dreams—the more so if the same message one brings—  
12          Often, if not always, deliver truthful things.  
13          Already five or six nights to my dismal thought  
14          The vision of that degrading marriage have brought,  
15          Showing me a shepherd with an arrogant leer  
16          Pretending to my bed, which would then be my bier,  
17          And the Emperor my father, with violence,  
18          Seconding his presumption and his insolence.  
19          I may, with due permission—and if verity  
20          Allows to children some measure of liberty—  
21          Fear I'll receive an ill-tempered ill-turn from him:  
22          I recognise his love, but also fear his whim,  
23          And see that at each meeting he blindly obeys

---

Pasquier specifies (Introduction, p. 161) that the decor required reflects a transition between the heterogeneity of the baroque period and the rigid unity of strict neo-classicism: a relatively complex “petit théâtre” within the “grand théâtre” would have served for the play-within-the-play, with its several locales and special effects, while the prison-scene (V.ii) would have been managed using one section of the palace, probably with barred windows.

5 Julius Caesar notoriously refused to trust in the dream of his wife Calpurnia, which foretold his imminent assassination in the Senate.

24 The impetuous heat that his first motion sways.  
 25 Was he himself able to realise, when he married,  
 26 What yoke his crowned head, now subjected, thenceforth  
     carried?—  
 27 When, as Emperor, he sold his state and his bed  
 28 For the price of a soldier's bit of borrowed bread<sup>6</sup>  
 29 And, in a moment of weakness unparalleled,  
 30 Joined my mother to the world empire he held?  
 31 Rome has since then suffered this, and has not upbraided  
 32 His calling Alcides, lest Atlas bear unaided,<sup>7</sup>  
 33 Or seeing the universe with two sovereigns,  
 34 Maximianus<sup>8</sup> called upon to share the reins.  
 35 But why, for just one, so many masters diverse,  
 36 Four heads for the sole body of the universe?  
 37 The choice of Maximian and Constantius—  
 38 Was the state to so great degree necessitous  
 39 It was reduced to seeking in extremity,  
 40 For its survival, their strength and authority?  
 41 Each in a different way degrades his memory:  
 42 One by his negligence, the other by his glory.  
 43 Maximian, such warlike deeds achieving now,  
 44 Seems to purloin my father's laurels from his brow;  
 45 While Constantius, bearing an enemy's slight,  
 46 Upon the selfsame brow imprints the shame outright.  
 47 Thus, in making neither his good nor his bad choice

6 Orig.: "Le prix de quelques pains qu'il emprunta soldat" (lit. "The price of some bread he borrowed when a soldier"). Contemptuously evoked are Diocletian's humble origins and service as a simple soldier before rising through the ranks to the ultimate status of emperor. As pointed out by Pasquier, ed., n. 5, the reference is to an episode in the first part of Lope's *Lo Fingido verdadero*, in which the offer of bread to Diocleciano by a peasant woman is eventually recompensed by marriage to her; there is some irony in Rotrou's adoption of her name, Camila, for Valérie's waiting-woman.

7 Alcides, another name for Hercules/Heraclès, who temporarily relieved the burden of the giant Atlas (upholding the heavens) in the course of performing his eleventh labour (obtaining the golden apples of the Hesperides).

8 Maximianus: orig. "Maximian", i.e., Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus, first designated as "Caesar" by Diocletian (284 C.E.), then, as co-Emperor, receiving Constantius as his "Caesar" (293 C.E.); see *OCD*, s.v. He is quite distinct from the play's Maximian/Maximin (see above, n. 2, and Pasquier, ed., Introduction, p. 171, n. 34). Pasquier, ed., n. 8, is surely right in attributing the slighting of Constantius (orig. "Constance") in this passage to rhetorical imperatives rather than historical accuracy: cf. *OCD*, s.v. "Constantius (Chlorus)", where he is judged "an able general and a generous and merciful ruler".

48 Did he follow a rational counselling voice,  
 49 And, all things deciding by his capricious will,  
 50 He neither foresaw the success nor feared the ill.

CAMILLE

51 You are too quickly alarmed, and this cogitation  
 52 Is far from grounding your fear on a just foundation.  
 53 When Diocletian to that rank raised up your mother  
 54 Which the universe reveres above any other,  
 55 His rank, because he shared it, did not bend from it,  
 56 And he, in raising her, did not descend from it;  
 57 So, he could reconcile his honour and his passion,  
 58 And, since his men chose him, could marry in his fashion.  
 59 His partners in reigning may be of any sort—  
 60 He is of his estates the most solid support:  
 61 If they are sailors, by whom this great fleet is manned,  
 62 He is at the helm, as its pilot in command,  
 63 And only involves them in such exalted things  
 64 In order to see Caesars as his underlings.  
 65 You see how a ghost's, dream's or chimera's distractions  
 66 Cause you to misinterpret a father's fine actions,  
 67 And you suffer from an importunate surmise,  
 68 Sprung just from where your tranquillity should arise.

VALÉRIE

69 I won't set myself, by any wilful behaviour,  
 70 Against your own sentiments in my father's favour,  
 71 And to oppose a father, a child must be wrong,<sup>9</sup>  
 72 But will you answer it is Fate that is headstrong?  
 73 This insolent monarch, who all the world enjoys,  
 74 With all its sovereigns, like bits of glass—mere toys,  
 75 Gives up some power, then, when he has had enough:  
 76 Does he not, as he formed them, make them broken stuff?  
 77 Can he not, if he would see me degenerate,  
 78 Sink the daughter to the mother's first vulgar state,

---

9 L. 71: orig. "Et contre un père enfin un enfant a toujours tort" (lit. "And against a father, in the end, a child is always in the wrong"). The translation allows for the seeming irony.

79 Destroy all his favours by his frivolity  
 80 And finally make my dream a reality?  
 81 It is true that death, against his inconstant moves,  
 82 To great hearts in need sometimes of assistance proves  
 83 And may always brave his power so insolent,  
 84 But although a remedy, it is violent.

## CAMILLE

85 Death holds too much horror to place any hope there,  
 86 But put your hope in heaven, which made you so fair  
 87 And which seems to pour down<sup>10</sup> on you, along with beauty,  
 88 Plentiful signs of power and prosperity.

## Scene ii

The same, a Page

PAGE [*entering*]

89 Madam.

VALÉRIE

Your errand?

PAGE

90 The Emperor as his envoy  
 Sends me to announce he's coming to share his joy.

VALÉRIE

91 At what?

PAGE

92 Don't you know of Maximian's return  
 From those far lands where the sun starts its daily  
 sojourn—  
 93 From their rebellions by his valiant arm reduced,

---

10 “[P]our down”: orig. “influer”, a term commonly associated with astrological influence; see *Le trésor de la langue française* online, *s.v.*, def. 2.

94 And the trophies at the Emperor's feet produced?  
95 Now to your honourable sight he feels impelled. (*Exit.*)

CAMILLE

96 To treat him well by his valour we are compelled;  
97 Do not withhold from him the fruit of victory:  
98 To rob one of glory is greatest thievery.

VALÉRIE

99 My spirit, now stirred by a secret agitation,  
100 Cherishes that emotion's most precious sensation;  
101 And the welcome chance that arrives my thought to flatter  
102 Dissipates my fears, almost all has caused to scatter.  
103 Let our conduct be ruled by the gods good and wise.  
104 (*seeing Maximian*) O heaven, what sweet pain strikes my  
heart through my eyes!

Scene iii

Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille, Plancien, Guards, Soldiers

(*Sound of drums and trumpets.*)

DIOCLETIAN (*kissing the hands of Valérie*)

105 Deploy, Valérie, your attractions and your charms;  
106 Make the Orient's conqueror lay down his arms;  
107 Thanks to him the empire is calm, without foes:  
108 Vanquish that great heart that for us vanquished all  
those.  
109 Load with chains the arm that has dashed many a head;  
110 Make him pay for broad conquests with prison instead.  
111 Already his exploits had earned deservedly  
112 The portion I gave him of my authority,  
113 And his lofty virtue, defect of birth repairing,  
114 Prevailed so that the power of my rule he's sharing.  
115 Today, when for his loss of blood I would him thank,  
116 I can honour him with no more exalted rank;  
117 I owe him my blood, and since my daughter he gains,  
118 A share in ruling my family he obtains.

119                   (*to Maximian*) More than this present, Maximian, is your  
                           due  
 120                   For the enormous service I've received from you;  
 121                   But to give you rewards proportioned to your merits,  
 122                   The Earth too constraining would find its narrow limits,  
 123                   And you have rendered my power without effect,  
 124                   Increased it so you are excluded as its object.

## MAXIMIAN

125                   The part your bounty assigned me in the empire  
 126                   Cannot match, my lord, the fair chains that I desire.  
 127                   All the triumphal arches Rome has raised for me  
 128                   Yield to the place you intend my prison to be,  
 129                   And, conqueror of Indus' shores, from that position  
 130                   I accept with greater content a slave's condition  
 131                   Than you, when, this body left, in the skies you gain  
 132                   That rank among the gods which your virtues attain.  
 133                   But to dare to dream such boldness, so out of place,  
 134                   Is to deserve her disdain instead of her grace;  
 135                   And whatever this arm's deeds, it did not procure  
 136                   Either these grand titles or this dazzling allure,  
 137                   Able to efface extractions from memory:  
 138                   Even as to virtue sole one must grant its glory,  
 139                   Whatever high advantage and resplendent state  
 140                   With which the defect of my blood you mitigate—  
 141                   However much dissembling—one may always say  
 142                   A shepherd to the empire's throne found his way:  
 143                   That hamlets once, not palaces, gave me a home;  
 144                   That formerly he herded flocks who governs Rome;  
 145                   That to take up the sword I left behind the crook;  
 146                   And last, that your construction has a faulty look.<sup>11</sup>  
 147                   May I, with that flaw still in need of reparation,  
 148                   Approach such an object worthy of adoration,  
 149                   Hope the glorious signs of her vows to receive,  
 150                   Pretend a hundred monarchs' best hopes to deceive,  
 151                   Surpass my own expectation, and the gods see

---

11 L. 146: orig. "Et qu'enfin votre ouvrage est une œuvre imparfaite."



152 Rankled, if not with hate, at least with jealousy?

DIOCLETIAN

153 It suffices this is my choice, that I well know  
 154 What qualities your person and your birth both show,  
 155 And that if one does not permit a rank so high,  
 156 The other's virtue can the remedy apply,  
 157 Fills Nature's lack, lifts his inferiority,  
 158 By self-reproduction forms his nobility.  
 159 How many shepherds have the Greeks and Romans seen,  
 160 By dint of their virtue, a sceptre's honour glean?  
 161 History, in which great hearts place most confidence,  
 162 Which, unlike all else, Time handles with reverence;  
 163 Which, because it fears nothing, nothing can respect;  
 164 Which appears unadorned and whose speech is direct—  
 165 Has it not a hundred times the high praises sung  
 166 Of those whose merit drew them from mire and dung,  
 167 Who by their efforts their names have illuminated  
 168 And have climbed to the rank where we are now instated?  
 169 Cyrus, Semiramis, his famous enemy<sup>12</sup>—  
 170 Names that are still today revered in memory;  
 171 Lycastus, Parrhasio<sup>13</sup>—a thousand diverse  
 172 Who in ancient times reigned over the universe;  
 173 And recently, again, in Rome, Vitellius,  
 174 Gordian, Pertinax, Macrin, Aurelian, Probus<sup>14</sup>—  
 175 Did they not rise to it, and with the selfsame hands  
 176 Direct their flocks and to men deliver commands?

**12** “[H]is famous enemy”: orig. “sa fameuse adversaire”; the feminine confirms that the reference is to Semiramis as the enemy of Cyrus, but while Cyrus (“the Great”) conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E., insofar as the legendary personage of Semiramis (supposed founder of Babylon raised by shepherds) had any historical basis, the reference must be to a figure who reigned in the 8th cent. B.C.E. See *OCD*, *s.v.*

**13** The story of the twins Lycastus and Parrhasio in Greek mythology, whose myth as founders of Arcadia parallels that of Romulus and Remus, may be found in Plutarch, *Greek and Roman Parallel Stories, Moralia*, ed. and trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1936), 4, para. 36 (online at <<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plut.+Para.+36&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0219:boo=0:chapter=0&highlight=Lycastus>>; accessed 15 December 2022).

**14** Ll. 173-74: the list is of humbly born Roman emperors of the post-classical period, although not all had actually been shepherds; see *OCD* under individual names.

177 And lastly I myself, I who, of birth obscure,  
178 Owe my sceptre to myself, not a whit to nature,  
179 Am I not right to think, in my honour's full flood,  
180 That merit lies in the man and not in the blood,  
181 To have shared my power with him who swelled its girth  
182 And have chosen the person instead of the birth?  
183 (*to Valérie*) You, dear fruit of my bed, fair prize  
    of his great deeds,  
184 If your brow does not deceive, approval it reads,  
185 And all the joyful feeling that love may impress  
186 Upon the brow of a girl in love—but a princess—  
187 There with due wisdom shows the signs that my election  
188 Is found to be a worthy object of your passion.<sup>15</sup>

## VALÉRIE

189 The chosen one so rare—what's more, my father's  
    choice—  
190 My taste would be perverse, should I deny his voice.  
191 Yes, my lord, I approve, and bless the friendly warning<sup>16</sup>  
192 Of a happy occurrence, which I feared this morning.  
193 (*turning towards Camille*) My dream explains itself: in  
    this great man I wed  
194 A shepherd, it is true, but one now at Rome's head.  
195 The dream made me afraid: I rejoice at the outcome,  
196 And what was then my fear is finally most welcome.

MAXIMIAN (*kissing her hand*)

197 O gracious decree, which overwhelms me with glory,  
198 And makes of my prison my greatest victory!

## CAMILLE

199 Thus often heaven brings all to such an event  
200 That what one fears occurs, yet proves quite innocent,  
201 And the object of fear at last is pleasant seen.

---

15 The rhyme “election”/“passion” is in the original (words identical).

16 “[F]riendly warning”: orig. “destin”.

## Scene iv

The same, a Page

PAGE [*entering*]

202 Genest is waiting, my Lord, and extremely keen  
203 To present the wishes due to your majesties.

DIOCLETIAN

204 Let him enter. (*Exit Page.*)

CAMILLE (*to Valérie*)

205 To complete your prosperities!  
For however great your happiness is, his art,  
206 To perfect it, must play, it somehow seems, a part.  
207 Madam, procure for us this source of merriment,  
208 Whose attractions are so charming<sup>17</sup> in your own judgement.

## Scene v

Genest, Diocletian, Maximian, Plutianus,  
Valérie, Camille, Guards, Soldiers

GENEST [*entering*]

209 If among your subjects a fortune all too base  
210 Permits one in the common rejoicing a place,  
211 And to share these common desires in some measure,  
212 If not to your glory, then to your tastes in pleasure,  
213 Do not consider it wrong, O generous monarchs,  
214 That our affection produces for you its marks,  
215 And that from my companions, by my means, proceeds,  
216 Not a file of pictures speaking of your rare deeds,  
217 Nor that far-famed and celebrated history  
218 Which your fortunate exploits leave in memory  
219 (Since neither the people of Greece nor Rome possesses

---

17 “[S]o charming”: orig. “si charmant” – a term that ironically suggests supernatural influence. The suggestion matches Camille’s intuition in l. 206 that the performance “somehow seems” necessary (“Sembler en quelque façon vous être nécessaire”).

220 A learned enough hand to set down those successes),  
 221 But at least some effort by which we hope to state  
 222 We have lightened for you the empire's great weight  
 223 And, by what our art offers of its charms most fair,  
 224 Have ravished you a moment from your heavy care.

DIOCLETIAN

225 Genest, I am grateful for your care; and the rite,  
 226 On the fair day my daughter and this prince unite,  
 227 And which raises our joy to such a high degree,  
 228 Would be lacking with no stroke of your artistry.  
 229 The theatre, today made famous by your merits,  
 230 To share this noble pleasure strongly us solicits,  
 231 And as it is cannot, without ingratitude,  
 232 Deny that it must lend its brilliant plenitude.  
 233 Stupefied, I have often known your imitations  
 234 To affect me despite myself with real sensations;  
 235 On all kinds of subjects, as I followed your motions,  
 236 I have gleaned, from your fires, genuine emotions;  
 237 And the empery<sup>18</sup> that over a soul you claim  
 238 Has a hundred times made me ice, as often flame.  
 239 By your art, the heroes—rather resuscitated,  
 240 Indeed, than just represented and imitated—  
 241 Some hundred or thousand years since their funerals,  
 242 Again go on progresses and triumph in battles,  
 243 And put their famous names to the order law brings:  
 244 You make me the sole master of a thousand kings!  
 245 The comic, in which your art has equal success,  
 246 Is such a powerful remedy against sadness  
 247 That one word, when it pleases you, one step, one action,  
 248 Denies any foothold whatever to that passion<sup>19</sup>  
 249 And, by a striking marvel, with a sudden start,  
 250 By the eye or the ear thrusts joy into the heart.

GENEST

251 By such glory, my Lord, I am so stupefied...

---

**18** “[E]mpery”: orig. “empire”. The double meaning must be kept in the translation.

**19** “[A]ction” and “passion” (French words identical) are likewise rhymed in the original.

## DIOCLETIAN

252 It's well deserved, believe me—that can't be denied.  
 253 But moving on now to authors, tell us what play  
 254 Today on stage commands greatest popular sway,  
 255 Whose pen is most in vogue, and to what noted mind  
 256 Most credit in the circus is justly assigned.

## GENEST

257 Tastes are different, and often a mere caprice,  
 258 Not justice, determines whose credit will increase.

## DIOCLETIAN

259 But still, by what author do you think the prize won?

## GENEST

260 My taste, to tell the truth, is for no recent one:  
 261 Of some three or four, it may be, the memory  
 262 Of future ages will perpetuate the glory;  
 263 But to rate them as equal to those famous playwrights  
 264 Whom timeless adoration will raise to the heights,  
 265 And to regard their works with that same reverence  
 266 With which I view those of a Plautus or a Terence,  
 267 And of those learned Greeks, whose brilliant jewels seem,  
 268 A thousand years on, with living beauty to gleam,  
 269 And whose value, finally, cannot be effaced—  
 270 You would then be lied to, and my judgement disgraced.

## DIOCLETIAN

271 I well know that in their writings art and invention  
 272 Undoubtedly have brought the stage to its perfection,<sup>20</sup>  
 273 But those which we have seen now lack the sweet appeal  
 274 And the sharp prodding that novelty makes us feel.  
 275 And things that grip our minds and eyes, though they  
                   confuse us  
 276 And may well be less finished, will better amuse us.

---

20 The rhyme “invention”/“perfection” (French words identical) is present in the original.

## GENEST

277 Our newest dramatic themes, worthy of Rome's power,  
 278 On which a great man spent many a sleepless hour—  
 279 One for whom the rare fruits the Muse may generate  
 280 Have gained on the stage renown quite legitimate,  
 281 And whose art and esteem are certainly both sound—  
 282 With the proud names Pompey and Augustus resound;<sup>21</sup>  
 283 These priceless works, in which his illustrious hand  
 284 Depicts the Roman spirit with peerless command,  
 285 Will by their beauties make your ears idolaters,  
 286 And are today the soul and passion of our theatres.

## VALÉRIE

287 That they were held in the highest esteem I knew,  
 288 Yet when all's said and done, the subjects are not new,  
 289 And whatever beauty they have, the rarest marvel,  
 290 Once the mind knows it, the ear can no longer dazzle.  
 291 Your art never changes, and your charms as well suit  
 292 Of ancient subjects as of new ones the pursuit;  
 293 But most praised is the inimitable address  
 294 With which you feign a Christian's zeal and joyfulness,  
 295 When, as he strides from baptism his death to meet,  
 296 It seems the fires are flowers beneath his feet.

## MAXIMIAN

297 That is readily ascertained.

## GENEST

It will be easy,

298 If on the stage your name, my Lord, we may use freely;  
 299 The death of Adrian, one of that stubborn crew  
 300 Who were, in your latest decrees, condemned by you,

---

**21** Rotrou here pays a transparent compliment to Pierre Corneille's tragedies *Cinna* and *La Mort de Pompée*; see Forestier, "Le Vritable Saint Genest de Rotrou", p. 309. The compliment, however, plays out ironically at several levels. First, of course, it flaunts its own anachronism. It also hints, chiefly by evoking the representation of Augustus in *Cinna*, at the tyrannic despotism of Diocletian. Finally, the martyr Polyeucte, the epolymous subject of Corneille's great recent triumph (1641), hovers in the background, his historically impossible absence supplied, as Forestier observes, by a foreshadowing of Genest own trajectory and Rotrou's imitations of his predecessor's style

301 You shall see presented with perfect artistry,  
 302 And so little varied from true reality  
 303 That you will accept our exercise of that freedom  
 304 Permitting Caesar's image to Caesar to come,  
 305 And you will wonder if in Nicomedia  
 306 You see the action, or in a *comedia*.<sup>22</sup>

MAXIMIAN

307 Yes, believe me, with pleasure I'll observe each act  
 308 In that action miming the part I play in fact.<sup>23</sup>  
 309 Go, and prepare an effort worthy of that day  
 310 When heaven, by the honour this match must convey,  
 311 Sets, with a stroke posterity will not believe,  
 312 My joy and glory above what I could conceive.

## Act II

### Scene i

Genest, Decorator

*(The théâtre-within-the théâtre opens.)*

GENEST (*dressing, holding his text  
 and considering the theatre-within-the-theatre*)

313 It's handsome enough, but still, with little expense,  
 314 You could do much to add to its magnificence:  
 315 Leave nothing hidden in darkness; put in more light;

---

**22** Genest is clearly playing on words (the original rhymes "Nicomédie" with "comédie") – grim word-play accessible to the audience, given the association of the city with Christian persecutions. In the context, it seems justifiable to convey this portentous "in-joke" by having Genest use the Italian word.

**23** L. 306: orig. "En la même action dont je serai l'acteur". At the same time as the action in the theatre-within-the-theatre is anticipated, the double meaning of "acteur" ("participant" and "performer"), together with the future tense ("serai"), suggests both Maximian's intention of continuing his persecutions and, ironically, his status as a mere player on the world's stage.

316 To the surrounding elements give greater height;  
 317 Do the outside in marble, like jasper the columns;  
 318 Enrich the peaks and crowns, along with the tympanums;  
 319 Manage your colouring with more diversity;  
 320 Put in your carnations greater vivacity;  
 321 Fold these garments better; move back the countryside;  
 322 Include some fountains there; mark the shade they  
           provide;  
 323 And chiefly where, on your canvas, you paint the skies,  
 324 Create light natural in the judgement of eyes,  
 325 Instead of colour that seems to me somewhat muted.

## DECORATOR

326 To lack of time, not effort, that must be imputed.  
 327 Too, sight from far off these shortcuts better assesses,  
 328 As objects emerge from the plane of these recesses;  
 329 Approach these scenes, their perspectives no longer  
           strike,  
 330 Their false daylight becomes blurred, their colours less  
           lifelike,  
 331 And, as with Nature, it is harmful to our art,  
 332 In which distance seems to play an attractive part.  
 333 Next time their grace will be more pleasing to the sight.

## GENEST

334 Right now we're pressed for time; go and prepare the  
           light. (*Exit Decorator.*)

## Scene ii

GENEST (*alone, walking and reading his  
 role, speaks as if pacing about, while he puts the finishing touches on his costume*)<sup>24</sup>

335 Cease your deliberating, Adrian—now go  
 336 And with ardour those exalted combatants follow;

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**24** An actor would normally have had his own part written out, not the entire script. Ll. 335-44 begin the actual performance at II.vii.477-86.



337 If glory pleases you, here is a fine occasion:  
 338 Heaven calls you to combat as its champion.  
 339 Torture, sword and flame they've prepared, you may be  
           sure:  
 340 Show a constant courage, their torments to endure;  
 341 Let cowards' hearts shed shameful tears amid such  
           harms:  
 342 Hold out your hands to tyrants, and lay down your arms.  
 343 Give the sword your throat; as your blood flows, brave  
           the sight,  
 344 And meet death unshaken, in your rank and upright.<sup>25</sup>  
           (*He repeats the last four verses.*)  
 345 Let cowards' hearts shed shameful tears amid such  
           harms:  
 346 Hold out your hands to tyrants, and lay down your arms.  
 347 Give the sword your throat; as your blood flows, brave  
           the sight,  
 348 And meet death unshaken, in your rank and upright.

### Scene iii

Marcèle (*as she finishes dressing for her role*), Genest

#### MARCÈLE

349 Gods! What hope have we of putting a play on here?  
 350 With this pestering throng how can my head stay clear?  
 351 How many, to hear them, do I consign to languish?<sup>26</sup>  
 352 By how many assaults their senses do I vanquish?  
 353 My voice would render forest and rock-face sensible;  
 354 My most artless looks are acts of murder visible;  
 355 I trample on as many hearts as steps I take;  
 356 The troupe, if it lost me, all appeal would forsake.  
 357 All in all, I'm right to be vain, if they say true:

**25** I.e., like a soldier, in keeping with Adrian's worldly identity.

**26** Ll. 351-57 are tellingly reminiscent of the caricatured vanity of the character Hespérie in *Les Visionnaires* [The Visionaries], the extremely popular satirical comedy (1637) by Jean Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin. Hespérie lives within an absurd delusion of being adored by all men. See Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin, trans. Hillman, I.vi *et passim*.

358                    My dressing-room just swarms with that false courtly  
                         crew,  
359                    And, tired to death of their flattering profession,  
360                    I've yielded the place to their absolute possession.  
361                    I dread worse than death the whole idolatrous brood  
362                    Of importunate elves that the theatre has spewed,  
363                    And that the very character of the profession  
364                    Obliges us to tolerate with all discretion.

## GENEST

365                    Besides the world's old ways, still very much around,  
366                    The vanities, as well, which in your sex abound  
367                    Mean that you tolerate that annoyance with pleasure,  
368                    By which to others you abandon all your leisure.  
369                    Have you reviewed that point where Flavius turns short  
370                    In exiting, moving pity by his retort,  
371                    And do you remember that you must be excited?<sup>27</sup>

MARCÈLE (*presenting him with her role*)<sup>28</sup>

372                    All right, I'll do as you say. Here it is, recited:  
373                    (*She rehearses.*) Now, Heaven, I dare, with a regard  
                         firm and sure,  
374                    Contemplate the diamonds studding Your vault of azure,  
375                    And those false gods deny that never trod upon  
376                    That starry palace-dwelling with its rolling motion.  
377                    For to Your power, Lord, my husband renders homage;  
378                    Your faith he professes, and his chains are his pledge.  
379                    The gods' fearful scourge, who left no Christians alone—  
380                    That lion who swilled the sacred blood of Your own,  
381                    Who deemed so many unjust deaths legitimate—  
382                    No longer their agent, chooses a victim's fate,  
383                    And now, patient lamb,<sup>29</sup> to Your enemies will give

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**27** Cf. below, III.vi.998.

**28** Orig. S.D.: "lui baillant son rôle"; she presumably hands him her part written out so that he can follow it.

**29** The evocation of Christ's sacrifice is latent in the passage, as is the echo of the biblical reference to the devil as a "roaring lion" (I Peter 5:8), but it will take the dramatic context to activate them fully; see below, III.vii.1005-9. Rotrou here closely adapts lines from the tragedy of Cellot, as documented by Pasquier, ed., n. 113.

384 A throat, joyfully to Your holy yoke submissive.

GENEST

385 Even if the whole court knows—which you have  
astounded—

386 That the esteem you enjoy is solidly grounded,  
387 This performance takes me aback, and may procure  
388 Fame in the theatre which will undying endure.

MARCÈLE

389 You have greater faith in me than I myself do.<sup>30</sup>

GENEST

390 The court will be coming soon. Let the lights be seen to.  
(*Exit Marcèle.*<sup>31</sup>)

## Scene iv

GENEST (*alone, repeating his role and walking about*)

391 Your yielding, Adrian, would be a shameful wrong;<sup>32</sup>  
392 If your God wants your death, then you have lived too  
long.

393 I have seen, Heaven—as the many souls proclaim  
394 That I presumed to send to You, whether by flame,  
395 In the bellies of bulls or on a red-hot griddle—  
396 The condemned burst into song, the torturers tremble.

(*He repeats the last four verses.*)

397 I have seen, Heaven—as the many souls proclaim  
398 That I presumed to send to You, whether by flame,  
399 In the bellies of bulls or on a red-hot griddle—  
400 The condemned burst into song, the torturers tremble.

(*And then, after day-dreaming a moment,  
and no longer consulting his role, he continues.*)

**30** L. 389: orig. “Vous m'en croyez bien plus, que je ne m'en présume”. The language of faith/belief is significant.

**31** Pasquier, ed., n. 49, points out that the form of the stage direction, “Elle rentre”, preserves the older concept of a withdrawal into the wings (“coulisses”) rather than from the theatrical space.

**32** Ll. 391-400 look forward to the performance at II.vii.493-98.

401                   You gods, against me come to your defence—and mine.  
 402                   In fact, as in name, to a new self I incline.  
 403                   I less feign to be, than I become, Adrian,  
 404                   And take on with his name the feelings of a Christian.  
 405                   I have found that, with long studying of a part,  
 406                   We make into custom our self-transforming art,  
 407                   But here it seems truths of unfeigned veracity  
 408                   Surpass both custom and our art's capacity,  
 409                   And that Christ proposes to me glory eternal,  
 410                   Against which my defence is vain and criminal.  
 411                   Your names of gods and immortals I now distrust;  
 412                   The rites one accords your altars give me disgust;  
 413                   My spirit secretly against your laws rebels,  
 414                   Conceiving a contempt that all its ardour quells;  
 415                   And like someone profane but at last sanctified,  
 416                   Seems to declare itself for a man crucified.  
 417                   But where has my thought strayed, and by what privilege,  
 418                   And most insensibly, slipped into sacrilege?  
 419                   Of the gods' power do I forget the full sum?  
 420                   The aim is to imitate, and not to become.

*(The sky opens,<sup>33</sup> with flames, and a voice is heard, saying:)*

421                                   Your character, Genest, pursue:  
 422                                   You will not imitate in vain.  
 423                                   Just a little courage and salvation awaits you.  
 424                                   God's helping hand will you sustain.

GENEST (*astounded, continuing*)

425                   What do I hear, just Heaven? By what strange effect,  
 426                   To touch me in the heart, my ears do You affect?  
 427                   You gentle sacred breath, that come now to fire me—  
 428                   Spirit holy, divine, who come to inspire me,<sup>34</sup>

**33** As Pasquier, ed., points out (n. 59), the capital in the original stage direction ("Ciel") calls attention to the double reference to the scenography and its spiritual significance. More broadly, by (exceptionally) not providing any further indication of the staging of the play-within-the-play at this point, the printed text supports the suggestion of an actual epiphany.

**34** L. 428: orig. "Esprit Saint et Divin, qui me viens animer"; the language echoes the biblical account

429 And who, desiring me, my courage erect,  
 430 Labour to bring me salvation: Your work perfect;  
 431 Guide my doubtful steps towards the heavenly prize  
 432 And, so that they may be opened, unseal my eyes.<sup>35</sup>  
 433 But oh, what vain belief and frivolous invention  
 434 To suppose that voice from Heaven for my attention!  
 435 Someone who perceived me wavering in my choice  
 436 Saw fit to amuse himself by feigning that voice,  
 437 Which ignites in me such a lively conflagration  
 438 That to the depth of my soul it makes penetration.  
 439 Come now, you gods, come, and against Christ take your  
                   part—  
 440 You who are almost all gone from my rebel heart.  
 441 And you, O Christ, against the gods take a strong stance,  
 442 Since this heart against your laws still makes some  
                   resistance.  
 443 Amid these surging waves, which toss my spirits still,  
 444 Finish—both of you—your wars, capture me who will:  
 445 Give me the peace of which this trouble me deprives.

### Scene v

Decorator (*coming to light the candles*), Genest

#### DECORATOR

446 Make haste now—it's high time, for the whole court  
                   arrives.

#### GENEST

447 Right. From a glorious role you've caused my distracting,  
 448 Which before the Court of the Heavens I was acting,  
 449 And whose action is of great consequence to me,  
 450 And the subject itself no less than heavenly.  
 451 Let's prepare the musicians—have them take their place.

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of creation.

**35** “[U]nseal my eyes”: orig. “desille-moi les yeux”. The common metaphor derives from the practice of sewing shut the eyes of falcons for training purposes.

DECORATOR (*exiting, having lit the candles*)

452 He was rehearsing his role, to lend it new grace.<sup>36</sup>

### Scene vi

Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille, Plutianus, Soldiers, Guards

VALÉRIE

453 On me, at any rate, tragedy has most hold:  
454 Its action is loftier, its subject more bold,  
455 And the thoughts, stately and replete with majesty,  
456 Confer on it more weight and more authority.

MAXIMIAN

457 It takes the prize finally by offering models  
458 Of monarchs as ornaments, heroes as examples  
459 Of measure and regulation in their affections,  
460 Both by the events it stages and by its actions.<sup>37</sup>

PLUTIANUS

461 The theatre today—proud in its edification,  
462 Admirable for its art, rich in decoration—  
463 Promises similar distinction for the content.

MAXIMIAN

464 The effects are splendid, if given proper treatment.  
465 Here you'll see a man of mine show rank insolence,  
466 Scorning his share of grace in my beneficence—  
467 Scorning his own life, scorning our divinities,  
468 Defying of earth and heaven the potencies,  
469 And causing my love to give way to such sheer hate

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**36** “[T]o lend it new grace”: orig. “et s’y veut surpasser” (lit. “and seeks to surpass himself in it”). By evoking “grace” (used with a double meaning throughout the text), the translation aims at conveying the spiritual overtones.

**37** The rhyme “affections”/“actions” (identical words in French) is in the original. Pasquier, ed., n. 60, points out that the notion of tragedy as a source of moral *exempla* for princes was old-fashioned in the 1640s. It is also ironic coming from Maximian, especially given the portrait of himself he is about to be shown.

470 That, far from viewing the scene in a troubled state,  
 471 With a spirit tranquil and satisfied I'll see  
 472 The woeful effects of zealous obstinacy  
 473 And have that traitor from his tomb to die again—  
 474 If not himself, at least the image they will feign.<sup>38</sup>

DIOCLETIAN

475 Genest will have left nothing out in his rehearsing.  
 476 Let us merely listen, and for now cease conversing.

*(A voice sings, accompanied by a lute.<sup>39</sup>)*

*(THE PLAY BEGINS.)*

Scene vii

Genest (*alone on the raised theatre*<sup>40</sup>), Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille,  
 Plutianus, Guards (*seated*), Soldiers

GENEST (*under the name of Adrian*)

477 Cease your deliberating, Adrian—now go<sup>41</sup>  
 478 And with ardour those exalted combatants follow;  
 479 If glory pleases you, here is a fine occasion:  
 480 Heaven calls you to combat as its champion.  
 481 Torture, sword and flame they've prepared, you may be  
       sure:  
 482 Show a constant courage, their torments to endure;  
 483 Let cowards' hearts shed shameful tears amid such  
       harms:  
 484 Hold out your hands to tyrants, and lay down your arms.  
 485 Give the sword your throat; as your blood flows, brave  
       the sight,

**38** The symbolic punishment of criminals in effigy was common in early modern France.

**39** On the possible implications of this stage direction for contemporary performance practice, particularly when companies entertained in great houses, see Pasquier, ed., n. 63.

**40** This confirms that a small theatre was constructed within the theatre for the purpose of the performance; see Pasquier, ed., n. 65.

**41** Ll. 477-86 are repeated from the earlier "rehearsal scene" (II.ii.335-44).

486 And meet death unshaken, in your rank and upright.  
 487 The favour of Caesar, which a whole people crave,  
 488 Can last at the most until he is in his grave;  
 489 To that of your God, no more than to Time's extent,  
 490 Never shall bounds be set by any accident.  
 491 Already this tyrant's deeply offended power,  
 492 If your zeal persists, has decreed your final hour.  
 493 Your yielding, Adrian, would be a shameful wrong;<sup>42</sup>  
 494 If your God wants your death, then you have lived too  
           long.  
 495 I have seen, Heaven—as the many souls proclaim  
 496 That I presumed to send to You, whether by flame,  
 497 In the bellies of bulls or on a red-hot griddle—  
 498 The condemned burst into song, the torturers tremble.  
 499 I have seen children who their confident throats dared  
 500 Hold out to the bloody death that they saw prepared  
 501 And fall to a glorious death beneath the blow—  
 502 Those fruits ripe for Heaven, though barely formed below.  
 503 I have seen some whom the time allotted by Nature  
 504 Was on the verge of thrusting in the sepulchre  
 505 Once upon the scaffold, hasten their final pace  
 506 And with the courage of youth look Death in the face;  
 507 Countless beauties I've seen in the flower of age,  
 508 To whom everyone—even tyrants—rendered homage,  
 509 Regard with pleasure all mangled and mutilated  
 510 Their precious members, once by all eyes venerated.  
 511 This you have seen: would you fear without shame  
           the brunt  
 512 Of what both sexes brave and all ages confront?  
 513 Might such vigorous strength be at human command?  
 514 No, no, that virtue,<sup>43</sup> Lord, comes straight from your  
           own hand,  
 515 Drawn by the soul from its originating place,  
 516 And as the outcome shows, the source is godly grace.  
 517 It is from Heaven I receive that noble vigour

42 Ll. 493-98 repeat the rehearsal at II.iv.391-400.

43 "[V]irtue": orig. "vertu". As often in both early modern French and English, the word combines moral meaning with its etymological sense of "manhood", "strength".



518 Which makes me despise the torments with all their  
 rigour—  
 519 Which lends me a force that human powers disdains  
 520 And makes my very blood displeased within my veins,  
 521 Burning as it is to water that precious tree  
 522 Where hangs for us the fruit Heaven prizes most dearly.  
 523 I can hardly conceive how deeply I'm transformed:  
 524 I feel different from myself, with new strength informed;  
 525 I know no fear, and fear no terror at the sight  
 526 Of Death's face looming through the horror of black  
 night.  
 527 Only one thing I lose, only my Natalie,  
 528 Whom a sacred yoke links in happiness with me,  
 529 And who knows nothing of this zeal, which is my secret,  
 530 Amid such fervour brings some feeling of regret;  
 531 But if that thought can touch me, my courage is weak:  
 532 I am so close to death, and here of love I speak!

### Scene viii

Flavius (*the tribune, represented by the actor Sergestus*), Adrian,<sup>44</sup> two Guards

FLAVIUS [*entering*]

533 I believe, dear Adrian, that it must be clear  
 534 For what pressing reason I direct my steps here.  
 535 All the court is troubled—with the truth unacquainted  
 536 Regarding a rumour by which your name is tainted  
 537 And to which you lend credence by your very absence.  
 538 Each takes a different view, depending on his sense:  
 539 Some that false gossip was spread just to mock, not harm;  
 540 Others that some spell was employed your soul to charm;<sup>45</sup>  
 541 Others that the poison in regions so infected  
 542 Has fuddled your reason and your senses affected.

<sup>44</sup> From this point on, the character is named in the paratext without any indication that the role is assumed by an actor. The practice is extended to the other figures in the play-within-the-play, starting with III.iv, although not consistently, and (for readers) supports the effect of a coalescence of the two dramatic levels.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Desfontaines, IV.iv.1222 and n. 81.

543 But above all Caesar's own vacillating view  
544 Has difficulty fixing an idea of you.

## ADRIAN

545 Say, to whom do I owe the good turn<sup>46</sup> of informing?

## FLAVIUS

546 We were in the palace, with around Caesar swarming  
547 His men, who of their zeal were boasting—the whole  
throng—  
548 That they would die for the gods or avenge their wrong.  
549 Adrian, he said, with an expression composed,  
550 Adrian would suffice for all forces opposed;  
551 Alone he'll prevail against rebels of this kind:  
552 Thanks only to his care, I can have peace of mind.<sup>47</sup>  
553 Seeing what small result our cruelties produce,  
554 Let us make trial of art, where force is of no use.  
555 Their stubbornness is merely angered by these pains:  
556 There now are more prisoners than irons and chains;  
557 The dungeons are too narrow—they are overfilling;  
558 The axes and crosses are quite weary of killing.  
559 They have seen Death too much: its sight is no more  
dreadful;  
560 Fire, from its use against them, is now not useful.  
561 Hangmen at last lack heart, with these horrid events,  
562 Judges constancy, the dying their rightful torments.  
563 Mildness can often prove an invincible recourse  
564 With these stubborn hearts, which one embitters by  
force.<sup>48</sup>  
565 At this, Titianus, bursting into the hall,

46 “[G]ood turn”: orig. “bien”. The irony is double, since the martyrdom he faces as a result is indeed a benefit.

47 The original similarly shifts between indirect and direct discourse.

48 An ironic deployment, especially given the immediate sequel, of the debate between harshness and mildness (here “douceur”) that had been a standard feature of French dramatic treatments of Roman themes. (See notably Hillman, *French Reflections*, p. 95; Elliott Forsyth, *La Tragédie française de Jodelle à Corneille (1533-1640). Le Thème de la vengeance*, Études et Essais sur la Renaissance (Paris: H. Champion, 1994); and Gillian Jondorf, *Robert Garnier and the Themes of Political Tragedy in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), esp. pp. 105-13.

566 Cried out loud, "Ah, Caesar! This means the loss of all!"  
 567 Fear, at hearing this cry, courses<sup>49</sup> throughout our veins;  
 568 Throughout the hall, a murmur of confusion planes.  
 569 "What's this?", said the Emperor, stopping short and  
         troubled.  
 570 "Has the sky opened up?<sup>50</sup> Or has the whole world trembled?  
 571 What thunderbolt's been hurled that menaces my head?  
 572 Does some foreign conqueror upon Rome now tread?  
 573 Has some conflagration where we stand been announced?"  
 574 "Adrian for Christ," he said, "the gods has renounced."

## ADRIAN

575 Yes, and Caesar too, and myself—no doubt of it.  
 576 And all, Lord, to Your power supreme I submit.

## FLAVIUS

577 Maximian, struck furious, with blazing eye—  
 578 A sure sign that deadly decrees and deeds will fly—  
 579 Turns pale, stamps his foot, shudders, curses with a  
         roar  
 580 Like one in despair, knowing no one anymore;  
 581 Shows us, by gesture and colour in living fashion,  
 582 A man transported by grieving and loving passion.<sup>51</sup>  
 583 "And do I hear Adrian still call his crime righteous?  
 584 Caesar's—his master's—favour does he repay thus?  
 585 And thus, though I wished him so well, does he mistake  
         me?"

## ADRIAN

586 Let him stop loving me, or as a Christian take me.

## FLAVIUS

587 The gods, on whom, like us, even monarchs depend,

---

**49** The translation follows the original in shifting into the historical present to render the narrative more vivid.

**50** Maximian, of course, speaks more truly than he knows. Cf. above, II.iv.420 S.D. and n. 33.

**51** Pasquier, ed., n. 80, detects a possible description of contemporary acting technique. In any case, effectively evoked is the notion of performance, and with it the larger issue of "true" and "feigned" identity.

588 Do not allow it—nor laws one cannot offend.

ADRIAN

589 It is the God I serve who causes kings to reign,  
590 And who causes the earth their commands to sustain.

FLAVIUS

591 His death on a gibbet reveals his impotence.

ADRIAN

592 Speak rather of His love, and His obedience.

FLAVIUS

593 But really, on a cross!<sup>52</sup>

ADRIAN

594 Rather, a dazzling tree—  
Less a cross than a ladder to mount up to glory!

FLAVIUS

595 But that kind of death is the chiefest to avoid.

ADRIAN

596 But in so dying, the empire He destroyed.

FLAVIUS

597 The universe's author in a tomb to bring!

ADRIAN

598 Thus the whole universe was seen to put on mourning,  
599 And the sky, affrighted, hid its every light.

FLAVIUS

600 If vain chimeras like that serve as your delight,  
601 This contempt for our gods, and for your duty too,  
602 In Caesar's mind will extinguish all hope for you.

---

52 Cited as the most disgraceful form of execution for criminals.

ADRIAN

603 Abandoned by Caesar, in Christ I find assurance:  
604 He is the hope of mortals condemned to endurance.

FLAVIUS

605 He may take from you the rich goods that you possess.

ADRIAN

606 I shall mount to Heaven more lightly having less.

FLAVIUS

607 Poverty is a monster feared by man on earth.

ADRIAN

608 Christ, both man and God, had a stable for his birth.  
609 I despise your worldly goods and their false caresses,  
610 Things which one is possessed by, rather than possesses.

FLAVIUS

611 His piety compels—and equity's advice is—  
612 To make of all the Christians equal sacrifices.

ADRIAN

613 Let him do it—he waits too long.

FLAVIUS

Only repent!

ADRIAN

614 No, Flavius, no: my blood is ripe to be spent.

FLAVIUS

615 If you stay obstinate, your destruction is certain.

ADRIAN

616 The expectation is sweet, the menace in vain.

## FLAVIUS

617 Will you not open your ear to my admonition,  
 618 The sighs of the court, your friends' care for your  
           condition?  
 619 To the favour of Caesar, to Natalie's cries,  
 620 To whom such a splendid bond recently you ties?  
 621 Will you accept that this regrettable event  
 622 Should bring that beautiful sun to its occident?<sup>53</sup>  
 623 Scarcely an hour since, in that blest<sup>54</sup> union's name,  
 624 The happy Hymeneal torches she saw flame.  
 625 And what if some fruit of your chaste loves should  
           await,  
 626 Which will, after your death, your days perpetuate?  
 627 But the death you are choosing will bring the disgrace  
 628 Of extinguishing your name along with your race,  
 629 And because of an access of furor unknown,<sup>55</sup>  
 630 Will take you wholly from us by one death alone.  
 631 If your good Genius waits for the time opportune,  
 632 Do you know what advancement may lie in your fortune?  
 633 Have you no hope? What—if you dare—might be  
           inferred  
 634 From Maximian's rise to emperor from shepherd?  
 635 If only his favour to you might be maintained,  
 636 What keeps you from thinking the same may be attained?  
 637 What obstinate scorn, by men and gods, of your worth  
 638 Makes indifferent to you both heavens and earth,  
 639 And, as if your death were something for which you long,  
 640 Makes you, just to obtain it, commit heinous wrong?  
 641 And Caesar and the gods your enemies you find?  
 642 Consider the value of a more settled mind.  
 643 A person who has never sinned, when he repents,  
 644 Expresses his surprise, and questions his offence.

---

**53** There is perhaps an ironic contrast with the symbolic association of the eastern sunrise with Christ's resurrection.

**54** "[B]lest": orig. "destinée" – a term which conforms to the aura of pagan piety that, ironically, Flavius attaches to the marriage. But cf. below, III.v.841-42, and n. 60.

**55** "[U]nknown": orig. "aveugle" (lit. "blind").

## ADRIAN

645 The grace with which Heaven opened my spirit's eyes  
 646 Indeed persuaded me, but not at all surprised,  
 647 And were I allowed the chance of one who repents,  
 648 Far from undoing it, I'd repeat the offence.  
 649 Go on: not Maximian, friendly or furious,  
 650 Nor lightning painted to show your gods injurious,  
 651 Nor the court nor the throne with all their potent  
       charms,  
 652 Nor even Natalie, whose tears lament her harms,  
 653 Nor the universe to its first chaos let slide  
 654 Such a solid intention could not turn aside.

## FLAVIUS

655 Weigh well the effects to which my words will give  
       course.

## ADRIAN

656 As frivolous as those were, these will have no force.

## FLAVIUS

657 If neither reason nor offered mildness moves you,  
 658 My orders go further.

## ADRIAN

Do as your charge behooves you.

## FLAVIUS

659 It is to arrest you and your body to chain,  
 660 If, as you say, both persuasions are merely vain.

[*Enter Guards.*<sup>56</sup>]

ADRIAN (*presenting his arms to the irons,  
       which the Guards attach*)

661 Do it. These precious burdens, as my spirit knows,

---

**56** The Guards might have been on stage from the opening of the scene, but an entrance here seems more in keeping with the failure of Flavius' persuasions.

662 I receive as the first presents Heaven bestows—  
 663 As the special favours and superb furnishings  
 664 Of the Caesar of Caesars, and the King of Kings.  
 665 And I go willingly where glory without fail  
 666 Greets Jesus's soldiers, who over death prevail.  
(*Exeunt omnes.*)

### Scene ix

Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie

DIOCLETIAN

667 Genest has surely surpassed himself in this case!<sup>57</sup>

MAXIMIAN

668 Nothing could he imitate with a greater grace.

VALÉRIE (*rising*)

669 In the interval we can due compliments pay  
 670 And see the actors.

DIOCLETIAN

Then we'd better not delay.

## Act III

### Scene i

Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille, Plutianus, Guards, Soldiers

VALÉRIE

671 Chaos! Disorder! How, barring a miracle,  
 672 Can they ever produce any pleasing spectacle?

---

57 The ironic double meanings are insistent in this exchange.



## CAMILLE

673 It's clear that when we see among them such confusion,  
674 The good order of their speeches seems sheer illusion.

## MAXIMIAN

675 The artistry is marvellous, I must allow—  
676 But the actor playing me is appearing now,  
677 And I just saw him with Genest in conversation.  
678 Let's see what grace he brings to my representation.

## Scene ii

Maximian (*played by the actor Octavius*),  
Genest (*in fetters*), Flavius, Guards, Soldiers

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

679 Are these the favours, traitor, and are these the wages  
680 With which your fine new master your homage engages,  
681 And whom, while the gods' rights and worship it defies,  
682 Christian impiety dares to place in the skies?

## ADRIAN

683 The newness, my Lord, this Master of Masters gives  
684 Is to be before all times, before all that lives.  
685 It is He who from nothing made the universe,  
686 Who caused the spreading seas the dry land to immerse,  
687 Who out of the air the water-soaked regions drew,  
688 Who sowed with diamonds the vaults of azure blue,  
689 Who brought to birth the war among the elements,  
690 And who regulated the heavens' diverse movements.  
691 The earth to His power defers in silent prayer;  
692 Kings are His subjects; He lends us the world to share;  
693 If seas should be stormy, a calm He can confer;  
694 If He rebukes the winds, they do not dare to stir;  
695 If He so commands the sun, it stops in its course;  
696 He is the Master of all, as He is its source;  
697 All exists through Him; without Him nothing would be:  
698 Of this Master, my Lord, this is the novelty.  
699 Judge if without reason, my homage I accord,

700 And if without vanity I wear my reward:  
 701 Yes, these very chains, Caesar, these glorious weights,  
 702 Are precious gifts that every Christian's arm awaits;  
 703 That dear Master had His hands so fettered before us:  
 704 Thus, in the fire of His love, He forged them for us.  
 705 Far from crushing us, their burden is our mainstay,  
 706 And it is these links that draw us to come His way.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

707 Gods! With whom can we safely deal in confidence?  
 708 And to whom trust for friendship without false pretence?  
 709 Any of those whom Fortune to our side has brought?  
 710 Any of those we have less acquired than bought?  
 711 Whose hearts, beneath their submissive brows, are  
       rebellious,  
 712 Which we, by too much trusting, render treacherous?  
 713 Oh, what cruelty the court carries as its fate,  
 714 Which cannot love inviolable tolerate—  
 715 Candour when unadorned, virtue unless unprized,  
 716 Duty unless constrained, or faith unless disguised!  
 717 What am I doing, poor man, in these parts removed,  
 718 Where, lieutenant of those gods with just anger moved,  
 719 I cause, with my vengeful arm, fierce tempests to crack  
 720 And of Christians' impious heads pursue the track?  
 721 Yet while I am so occupied, with futile care,  
 722 I see here at home arise what I chase elsewhere:  
 723 In my court takes root what I aim to extirpate;  
 724 I nurture nearby what there I exterminate.  
 725 Thus our great fortune, though dazzling in brilliant  
       state,  
 726 Cannot, despite its best efforts, purchase an ingrate.

ADRIAN

727 To believe in one God—to that freedom, my Lord,  
 728 Does your judgement so black a taint of crime accord?  
 729 If worthy these excesses that your temper seize,  
 730 Then can those tolerate the slightest liberties?  
 731 If till today you believed my life without faults,  
 732 Invulnerable even to envy's assaults,

733 And if the strictest censors in that view concurred,  
 734 What guilt, in becoming Christian, have I incurred?  
 735 Christ reproves dishonesty, plain-dealing commands,  
 736 Condemns wealth if it comes wrongfully to our hands;  
 737 Of all illicit love, forbids the foul offence,  
 738 And to steep one's hands in the blood of innocence.  
 739 Do you find in these laws any criminal trace,  
 740 Unrighteousness or source of family disgrace?  
 741 I have put them to such trials as hell could have done:  
 742 I have seen their blood flowing under hooks of iron;  
 743 I have seen their bodies boiling in pitch and flame,  
 744 Have seen their flesh fall to fiery blades that  
                                 maim,  
 745 And from those glorious hearts obtained no reward  
 746 But to see them uttering their hymns heaven-ward,  
 747 Praying for their torturers in their pains most dire,  
 748 For the welfare of all and good of the Empire.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

749 Insolence! Is choosing the gods part of your cares?  
 750 My own, those of the Empire and your forebears—  
 751 Have they deployed their power with too much indulgence  
 752 To keep you under the yoke of obedience?

ADRIAN

753 My object is salvation, which one cannot hope for  
 754 From those gods of metal that we see you adore.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

755 Your own, should this vexing humour of yours persist,  
 756 Will hardly help you my angry strokes to resist,  
 757 Which your impieties upon you will impose.

ADRIAN

758 With the shield of my faith I will parry the blows.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

759 Beware of being—and soon—by my help forsaken  
 760 And seeing, for your blasphemy, harsh vengeance taken.

761                   Those whose flesh we've seen, on your orders, mutilated,  
 762                   By fire devoured, by the sword penetrated,  
 763                   Unless you void the sentence your conduct imposes—  
 764                   Their cruellest torments will seem a bed of roses.<sup>58</sup>

## ADRIAN

765                   We hope that our perished bodies, elsewhere directed,  
 766                   The God whom we serve will restore to us perfected.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

767                   Traitor! Never will sleep cause me to spare my pains  
 768                   Until your treacherous blood, drawn out of your veins,  
 769                   And your sacrilegious heart, to make the crows pleased,  
 770                   The anger of our gods have finally appeased.

## ADRIAN

771                   The death I shall die will move envy at the sight,  
 772                   When for the Author of Life I relinquish light.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

773                   Go now, and in a dungeon, weigh him down with chains;  
 774                   Assemble all the torments that his sect sustains  
 775                   And apply all you wish against this faithless one.

## ADRIAN

776                   Say one converted.

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

Let your zealous worst be done.

777                   Invent, imagine things: the most industrious  
 778                   In making him suffer will be counted most pious.  
 779                   I will use my justice where favour is in vain:  
 780                   He who flies my favour will feel my hate in pain.

---

58 L. 764: orig. "Les plus cruels tourments n'auront été que Roses"; the translation supplies the common English equivalent.

ADRIAN (*as he exits*)

781 I, Your supporter, Lord, ask support that endures;  
 782 He who begins to suffer, begins to be Yours.  
 (*Flavius leads Adrian off with Guards.*)

### Scene iii

Maximian (*actor*), Guards

MAXIMIAN (*actor*)

783 Gods! You have a thunderbolt, and this felony  
 784 Fails to ignite it, from your punishment is free!  
 785 You preserve alive, and let profit from the light,  
 786 One who would dislodge you from your immortal height!  
 787 One who raises his bit of earth against the sky,  
 788 One who seeks to steal your thunder, you to defy,  
 789 Who plots against you, wants you from your thrones cast  
 down  
 790 For a god he forges himself and seeks to crown.  
 791 Inspire me, great gods, punishments to create  
 792 Worthy of my anger, and worthy of my hate,  
 793 Since for violations of such enormity  
 794 A simple execution is impunity.

### Scene iv

Flavius (*leading Adrian to the prison*), Adrian, Jailer, Guards

FLAVIUS (*to Jailer*)

795 Caesar's express order commits him to your charge.

JAILER

796 Your own is sufficient: no risk he'll be at large.

## Scene v

Natalie, Flavius, Adrian, Jailer, Guards

NATALIE

797 Is it my husband? Oh, then, the news is too true!

FLAVIUS

798 The final hope we have depends wholly on you:  
799 Restore him to you, Caesar, himself—for our sake.

NATALIE

800 If an extreme desire is all it would take . . .

FLAVIUS

801 I'll make an occasion to hope for such amendment.  
802 See him there.

*(Flavius exits with the Guards; the Jailer steps back.)*

ADRIAN

Silence, woman, and listen a moment.  
803 By the custom of nations and the laws of Rome,  
804 The pleasures, the pains, the possessions and the house,  
805 All hope, all profit, the sum of human affairs  
806 Should be in common when a common couch is shared.  
807 But that equally, like their life and like their Fortune,  
808 Their beliefs must always be precisely in tune—  
809 To stretch as far as the gods their community—  
810 No law imposes on them that necessity.  
811 Supposing, however, that it did so provide,  
812 It seems the husband, with more power on his side,  
813 Would have more right, at least according to appearance,  
814 To dictate to what gods his household gave adherence.  
815 What you see here, this body loaded down with chains,  
816 Neither to laws nor to human reasons pertains,  
817 But to the mere fact that the Christian God I knew  
818 And bade to your altars an eternal adieu.<sup>59</sup>

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59 “[A]dieu”: so in the original. Adrian might be using the formula with bitter irony here, with telling

819 I have said it, I say it, but no merit claim:  
 820 Belief was belated and compelled, to my shame.  
 821 For even when in brazen bulls I had them seen,  
 822 Chanting hymns to the heavens with faces serene,  
 823 And with a breath, with a mere glance, throwing away  
 824 Your gods, which shattered like glass into sticks  
                     and clay,  
 825 I fought against them. But by those effects convinced,  
 826 Effects that the error of my own life evinced,  
 827 I saw the truth; I embrace it, follow its course.  
 828 And if Caesar supposes by threats or by force,  
 829 By offers made or counsel given or inducements—  
 830 Or you, whether by plaintive sighing or embracements—  
 831 To shake a faith so constant, with such firm foundation,  
 832 You both flatter yourselves with a vain expectation.  
 833 Recover your freedom now with absolute power:  
 834 Let the knot that joins us be undone from this hour;  
 835 By the death pronounced against me you are a widow:  
 836 Let your thoughts toward some worthier object go;  
 837 Your young age, your riches, your beauty, and your virtue  
 838 Will make you find one better than him lost to you.  
 839 Adieu. Why drown—so cruel to such loveliness!—  
 840 Those roses and carnations with tears of distress?  
 841 Soon, soon, Destiny, which takes your husband away,  
 842 Will let you breathe easy with a Hymen more gay.<sup>60</sup>  
 843 What's this? You follow me? Then—do you love me still?  
 844 Oh, if only my desire I could fulfil,  
 845 Sister (for I can call you by no other name),  
 846 And gentle laws allowed our love to stay the same,  
 847 You'd come to know that death, by which the soul departs,  
 848 The end of death, and not the end of life, imparts—  
 849 That neither love nor life is in this world below,  
 850 That love and life, except with God, we cannot know.

---

sincerity below at l. 839, but it seems purely formulaic in subsequent occurrences.

**60** Adrian might be supposed to be using pagan language here (in marked contrast with the corresponding passage in Cellot – see Pasquier, ed., n. 104) as a concession to Natalie's presumed belief, although his exhortation concludes on a resoundingly Christian note. She too uses "Hymen" as a metonymy for marriage (below, ll. 853, 899), seemingly with no religious connotation.

NATALIE (*embracing him*)

851 O sovereign marvels of a God omnipotent!  
 852 Let part of your chains, dear husband, to me be lent!  
 853 And if our rites of Hymen and chaste amity  
 854 Do not gain the title of your half-self for me,  
 855 Allow this alliance finally to be sealed,  
 856 And may Christ with these chains today our union  
       yield!  
 857 Believe I will count them bonds not to be untied,  
 858 Which frustrate me because to you alone applied.

## ADRIAN

859 O Heaven, Natalie! Ah, pure and sacred flame!  
 860 My feelings I revive, and call my wife by name;<sup>61</sup>  
 861 Since on the way to Heaven my steps you will trace,  
 862 Be mine, my dear spouse, and beyond death we'll embrace.  
 863 My wishes join your faith! But give my doubt relief:  
 864 Do I not flatter myself with a vain belief?  
 865 What is the source of this fair flame that warms your  
       breast?  
 866 When did you conceive the grand project you express?  
 867 By what happy means?

## NATALIE

I will see you satisfied.

868 It was inspired almost at my mother's side;  
 869 And Heaven then almost simultaneously  
 870 The light of day and that of faith poured down on me.  
 871 It caused that with the mother's milk that was my meal  
 872 I sucked in the belief of Christians and their zeal.  
 873 And that zeal with me grew until that happy day  
 874 When my eyes, without intent, drew your love my way;  
 875 You know, if you recall, with what strong opposition  
 876 My mother combatted your amorous petition—  
 877 Not that glory wanted in a match so august,

---

61 L. 860: orig. "Je rallume mes feux, et reconnais ma femme". The translation points up the contrast with l. 854 above.



878 But the worship of your gods filled her with disgust;  
 879 Caesar's supreme authority, at all events,  
 880 Obtained her sad acceptance and obedience.  
 881 Only her weeping was a sign of her distress—  
 882 For what, other than his tears, does a slave possess?  
 883 At last the day came when I was to you consigned.  
 884 "Go, girl," she said apart, "condemned by fate unkind,  
 885 Since Caesar so wishes, but above all preserve  
 886 Your allegiance to that God whose law we observe:  
 887 To Him alone make your vows, to Him alone pray;  
 888 Rather than His radiance, cede the light of day,  
 889 And the gods of your spouse with as much loathing treat  
 890 As his chaste kisses you are certain to find sweet."  
 891 I wept in answer, for my voice had been effaced,  
 892 And by your people in your chariot was placed,  
 893 But so occupied was my mind by that impression  
 894 That I scarcely had eyes to take note of your passion,<sup>62</sup>  
 895 And I needed time to master my free condition  
 896 To where at last your merit brought it to submission.  
 897 The eye that into hearts and heavens clearly sees  
 898 Knows how intensely since then your gods me displease;  
 899 And since our Hymen, never have I paid the price  
 900 (You'll agree) of any impious sacrifice:  
 901 Never upon their altars has my incense smoked,  
 902 And when I have seen you there, to furor provoked,  
 903 Offer so many victims in their innocence,  
 904 I've wished a hundred times to die for your offence,  
 905 And a hundred times to Heaven, which my pains knew,  
 906 Sent upward, along with my tears, my prayers for you.

## ADRIAN

907 My dear Natalie, at last I can testify  
 908 That I owe my salvation to our sacred tie.  
 909 Permit me, however, to complain in my turn:  
 910 Since you saw with what tender love for you I burn,  
 911 Could you respond to that while keeping still concealed  
 912 The heavenly flame that God had to you revealed?

---

62 Ll. 893-94: "impression" and "passion" (identical in French) are rhymed in the original.

913                   Could you, and still remain unmoved, your husband see  
914                   Against so many innocents discharge his fury?

NATALIE

915                   Remain unmoved? Alas, Heaven knows if your arms  
916                   Ever, without my shedding tears, did bloody harms!  
917                   But how could I have hoped, although my heart was  
                                  breaking,  
918                   To prevent a lion his thirst for blood from slaking?  
919                   To keep a flooding river within its banks pent,  
920                   Interrupt in mid-air a thunderbolt's descent?  
921                   Still, I almost did—I should have blocked your assault:  
922                   My fear, as much as your fierce anger, was at fault.  
923                   So let us both the crimes and the punishment share:  
924                   These chains that are your due are also mine to wear.  
925                   Both of us deserving of death, and both resolved,  
926                   Here we are joined—let the bond no more be dissolved.  
927                   Let never time or place intervene to divide us:  
928                   Just one sole torment, one dungeon, one judge provide us!

ADRIAN

929                   By a heavenly order, to mortals obscure,  
930                   Each leaves this world behind when his span is mature.  
931                   I follow that sacred order, which nothing must prevent;  
932                   It's when God summons us that we must answer present.  
933                   Unable in that famous combat to take part,  
934                   If my wishes are not matched by my failing heart,  
935                   Then earn, by heartening me, your part of that crown  
936                   With which the eternal realm grants martyrs renown.  
937                   Failing the first rank, then the second prize obtain:  
938                   Acquire by will what by blood you cannot gain;  
939                   Support me in our danger, lending me your worth.

NATALIE

940                   Very well, then: choose Heaven and leave me the earth.  
941                   To bolster your resolve in this passage so dire,  
942                   I'll follow wherever, even into the fire,  
943                   Contented if the Law at whose behest I live  
944                   Leave to follow you to Heaven at last will give;  
945                   And if it extends to the wife, your tyrant's fury,

946 Having once accomplished the husband's injury,  
 947 Your people will perform for me this kindness yet—  
 948 Prevent Caesar from taking you from me in secret,  
 949 Not revealing the hour or letting me know;  
 950 Very soon after that my steps your own will follow;  
 951 Very soon . . .

## ADRIAN

Spare them that unnecessary pain;  
 952 Leave that care to me; their vigilance would be vain.  
 953 I will not depart from that funereal place  
 954 Without your final adieu and final embrace.  
 955 Let your solicitude upon my care repose.

## Scene vi

Flavius, Guards, Adrian, Natalie

## FLAVIUS

956 In crucial affairs, he who fears impatient grows.  
 957 So then, what will the outcome be? Your earnest tries  
 958 With your blinded husband—have they opened his eyes?

## NATALIE

959 To all human respects and feelings he is closed;  
 960 When I opened my mouth, any speech he foreclosed,  
 961 And, detesting the gods, in discussion prolonged  
 962 Sought to show me that worship to his own belonged.  
 963 In short, do not pursue an aim impossible,  
 964 And make sure that, against a heart inaccessible  
 965 You do not wound yourselves in striving him to  
     save,  
 966 And, wishing to cure an evil, catch one as grave.  
 967 Do not seek his welfare, and your own fail to cherish;  
 968 Allow, rather, allow that stubborn man to perish.  
 969 Report to Caesar our expense of wasted breath,  
 970 And if the law of the gods imposes his death,  
 971 Let the threat be realised without delaying more:

972 That is the last and only favour<sup>63</sup> I implore.  
 973 With hope for a milder outcome ungratified,  
 974 At least my sense of duty done is satisfied.<sup>64</sup>

## FLAVIUS

975 Oh, virtue unparalleled, above all on earth!  
 976 Oh, of a worthy wife, husband that lacks all worth!  
 977 What pity can induce us succour to supply,  
 978 If, without pitying himself, he seeks to die?

## NATALIE

979 Come now, hold out no hope that either force or fear  
 980 May prevail, when I've shed many a futile tear.  
 981 I know his heart too well, know its solidity,  
 982 Incapable of fear and of frivolity;  
 983 It's with regret that against him I add my voice,  
 984 But the interest of Heaven leaves me no choice.  
 985 One last attempt, cruel man, in the name of our love:  
 986 In the Holy, Sacred Name of the Court above,  
 987 Receive from your spouse this counsel for you auspicious—  
 988 Abjure your error, and render Heaven propitious.  
 989 Think, and keep well in mind, that every present torment,  
 990 Compared to future ones, is gentle, at least lenient;  
 991 See what damage this death does to your reputation!  
 992 Weigh what you're leaving, and why, and your destination!

## ADRIAN

993 For your part, restrain your zeal, which I know quite well.<sup>65</sup>  
 994 Think that you still have here a certain time to dwell,

63 “[F]avour”: orig. “grâce”, which in the context also carries the legal sense of “pardon”; she thereby reinforces her apparent endorsement of Adrian’s sentence.

64 Pasquier, ed., n. 110, points out that Natalie’s pretense of cold disdain is borrowed from Cellot (II.vi). In taking over this detail, Rotrou adds depth and complexity to the metadramatic dimension. Natalie’s role in the play-within-the-play calls for Marcèle to feign a contempt for Adrian’s Christianity which ironically corresponds to her true sentiments, as these are subsequently expressed regarding Genest’s conversion. Moreover, her assumed pagan piety in ll. 984-90 below is expressed in terms that resonate, for Adrian’s benefit, with Christian belief (hence the translation’s use of capitals for her spiritual language).

65 The irony of Adrian’s lines is strong, especially given the echo of Natalie’s declaration of Christian “zeal” (orig. “zèle”) above in ll. 872-73.

995 And waiting at that longed-for port you will find me.  
 996 [*to Flavius*] Come now, execute that felicitous decree,  
 997 Which deems me, not for death, but for salvation fit.

FLAVIUS (*delivering him to the Jailer and exiting*)

998 You are yourself to blame for not avoiding it.

## Scene vii

Natalie (*alone*)<sup>66</sup>

999 Now, Heaven, I dare, with a regard firm and sure,  
 1000 Contemplate the diamonds studding Your vault of azure,  
 1001 And those false gods deny that never trod upon  
 1002 That starry palace-dwelling with its rolling motion.  
 1003 For to Your power, Lord, my husband renders homage;  
 1004 Your faith he professes, and his chains are his pledge.  
 1005 The gods' fearful scourge, who left no Christians alone—  
 1006 That lion who swilled the sacred blood of Your own,  
 1007 Who deemed so many unjust deaths legitimate—  
 1008 No longer their agent, chooses a victim's fate,  
 1009 And now, patient lamb, to Your enemies will give  
 1010 A throat, joyfully to Your holy yoke submissive.  
 1011 Let us, following his death, break our shameful silence,  
 1012 Out of this cowardly respect force violence,  
 1013 And say to tyrants, with a voice constant and firm,  
 1014 What we to God in thought a hundred times affirm;  
 1015 Give air to that fair blaze by which our soul is pressed.  
 1016 A thousand before me have brave ardour expressed,  
 1017 Triumphs over infinite obstacles have won:<sup>67</sup>  
 1018 Cecilia's slicing blades, Prisca's teeth of iron,  
 1019 Faustina's boiling lead, Dymphna despite lineage,  
 1020 Agatha despite her sex, Agnes her young age,  
 1021 Tecla her suitor—all women who death have faced.

66 Ll. 999-1010 are those rehearsed by Marcèle at II.iii.373-84. On the religious allusions, which now take on their full significance, see above, n. 29.

67 On the martyrs enumerated below, see Pasquier, ed., nn. 114-119. The legend of Saint Agnes was in circulation in recent dramatic form, thanks to the tragedy of Pierre Troterel; see Troterel, *Pièces de dévotion (Hagiographic Plays)*, ed. Pasquier, trans. Hillman.

1022                                   And would I disdain the footsteps that they have traced?

### Scene viii

Genest, Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille, Plutianus, Guards

#### GENEST

1023                                   My Lord, the confusion of an unruly crowd,  
1024                                   Who, as your followers, suppose that all's allowed,  
1025                                   By troubling us with noisy importunity  
1026                                   Threatens to spoil the pleasures of Your Majesty,  
1027                                   And our actors, confused by such disorder there . . .

                                  DIOCLETIAN (*rising, with the whole court*)

1028                                   An order is needed, which I myself will bear.  
1029                                   It is your ladies' youthful and inviting<sup>68</sup> beauty  
1030                                   That constantly attracts such importunity.

## Act IV

### Scene i

Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille,  
Plutianus, Guards (*coming down from the theatre*)

                                  VALÉRIE (*to Diocletian*)

1031                                   Your order has made for calm, and, imposing silence  
1032                                   On these irreverent types, will check their insolence.

                                  DIOCLETIAN

1033                                   Let us listen, for Genest in this current action  
1034                                   Surpasses the best endeavours of his profession.<sup>69</sup>

68 “[I]nviting”: orig. “courtoise”, which here suggests at least free and easy manners – an apparent reflection on contemporary notions about actresses (cf. Eng. “courtesan”).

69 The rhyme “action”/“profession” (French identical) is present in the original. The irony in Diocle-

## Scene ii

Adrian (*represented by Genest*), Flavius (*represented by Sergestus*), Guards, Diocletian,  
Maximian, Valéria, Camille, Plutianus, additional Guards

## FLAVIUS

1035 If heaven, Adrian, does not soon favour show,  
1036 You'll surely run to the cliff-edge and plunge below.  
1037 I have seen, when rapid repentance he awaited,  
1038 The wrath of Caesar, though enraged, be palliated,  
1039 But when he learned of all our prayers and efforts made,  
1040 The tears and hopes of your wife, uselessly displayed,  
1041 (His eye with anger burning and face turning pale),  
1042 "Bring him," he said (with an accent to make one quail),  
1043 "Bring out that traitor, in whom my notable kindness  
1044 Today encounters most vicious cowardly blindness,  
1045 And let the ingrate know to what extremity  
1046 May proceed the furor of outraged monarchy."  
1047 Passing from this discourse—it must be said—to rage,  
1048 He invents, gives orders, turns all to serve his umbrage,  
1049 And if the repentance of your benighted error  
1050 Does not avert the effect, extinguish his furor . . .<sup>70</sup>

## ADRIAN

1051 Let all effort, all art, the whole of human skill  
1052 Unite to destroy me, conspire ways to kill.  
1053 He whose sole word created every element,  
1054 Imparting to each one its action, weight and movement,  
1055 And lending His sanction to that famous creation,  
1056 Retains the power to suspend its application.  
1057 Fire cannot burn, nor is air able to stir;  
1058 Water cannot flow, but at the will of His power.  
1059 Iron, the solid blood that the veins of earth store,  
1060 And fatal instrument of the furors of war,

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tian's praise is evident.

70 The original text places a full stop at the end of the line, leaving the sentence incomplete, but it is clear that Adrian defiantly interrupts.

1061 Weakens, at His command, and cannot penetrate  
 1062 Where His power prevents its entry in that state.  
 1063 If Caesar is cruel to me, he favours my case:  
 1064 I give him my support; in him my hope I place;  
 1065 He proves every day that a tyrant's raging hate,  
 1066 Where it believes it conquers, conquerors creates.

## FLAVIUS

1067 Often in such ardours, the death which one supposes  
 1068 Seems a mere amusement, a breath, a bed of roses;<sup>71</sup>  
 1069 But when that fearful spectre, by a cruel brow spanned,  
 1070 With its pincers, fires and axes in its hand,  
 1071 Starts to appear to us and makes its coming known,  
 1072 Then not to be afraid, one would have to be stone,  
 1073 And any repentance of ours, on that occasion,  
 1074 If not merely vain, will lack all force of persuasion.

## ADRIAN

1075 Your hatred of Christians a long time I have served  
 1076 And in punishing them their constancy observed.  
 1077 But while Caesar has still not pronounced the command,  
 1078 At whose proclamation I will be close at hand,  
 1079 Allow me with adieu the promise to fulfil  
 1080 Made to my dear half-self, whom I leave by God's will,  
 1081 So that, as the last fruit of our chaste love, I may  
 1082 Take leave of her, as I do of the light of day.

## FLAVIUS

1083 Come. Piety compels respect for your desire,  
 1084 But this delay is bound to aggravate his ire.

## ADRIAN

1085 The time will not be long. Walk a little ahead.

## FLAVIUS

1086 Walk, then. [*to the Guard*] The burning zeal he harbours  
 to be dead

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71 “[A] bed of roses”: orig. “une rose”; cf. above, III.ii.764.



1087 Is, for his person, a sufficiently sure guard.

GUARD

1088 Still, to believe a prisoner puts him at hazard.

ADRIAN

1089 My ardour and my faith should make you confident.

1090 Go just a pace ahead; I only want a moment.

Scene iii

*Adrian (as he continues alone)*

1091 My dearest Natalie, with what a joyful thrill  
 1092 Will you now see my visit my promise fulfil!  
 1093 Sacred kisses, embraces galore, I surmise,  
 1094 From the secret motions of your heart will arise!  
 1095 Be guided by my ardour, counselled by my flame,  
 1096 March boldly on the path where once a woman came—  
 1097 That sex which closed Heaven, then access did repair:<sup>72</sup>  
 1098 Precious are the fruits of virtue everywhere.  
 1099 I cannot wish a guide of more fidelity.  
 1100 I approach the door; now it opens—it is she!

Scene iv

Natalie, Adrian

*ADRIAN (seeking to embrace her)*

1101 At last, dear half-myself . . .

*NATALIE (going back and shutting the door on him)*

What? Alone, without chains?<sup>73</sup>

1102 Is this the great martyr, vanquisher of hell-pains,  
 1103 Whose famed courage, and strength stretched to infinity,

**72** An allusion to the traditional typological relationship between Eve, responsible for the Fall of mankind, and Mary, the instrument of redemption.

**73** The chains have already been established, for both of them, as key emblems of the spiritual freedom to be realised through martyrdom; see above, notably, III.ii.701, III.v.856,924, III.vii.1004.

1104                   Have been braving his persecutors' tyranny?

ADRIAN

1105                   You suspect, my dear soul . . . ?

NATALIE

                          This cowardly display!

1106                   Go, traitor—never more address me in that way!

1107                   Of the God you betray I share the injury.

1108                   Me, be a pagan's soul, tainted by perjury!

1109                   Me, be the soul of a Christian turning his back

1110                   On his Law, who all of soul, heart and faith can lack!

ADRIAN

1111                   Deign to hear me speak one word!

NATALIE

                          No coward I'll hear,

1112                   Who at the first step teeters and lets go from fear,

1113                   Whose manhood<sup>74</sup> at mere petty menaces takes fright,

1114                   Who lays down his arms without putting up a fight,

1115                   And who, having made us think him a solid rock,

1116                   When the assault is sounded, yields before the shock.

1117                   Go, foresworn, to the tyrants, to whom you've  
                          surrendered:

1118                   Ask, like a coward, that your price to you be rendered;

1119                   Let Rome's treasury to your hands spill out its worth:

1120                   Denied the goods of Heaven, dream of those on earth.

1121                   But among its posts of honour, shimmering lures,

1122                   Count me as property that is no longer yours.

ADRIAN

1123                   I beg for just one word; don't let my prayer fail.

NATALIE

1124                   Ah, would that I had been the keeper of your jail!

1125                   I would have died before I'd have let you go free.

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74 "[M]anhood": orig. "vertu"; the sense of virility is clearly dominant here.

1126 Traitor, what do you hope from conduct so cowardly?  
 1127 The court will mock; your tyrant, whatever he says,  
 1128 Will not value the perfidy your heart displays.  
 1129 The martyrs, churning in the grip of holy furor,  
 1130 Will be seen to blush with shame and tremble with horror;  
 1131 Against you in Heaven Christ His justice is arming;  
 1132 Hell's ministers prepare their torment for your harming—  
 1133 And now you, by the earth and the Heavens abandoned,  
 1134 Come here to destroy me with you—and to be pardoned!  
 (*She exits furiously, speaking as she goes.*)  
 1135 What shall I do, O Lord? How can I tolerate  
 1136 Your glory's enemy and object of Your hate?  
 1137 Can I live with this dislocation in my life—  
 1138 From a martyr's sister to an apostate's wife,  
 1139 A foe of God, a coward, a man all will shun?

## ADRIAN

1140 I'll disabuse you. Where, my dear soul, do you run?

## NATALIE

1141 To ravish in your prison, playing a man's part,<sup>75</sup>  
 1142 The palm today you forfeit by your lack of heart—  
 1143 There join the martyrs, and by holy hardihood  
 1144 Combat with them in the rank where you should have stood;  
 1145 There pluck the laurels God would give you for a crown  
 1146 And in Heaven assume the place for you marked down.

## ADRIAN

1147 What distrust causes you to diminish my glory?  
 1148 God still within my heart maintains His victory.  
 1149 He has received my faith, which nothing can dismay,  
 1150 And I run to my death, far from fleeing away;  
 1151 Alone, unchained, but armed with zeal that conquers all,  
 1152 I go to the combat at the Emperor's call;  
 1153 My guards go on ahead, and all I'm here to do  
 1154 Is to fulfil my promise and bid you adieu.

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75 “[P]laying a man's part”: orig. “d'une mâle vigueur”. In the theatrical context, the acting metaphor enters naturally into the translation.

1155 To free me from my chains is just their vain attempt  
 1156 To make me afraid of them, my weakness to tempt;  
 1157 And I, as that respite's one and only effect,  
 1158 Nothing but the rapture of your embrace expect.  
 1159 Adieu, dear sister, woman worthiest of fame:  
 1160 I go upon a path made of thorns and of flame,  
 1161 But which, before me, God Himself did not eschew,  
 1162 To reserve for you a place worthy of your virtue.  
 1163 Adieu. When my torturers are raging apace,  
 1164 Implore for me from Heaven the courage and grace  
 1165 To vanquish nature in that blessed agony,  
 1166 Equalling my suffering by my constancy.

NATALIE (*embracing him*)

1167 Pardon my ardour, my brother noble and precious,  
 1168 For the doubt unjust and audaciously suspicious  
 1169 That, coming in this state of seeming liberty,  
 1170 Without guards and chains, you first excited in me.  
 1171 Go. That holy temerity in full maintain  
 1172 Which causes you the tyrants' menace to disdain;  
 1173 Though a great one attacks you, a greater defends;  
 1174 A God will succour one who for His faith contends.  
 1175 Run in that illustrious race, you noble athlete,  
 1176 By which we pass from this world's night, the light to  
                   greet;  
 1177 Run, called to a God's altar in humility;<sup>76</sup>  
 1178 Strip off, without regret, infirm mortality.  
 1179 Of your blood shed in God's war, let there be no dearth;  
 1180 Give to it all your body: render earth to earth.  
 1181 And let us give back to God, in whom your cause thrives,  
 1182 The part that He asks of you, and from Him derives.  
 1183 Flee without regret the world and its false contents,  
 1184 Where those most innocent are forced to suffer torments,  
 1185 Whose most assured estate is forever inconstant,  
 1186 Whose being—and not—share almost a single instant,  
 1187 Yet for which a blinded Nature can still inspire

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76 Ll. 1177: orig. "Cours, puisqu'un Dieu t'appelle aux pieds de son Autel".

1188 In her children a quite immoderate desire,  
 1189 Which often makes them, at the risk of perishing,  
 1190 Invest its idle lures with futile cherishing.  
 1191 There what an age produces lasts a moment's span;  
 1192 Lift your eyes higher, Adrian—appear a man;  
 1193 Combat, suffer, and by a Christian death you gain  
 1194 Eternity of good for a moment of pain.

## ADRIAN

1195 Adieu. I run, I fly to pleasures that await;  
 1196 Fulfilment comes too slow, the hour seems too late.  
 1197 My only source, O noble sister, of frustration,  
 1198 And which sours the sweetness of anticipation,  
 1199 Is that the law against the God that I profess  
 1200 Deprives you by my death of what you would possess,  
 1201 And robs your noble blood, to profit public finance,  
 1202 Of its rank's privilege, its glory's sustenance.

## NATALIE

1203 What? Does the flight you take through celestial airs  
 1204 Allow you to look downward on human affairs?  
 1205 Can you, the world put off, departure so close seeing,  
 1206 Still speak not as a martyr but a human being?  
 1207 Do not be worried by an interest so trivial:  
 1208 Cling to Heaven, cling to God, with strength invincible.  
 1209 Keep your glory for me: how proud then I will feel  
 1210 Of an inestimable treasure none can steal.  
 1211 A woman can count endless riches on her shelf  
 1212 Who has a husband who possesses God himself.  
 1213 [*spying Anthimus*] Dear Anthimus, who with your instruction divine  
 1214 Assist Christians, approach and join your prayers to  
 mine.

## Scene v

Anthimus, Adrian, Natalie

## ANTHIMUS

1215 A rumour running through the town has struck my  
 ears,

1216 By which the marvel of your conversion appears,  
 1217 And the noble contempt you display for your life  
 1218 Enlists me, not for your rescue, but in your strife.  
 1219 I know to what point Caesar is a feeble foe;  
 1220 What a Christian can suffer and perform, I know;  
 1221 And I know that never did paltry fear of dying  
 1222 Keep a heart touched by Christ its onward course from  
           plying.  
 1223 Go, then, fortunate friend, go and your head submit,  
 1224 Less to the sure blow than the bays prepared for it;  
 1225 Go, your sacrosanct words to their fruition bring;  
 1226 Go fulfil the wishes Heaven's choirs all sing.  
 1227 And you, blest legions of angels, heavenly host,  
 1228 Who of the thrice-holy Name endless praises boast,  
 1229 Let not your sacred concerts interruption find,  
 1230 But hold the Heavens open, when he is struck blind.

## ADRIAN

1231 My wishes will achieve their blissful paroxysm  
 1232 If, with sin-cleansing water of holy baptism,  
 1233 To enter those blessed ranks you give me the right  
 1234 Of all those this banner had led into the fight.  
 1235 Confirm, then, dear Athimus, with the holy water  
 1236 By which the cross appears in nearly every quarter,  
 1237 In this frail heart that project of glorious size:  
 1238 To do battle with the earth and conquer the skies.

## ANTHIMUS

1239 Of that saving water, Adrian, you've no need:  
 1240 Your blood will impart that quality when you bleed.  
 1241 Only let your invincible faith be descried,  
 1242 And as you fight for God, He will fight at your side.

ADRIAN (*looking at the sky and lost in thought  
           for a little while before finally speaking*)

1243 Ah, Lentulus! The zeal in which my soul is caught  
 1244 Compels me to raise the mask and reveal my thought.  
 1245 The God I hated makes me with love for Him burn:  
 1246 Adrian has spoken; Genest speaks in his turn!

1247 Adrian breathes no more, for Genest's have become  
 1248 The grace of baptism, honour of martyrdom.  
 1249 But Christ would hardly entrust to your profane hands  
 1250 That mysterious seal with which His saints He brands.  
 (*Looking at the sky, from which some flames are cast down.*)  
 1251 A heavenly minister bearing sacred dew  
 1252 To cleanse me of sins is cleaving the vault of blue;  
 1253 His brilliance surrounds me, and all around the air  
 1254 Resounds with harmony and glistens as I stare.  
 1255 Descend, heavenly actor; you wait, you summon me;  
 1256 Wait! My fiery zeal will put wings upon me.  
 1257 From the God who sent you, share blessings round about!  
 (*He climbs two or three steps, then exits behind the tapestry.*)

MARCÈLE (*who was representing Natalie*)  
 1258 Those verses there were added; my cue was left out.

LENTULUS (*who was playing Anthimus*)  
 1259 He made them up, and failing to follow the story,  
 1260 By exiting covers his lapse in memory.

#### DIOCLETIAN

1261 See with what skilfulness Genest today invents  
 1262 A passage from someone's looks to his sentiments.

#### VALÉRIE

1263 To fool the hearer, the actor himself deceive:  
 1264 Surely no greater exploit could his art achieve.

### Scene vi

Flavius, Guards, Marcèle, Lentulus, Diocletian, Maximian,  
 Valérie, Camille, Plutianus

#### FLAVIUS

1265 This moment lasts too long—let's find him right away.  
 1266 Caesar will have it in for us for this delay.  
 1267 I know his violence, am fearful of his hate.

## A SOLDIER

1268                    Those ordered to their death are likely to be late.

## MARCÈLE

1269                    This man—one at the very top of his profession—  
1270                    Genest, whom now you're looking for, has spoiled this  
                                session  
1271                    And, troubled at being seen, has left us alone.

FLAVIUS (*who is Sergestus*)

1272                    The most gifted into such states are sometimes thrown.  
1273                    Extreme ardour to succeed must be his excuse.

CAMILLE (*to Valérie*)

1274                    How his art, Madam, has exposed them to abuse.

## Scene vii

Genest, Sergestus, Lentulus, Marcèle, Guards, Diocletian,  
Valérie, Maximian, Camille, Plutianus

GENEST (*looking at the sky, his hat in his hand*)

1275                    Supreme Majesty, who cast into souls below  
1276                    With just two drops of water flames that we feel so!  
1277                    Fulfil Your good works, and let my case be asserted  
1278                    To trace the holy paths of hearts to You converted!  
1279                    Let the Love whose blaze consumes us now show the plan,  
1280                    For You, of force divine, my duty as a man:  
1281                    Your welcome as a victor valuing repentance,  
1282                    And I, Lord, a martyr with ardour and endurance.

## MAXIMIAN

1283                    He imitates, as if possessed, baptismal graces.<sup>77</sup>

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77 L. 1283: orig. "Il feint comme animé des grâces du Baptême". The translation aims at bringing out the sneering cynicism surely present in Maximian's comment.



VALÉRIE

1284 It would be easy to take for true his false faces.<sup>78</sup>

PLUTIANUS

1285 Surely, either this spectacle is a true thing  
1286 Or never did a false find better imitating.

GENEST

1287 And you, dear fellows of the regrettable fortune  
1288 Which made my life with yours both in and out of tune<sup>79</sup>—  
1289 Marcèle and you, Segestus, with whom many times  
1290 The Christian God’s laws I have scandalised with crimes—  
1291 If I may offer you some salutary counsel,  
1292 Stop being cruel: adore them to the least scruple,  
1293 And cease to attach, with further nails that pierce  
                            through,  
1294 A God who deigned upon the cross to die for you.  
1295 My heart illuminated with heavenly grace . . .

MARCÈLE

1296 Of the couplet he’s supposed to speak there’s no trace.

SERGESTUS

1297 How can this be, when he prepared so carefully...?

LENTULUS (*looking behind the tapestry*)

1298 Wait! Who holds the book?<sup>80</sup>

GENEST

  There’s no more necessity.  
1299 For this new sequence, in which Heaven now directs me,  
1300 An angel holds the playbook, an angel corrects me,  
1301 Granting me, at His command, all for which I long

**78** Pasquier, ed., n. 139, points out the close reworking of Lope de Vega in this passage.

**79** “[B]oth in and out of tune”: orig. “commune”, which seems here to convey both the sense of fellowship and contemptible, because anti-Christian, conduct.

**80** “[B]ook”, i.e., prompt-book: orig. “pièce” (“play”). The reference is to the complete text used by the prompter to supply actors with forgotten lines.

1302 By cleansing me, through baptism, of all my wrong.  
 1303 This transitory world, made of frivolity,  
 1304 Assigned me a role unknown in its comedy;  
 1305 I did not know with what fire my heart should burn:  
 1306 The Demon dictated, when to speak was God's turn.  
 1307 But since an angel-spirit gives me tutelage,  
 1308 Guides me, re-directs me, instructs my personage,  
 1309 I've corrected my role, and the Demon, confounded,  
 1310 Seeing me better apprised, no more has me hounded;  
 1311 I have wept for my sins: Heaven perceived my tears,  
 1312 In that performance found that a true charm appears;  
 1313 Bestowed on me its Grace as my approving sponsor;<sup>81</sup>  
 1314 Proposing its fees, has created me its actor.

## LENTULUS

1315 Though he mistakes his lines, he shows no hesitation.

## GENEST

1316 God teaches me line by line my whole recitation,  
 1317 And you have not truly listened if, in this action,  
 1318 My role even now can appear to you a fiction.<sup>82</sup>

## DIOCLETIAN

1319 Your disorder, finally, is trying my patience;  
 1320 Are you aware that this show takes place in my presence?  
 1321 And may I not know why this fiasco I see?

## GENEST

1322 Excuse them, my Lord, all the fault belongs to me.  
 1323 But my salvation hinges on this rude display:  
 1324 It is not Adrian who's speaking, but Genest.  
 1325 This play is no play but reality presented,  
 1326 Where through my feigning I am truly represented,  
 1327 Where, both my acting's object and its origin,

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**81** “[A]pproving sponsor”: orig. “approbateur”, which here seems to carry the senses of both sponsorship and censorship. Pasquier, ed., n. 141, signals the close adaptation of Lope in this passage.

**82** Ll. 1317-18: the rhyme “action”/“fiction” (same words in French) is in the original, with “action” carrying its theatrical sense of “performance”.

1328 By water of holy baptism purged of sin—  
 1329 Water a heavenly hand has deigned to confer—  
 1330 I profess one sole Law, which I must here deliver.  
 1331 Then hear me, you Caesars, and you, armed troop of  
                     Romans,  
 1332 The glory and terror of all forces of humans,  
 1333 But feeble enemies of a sovereign Power  
 1334 That tramples underfoot Rome's arrogance and sceptre.  
 1335 Blinded by the hellish errors that you infect,  
 1336 Like you I held in hatred the whole Christian sect,  
 1337 And, to the poor utmost my art could execute,  
 1338 I took pleasure in all that could them persecute.  
 1339 To flee them, and adhere to your idolatry,  
 1340 I left behind my parents and my native country,  
 1341 And purposely embraced an art inglorious,  
 1342 The better to scorn them and make them odious.<sup>83</sup>  
 1343 But by beneficence that knows no parallel,  
 1344 By an incredible and sudden miracle,  
 1345 Of which only power divine could be the author,  
 1346 Their rival I became, and not their persecutor.  
 1347 And I submit to the Law whose ruin I craved  
 1348 A soul from so many shipwrecks happily saved:  
 1349 In the midst of the storm by which fate would me strand,  
 1350 An angel guided me into port by the hand—  
 1351 Showed me on a paper where my past faults were traced,  
 1352 And now, with that water, in an instant erased;  
 1353 And that healthful and celestial preparation,  
 1354 Far from chilling me, kindled my heart's conflagration.  
 1355 I renounce the hatred and the rancorous envy  
 1356 That made me persecute all Christianity;  
 1357 What they believe is my own faith; their hope I share,  
 1358 Their God adore: the name of Christian, then, I bear.  
 1359 In the ardour that impassions me, come what may,  
 1360 The body's interests to those of the soul give way;  
 1361 Bring on your cruelties, your burnings, cuts and slices—

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**83** Pasquier, ed., n. 144, points out that this rare reference to Genest's previous flouting of Christianity reflects a dimension of the legend more fully developed in the version of Desfontaines.

1362 My sufferings will still be lesser than my vices;  
 1363 I know what repose will follow upon this strife  
 1364 And have no fear of death, which will lead me to life;  
 1365 I've long had the wish to be pleasing in your eyes:  
 1366 Now I wish to please the Emperor of the Skies.<sup>84</sup>  
 1367 I have diverted you, your praises filled my voice;  
 1368 Now the moment has come the angels to rejoice.  
 1369 It is now time immortal prizes to prefer;  
 1370 It is now time to pass to altars from the theatre.  
 1371 If I've deserved it,<sup>85</sup> to martyrdom lead the way;  
 1372 My role is over with: I have no more to say.

## DIOCLETIAN

1373 Finally, your play proves troublesome and uncouth.

## GENEST

1374 You owe it to yourselves that it should prove a truth.

## VALÉRIE

1375 Has he lost his senses?

## MAXIMIAN

Can I believe my ears?

## GENEST

1376 At the same arm's touch many a marvel appears.

## DIOCLETIAN

1377 What? You will not, traitor, worship our gods with us!

## GENEST

1378 And they themselves I deem as false as odious.  
 1379 Seven of the lot are nothing but feeble lights,

---

**84** Cf. Desfontaines, III.ii.703-4, and n. 48.

**85** "If I've deserved it": orig. "Si je l'ai mérité"; the formula is poised between the perspective of the persecutors, for whom the blasphemous criminal deserves punishment, and that of the Christian, for whom martyrdom is a benefit to be earned.

1380 But dimly shining through the shadows to our sights<sup>86</sup>  
 1381 (Although with your credulity they still play games);  
 1382 As for the rest, there's little more to them than  
 names.

DIOCLETIAN (*rising*)

1383 Oh, cursèd blasphemy! Sacrilege that offends,  
 1384 And which we'll answer unless his blood makes amends!  
 1385 (*to Plutianus*) Prefect, see to it, and of his insolent flood  
 1386 Conclude the actions with a final act of blood  
 1387 That may satisfy the gods' hatred in their rage:  
 (*All rise.*)

1388 He who lived in the theatre, shall die on the stage.<sup>87</sup>  
 1389 And if some other,<sup>88</sup> touched by the same blind intent,  
 1390 Shares in his crime, let them share also in his torment.

MARCÈLE (*kneeling*)

1391 If pity, my Lord . . .

DIOCLETIAN

Piety, of greater power,  
 1392 Will repress the audacity bred by his error.

PLUTIANUS

1393 Thinking over that error with a calmer mind . . .

DIOCLETIAN

1394 Carry out to the letter the task I've assigned.  
 (*Exeunt Diocletian with the entire court.*)

---

86 I.e., as noted by Pasquier, ed., n. 149, the five planets then known, which were named after gods (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), plus the sun (identified with Apollo) and the moon (with Diana).

87 The line is adapted from Lope, as noted by Pasquier, ed., n. 150, and Rotrou has Diocletian build up to it with theatrical language evoking the hubris and catharsis associated with pagan tragedy.

88 “[S]ome other”: orig. “quelqu’autre” – seemingly aimed particularly, given the context, at the other actors and so lending special point to Marcèle’s intervention, whose motive is allowed to remain momentarily ambiguous: might it be romantic love, as with Pamphile in *L’Illustré Comédien*, or Christian love, in keeping with her role as Natalie? But her professional interest will soon appear to dominate.

CAMILLE

1395 Simpleton, how little you care for Caesar's grace!

GENEST

1396 But God's I gain!<sup>89</sup>

### Scene viii

Octavius, Decorator, Marcèle, Plutianus, Guards

OCTAVIUS

What mystery<sup>90</sup> is taking place?

MARCÈLE

1397 The Emperor to rigour of the law now leaves  
1398 Genest, who states that he the Christian faith believes.

OCTAVIUS

1399 Our prayers, perhaps?

MARCÈLE

We tried—no hope in them remains!

PLUTIANUS

1400 Guards?

A GUARD

Sir?

PLUTIANUS

1401 Conduct Genest, bound and burdened with chains,  
To a deep dungeon cell to await his decree.

**89** Pasquier, ed., n. 152, points out the adaptation of the exchange in Lope, where the interlocutor of Ginès is Maximiano. Cf. also Baudoin, p. 147: “vous vous trompez . . . si vous croyez que j’aye besoin d’autre grace que celle du Roy des Roys [you are deceived . . . if you believe that I need any grace but that of the King of Kings].”

**90** The term (orig. “mystère”), with its application to religion, and the theatre that enacts it, is used advisedly by Rotrou (if not Octavius, who will speak in l. 1399 of “prayers” [orig. “prières”] in the purely secular sense); this is in counterpoint to Diocletian’s evocation of pagan tragedy in the previous scene.

GENEST (*as he is brought down from the theatre*)<sup>91</sup>

1402 I thank you, O Heaven! Let us go, I am ready.  
 1403 Angels, one day, those chains with which you<sup>92</sup> weigh me down  
 1404 Will use, in that palace of azure, me to crown.

### Scene ix

Plutianus, Marcèle, Octavius, Sergestus, Lentulus, Albinus, Guards,  
 Decorator, and other assistants

PLUTIANUS (*seated*)

1405 His insolence is as much to blame as his error:  
 1406 To dare to boast of it before the Emperor!  
 1407 And you, who use his art and with his fortunes fare—  
 1408 Is his faith, like his art, also something you share?  
 1409 Is it now contagious, as with some invalid?

MARCÈLE

1410 Oh, heaven preserve me from it!

OCTAVIUS

The gods forbid!

SERGESTUS

1411 Sooner a thousand deaths!

LENTULUS

Flames again and again!

---

91 The symbolic change of scene is to a spiritual theatre, as pointed out by Pasquier, ed., n. 153 – where, of course, a different role and genre will be performed.

92 “[Y]ou”: orig. “tu” – perhaps an indication that he is addressing heaven.

PLUTIANUS (*to Marcèle*)

1412 You used to play what roles?<sup>93</sup>

MARCÈLE

As you have seen, the women,

1413 Unless some disguise within the plot should require,

1414 As sometimes happens, that I put on male attire.

PLUTIANUS (*to Octavius*)

1415 And you?

OCTAVIUS

Sometimes a king, but sometimes a mere slave.

PLUTIANUS (*to Sergestus*)

1416 You?

SERGESTUS

Extravagant types, the furious, the brave.<sup>94</sup>

PLUTIANUS (*to Lentulus*)

1417 This old man?

LENTULUS

Doctors, lacking in both laws and letters,<sup>95</sup>

1418 Confidants sometimes, and sometimes treason's abettors.

PLUTIANUS (*to Albinus*)

1419 And you?

---

93 Pasquier, ed., who notes the origin of the prefect's interrogation of the actors in Lope's tragedy, deduces useful information concerning contemporary theatrical repertoires, especially with respect to genre and character-types (see nn. 154-56). What also emerges collectively is a succinct recapitulation of the *theatrum mundi* concept, in contrast with the "true" identity of the afterlife. See the Introduction to the translations, pp. 12-17.

94 "Extravagant types": orig. "Les extravagans" – used in the sense of "Astonishingly or flagrantly excessive or extreme" (*Oxford English Dictionary* online [<https://www.oed-com>]; accessed 17 April 2023]), *s.v.* "extravagant", def. 6; "the brave": orig. "les braves" – no doubt, in the context, the comic stereotype of the *miles gloriosus* (Pasquier, ed., n. 156).

95 Pasquier (private communication) sees a reference here to the type of pedant common in French (and Italian) comedies of the period, as fits with a wide repertoire adapted to court presentation.



ALBINUS

The assistants.

PLUTIANUS (*rising*)[*aside*] Their frank simplicity

1420                   Appears quite unadorned in their naivety;  
 1421                   [*to the actors*] I pity your woes, but where the gods  
                           are concerned,  
 1422                   Our eyes to mere human matters cannot be turned.  
 1423                   Sometimes pardon for crimes may be legitimate,  
 1424                   But in cases like this, a crime it would create;  
 1425                   And if Genest his blind folly will not repent,  
 1426                   It's he himself who seeks his death and passes judgement.  
 1427                   In any case, go see him, and if that good office  
 1428                   Can render him disposed to render himself service,  
 1429                   Believe me, with pleasure I will see again flourish  
 1430                   The limbs assembled of a body apt to perish.<sup>96</sup>

## Act V

### Scene i

Genest (*alone in the prison, chained*)<sup>97</sup>

1431                   By what precious divine adventure,  
 1432                   Pleasure sacred and sensible,

**96** L. 1430: orig. "Les membres raliés d'un corps prêt à périr". The image evokes both the reuniting of the acting troupe (cf. below, V.ii.1482) and, ominously, the impending dismemberment of its leader's body.

**97** Pasquier, ed., nn. 157-58, calls attention to the conventionality of prison scenes in the period's tragedy and tragicomedy, with the prisoner typically lamenting in stanzaic verses. In transforming lament into exaltation, Rotrou effectively signals his adaptation of profane theatrical convention to *théâtre dévot*. Thus, too, Genest's expression of life's fragility (ll. 1455-60) and conclusion, "Let us die" (orig. "Mourons donc"), at once recall and contrast with similar sentiments in the pagan context: cf. the "Mourons donc" of the heroine in Étienne Jodelle, *Cléopâtre Captive*, ed. Kathleen M. Hall, Textes Littéraires, 35 (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1979), V.1289.

1433 Foretaste of a glorious future,  
 1434 Felicity incredible—  
 1435 With what remedies for our pains,  
 1436 Our holy speech with truths to gloze  
 1437 And help us to preserve repose  
 1438 Beneath the burden of our chains,  
 1439 Do you quit the heavenly plains  
 1440 For the horror dungeons enclose?

1441 O you false pleasure of the world,  
 1442 Vain promise of a rude deceiver!  
 1443 The deepest calm by you unfurled  
 1444 Is never but a wisp of vapour:  
 1445 And my God, even in the pain  
 1446 He wills that we for Him should bear,  
 1447 When He deigns our burden to share,  
 1448 And knows what love we still maintain,  
 1449 A flood of bliss we entertain  
 1450 With no trace of the slightest care.

1451 Death for Him is salvation's key,  
 1452 And by that act of valiant will  
 1453 We cause to spring felicity  
 1454 From an inevitable ill;  
 1455 Our days have not one hour sure;  
 1456 Each instant does their torch consume,  
 1457 Each step takes us towards the tomb;  
 1458 And art, in imitating nature,  
 1459 Edifies with the self-same figure  
 1460 Cradle and bier in one small room.

1461 Let us die, then, called by the cause;  
 1462 To die must surely be most sweet,  
 1463 When someone who from life withdraws  
 1464 Confronts a goal so hard to meet.  
 1465 Since that light of heavenly source  
 1466 Is found only by life's abating  
 1467 And conquest comes by dominating,  
 1468 With masculine and warlike force

1469 Let us run to complete the course  
1470 Where we shall find the crown is waiting.

## Scene ii

Marcèle, Jailer, Genest

JAILER (*to Marcèle*)

1471 Enter. (*Exit Jailer.*)

MARCÈLE

Well now, Genest, this nonsensical ardour—  
1472 Is it still with you or have you shown it the door?  
1473 If you won't act for yourself, if your life's not dear,  
1474 If your welfare can't touch you sufficiently near,  
1475 We dare hold out the hope that perhaps our own fate,  
1476 In this grave extremity, will carry more weight,  
1477 And that, so cruel to yourself, to us you'll yield,  
1478 And for us your obstinacy may be repealed.  
1479 If ever you must care for us, the time has come:  
1480 For separated from you, what would we become?  
1481 By what fortune after your death might we go on?  
1482 What can a body still do when its head is gone?  
1483 It's on your life only that our own life depends;  
1484 All of us will die from the blow by which yours ends:  
1485 Yours alone the guilt, and the effect thus created—  
1486 To punish all for what we never perpetrated!

GENEST

1487 If your minds of constructive counsel are capable,  
1488 Be partners in the crime, render yourselves culpable,  
1489 And you will learn whether sweeter joy can befall  
1490 Than death, which indeed I would wish unto you all.  
1491 You would die for a God whose all-bountiful will,  
1492 Causing you, in your dying, death itself to kill,  
1493 Would make eternity be purchased by that moment  
1494 Which I proclaim a pardon,<sup>98</sup> you a punishment.

---

98 “[P]ardon”: orig. “grâce”, which obviously carries the theological meaning as well.

## MARCÈLE

1495 Oh, how ludicrous!—to vaunt the omnipotence  
 1496 Of a God that distributes death as recompense,  
 1497 An imposter, a trickster, someone crucified!  
 1498 Who placed him in the heavens to be deified?<sup>99</sup>  
 1499 A crowd of ignorant good-for-nothing refuse,  
 1500 Malcontents, the dregs and disgrace the towns produce?  
 1501 And of women and children, whose credulity  
 1502 Has forged to their own liking a divinity?  
 1503 People who, lacking the comfort of worldly fortunes,  
 1504 Find that, in their misery, life's light<sup>100</sup> importunes,  
 1505 So, calling themselves Christians, make death blessedness,  
 1506 And contempt for riches (which they do not possess);  
 1507 Who of ambition lose, because of hope, the sense,  
 1508 And suffer all fate sends them with indifference!  
 1509 This is what disorder in diverse places brings;  
 1510 This is the source of contempt of both gods and kings,  
 1511 Which Caesar, in his anger, with justice represses,  
 1512 And cannot punish with too vigorous excesses.  
 1513 If I dare speak my mind with perfect liberty  
 1514 (And if your own, Genest, is not unknown to me),  
 1515 Such gross abuse could not attest your true convictions:  
 1516 You're laughing at the vulgar and feeding them fictions,  
 1517 And for a cause you hide from us, some unknown end,  
 1518 To this new cult a strong attachment you pretend.  
 1519 Perhaps you complain of neglect in your young days  
 1520 By an ungrateful court that slight attention pays;  
 1521 If Caesar himself was not chary of expense,  
 1522 Yet your good service deserved better recompense;  
 1523 In all courts, however, this complaint is not rare:  
 1524 Merit comes tardily to meet with fortune there;

99 As documented by Pasquier, ed., nn. 162-63, from this point until l. 1528, Marcèle again substantially borrows from the anti-Christian language and argument deployed in the play of Cellot against Adrianus (whose interlocutor is his fellow Titianus). This time the borrowing is adapted to express the actress's true feelings – another ironic twist on the interplay between assumed and genuine identities. Cf. above, n. 64.

100 “[L]ife's light”: orig. “lumière” – a commonplace metonymy for life itself.

1525 Kings are prone to the hard and unfair attitude  
 1526 That we owe all to them without their gratitude,  
 1527 And that our wishes, attentions, persons, leisures,  
 1528 Are trivial tributes due to their royal pleasures.  
 1529 Our profession chiefly, though bathed in admiration,  
 1530 Is the art whose merit gets least consideration.  
 1531 But can mere suffering treat an ill without cure?  
 1532 For one who will be moderate success is sure.  
 1533 To accomplish our ends, let's not aim any higher;  
 1534 No good is lacking for one who lacks the desire.  
 1535 If your life has encountered some compelling need,  
 1536 Don't dream of sparing us—give us your thoughts to  
                     read;  
 1537 Speak, ask, command, and all we own belongs to you:  
 1538 But what aid, alas, from the Christians can ensue?  
 1539 The cruel death which Caesar would have you face?  
 1540 And our inevitable and common disgrace?

## GENEST

1541 Marcèle, it's with regret that I must hope in vain  
 1542 To chase away with light the blindness you maintain,  
 1543 Since you suppose my soul to be so far debased  
 1544 (Despite infinite goods Heaven gave it to taste)  
 1545 As to reach out for other goods and be constrained  
 1546 By thinking so cowardly and so addle-brained.  
 1547 No, Marcèle, our art is not of such eminence  
 1548 That I ever promised myself much recompense;  
 1549 To have had some Caesars to observe was an honour  
 1550 That gained too much glory, paid too well my endeavour.  
 1551 Our wishes, our passions, our long nights, and our  
                     pains—  
 1552 And finally all the blood that flows from our veins—  
 1553 Are tributes for them of loyalty and devotion  
 1554 Imposed by Heaven in giving us lively motion,  
 1555 As I too have always, since my first breath of air,  
 1556 Made vows for their glory and the Empire's welfare.  
 1557 But where I see the interest of a God at stake  
 1558 Whose claims in Heaven far exceed those they can make—  
 1559 Of all the emperors the Emperor and Lord,

1560 Who alone can save me, as life in me He poured,  
 1561 Rightfully their thrones beneath His altars I place  
 1562 And, compared with His honour, scorn the mortal race.  
 1563 If to hold their gods in contempt is to rebel,  
 1564 Believe that with reason they count me infidel,  
 1565 And far from excusing that infidelity,  
 1566 I count that guiltless crime a source of vanity.  
 1567 You will see if those gods of metal and of stone  
 1568 Wield the power above for which on earth they're known,  
 1569 And if they will rescue you from the righteous furor  
 1570 Of a God belief in whom passes there for error.  
 1571 And then those wretched ones, the refuse of the town,  
 1572 Those women, those children, those types of no renown—  
 1573 In short, the followers of someone crucified—  
 1574 Will tell you if for nothing He's been deified.<sup>101</sup>  
 1575 Your Grace, Lord, has power this presage to forestall,  
 1576 But only some use, alas, what is free to all;  
 1577 Of so many bidden, few with your path comply;  
 1578 And though many are called, they do not all reply.<sup>102</sup>

## MARCÈLE

1579 Cruel man! Since this error so possesses you  
 1580 That for your blind illness there is nothing to do,  
 1581 At least appease Caesar's wrath by being devious  
 1582 And save yourself, if not for your sake, then for us;  
 1583 And hoping in one God, to whom your faith adheres,  
 1584 Contrive that your faith in our gods at least appears;  
 1585 If not with a heart, at least with a brow submissive,  
 1586 Obtain for us a pardon and—for your friends—live!<sup>103</sup>

## GENEST

1587 Our faith could never allow such an act of weakness:  
 1588 I am bound to proclaim the faith that I profess.  
 1589 Might I ever disavow the Master I follow?  
 1590 Besides our hearts, our mouths as well to him we owe.

**101** Genest is, of course, throwing back in her face Marcèle's words at ll. 1497-1502.

**102** Ll. 1577-78: a reminiscence of Jesus's proverb concerning the wedding guests in Matt. 22:1-14.

**103** This stratagem obviously presumes Genest's acting skill.

1591 The cruellest torments possess no violence  
 1592 That might oblige me to accept such shameful silence.  
 1593 Could I again, alas, after the shameless licence  
 1594 With which this ingrate voice inflicted such offence—  
 1595 Whereby I made a God a theatrical toy  
 1596 For a prince's and pagan crowd's ears to enjoy—  
 1597 With silence as guilty as my voice in full throat,  
 1598 Before His enemies of His laws take no note?

MARCÈLE

1599 Your death will be cruel if Caesar obtains nothing.

GENEST

1600 My torments will be short, my glory everlasting.

MARCÈLE

1601 When the flame and the iron appear to your eyes...

GENEST

1602 In opening my tomb, they'll open up the skies.

MARCÈLE

1603 O man too fearless!

GENEST

O woman too little brave!

MARCÈLE

1604 Cruel, save your life!

GENEST

Coward, your soul you should save!

MARCÈLE

1605 That an error, a caprice, mere frivolity,  
 1606 Should mean that the light of day you'll no longer see!

## GENEST

1607 I will indeed have little lived if age we measure  
 1608 Only by the number of years prescribed by nature.  
 1609 But the soul a tyrant from us martyrs may sever  
 1610 In the dwelling-place of glory lives on forever.  
 1611 To complain of dying is to grudge being man;  
 1612 Each day cuts him down, every instant shrinks his span:  
 1613 The moment he arrives, on his return he leaves,  
 1614 And so begins to lose the daylight he receives.

## MARCÈLE

1615 Then nothing touches you, and you abandon us.

## GENEST

1616 I'd leave a throne and crowns if I did not do thus.  
 1617 Any loss is light if it brings a God to you.

## Scene iii

Jailer, Marcèle, Genest

## JAILER

1618 The Prefect wants you.

## MARCÈLE

Adieu, cruel one.

## GENEST

Adieu.

## Scene iv

Jailer, Genest

## JAILER

1619 If you do not soon to our gods accord due homage,



1620 You won't be doing justice to your personage;<sup>104</sup>  
 1621 And I fear this act will have a tragic dénouement.

GENEST

1622 A favourable judge presides at my arraignment:  
 1623 His eternal diligence gives me peace of mind;  
 1624 Assurance that my cause will win in Him I find;  
 1625 By His means shall these chains I bear be cast aside—  
 1626 And by Him one day shall Caesar also be tried.  
 (*Exit Genest with Jailer.*)

Scene v

Diocletian, Maximian, Guards in attendance

DIOCLETIAN

1627 May this Hymen, by the fruitfulness its couch brings,  
 1628 To the end of all time furnish the world with kings,  
 1629 And by their actions these descendants, in their glories,  
 1630 Deserve, like you, a rank among the deities!<sup>105</sup>  
 1631 In this common gladness, the joy common to all  
 1632 Marks more your virtue than good fortunes that befall,  
 1633 And shows that in the honour I have rendered you  
 1634 I have paid you less than to you was rightly due.  
 1635 The gods, in whom human fortunes originate,  
 1636 Who make us all what we are, each in his estate,  
 1637 And to whom the greatest king is a simple subject,  
 1638 Must in this business likewise be our chiefest object;  
 1639 And knowing they have our dwelling on earth elected  
 1640 To uphold their rights, to see their thunder directed,  
 1641 And, in brief, to consign their vengeance to our hands,  
 1642 We must constrain human beings by their commands,

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**104** The Jailer's banter deploys, in a minor comic mode, the metaphor of *theatrum mundi* and the issue of false versus true identity. The character-type was well established. For a Shakespearean example, in an intriguingly similar context of Christian revelation about to dawn on the pagan Roman universe, see the Jailer's exchange with his condemned prisoner in William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, gen. eds G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997]), V.iv.151 ff.

**105** There is a starkly ironic juxtaposition with the last prophetic words of Genest just previously.

1643 And our authority, which they'd have men revere,  
 1644 In maintaining their own is never too severe.  
 1645 I hoped for that effect, and that to liquidate  
 1646 So many Christians would set those remaining straight;<sup>106</sup>  
 1647 But it did no good to give them hosts soaked in blood,<sup>107</sup>  
 1648 And with their impious blood their foul altars flood;  
 1649 In vain my desire to purge them from these regions:  
 1650 From the blood of one alone, I see spring up legions.  
 1651 My deeds are more harmful to the gods than of use:  
 1652 Each defeated foe a thousand more will produce;  
 1653 And their caprice is such, in their extravagance,<sup>108</sup>  
 1654 That death animates them and lends them arrogance.  
 1655 Genest, for whom that sect, as mad as they are vain,  
 1656 Had long been an object of laughter and disdain,  
 1657 Now comes to reject the gods' law and theirs embrace,  
 1658 And insolently dares proclaim it to our face.  
 1659 Impiety aside, that contempt manifest  
 1660 Intertwines our own with the heavens' interest;  
 1661 It must needs be purged by death, this double attack:  
 1662 We, the gods and ourselves, have to get our own back.

## MAXIMIAN

1663 I believe the Prefect, whose orders will suffice,  
 1664 Also intends to make a public sacrifice  
 1665 Of your command, and will have that insolent fellow  
 1666 Offer the people this evening a bloody show—  
 1667 Unless already on a stage for grim display<sup>109</sup>

**106** Ll. 1645-46: orig. "J'esperais cet effet, et que tant de trépas / Du reste des Chrétiens, redresseraient les pas." "[R]edresseraient les pas" (lit. "would correct the steps") is used in the sense of putting someone who is lost on the right path.

**107** Symbolically torturing or abusing the sacrament was an established form of anti-Christian persecution – the counterpart of attributing miracles to it. In France, *Le jeu et mystere de la Sainte Hostie, par personnages* (anon.) was published in the mid-sixteenth century (BnF Gallica NUMM-71490); the outstanding English example is *The Play of the Sacrament*, dating from the late-fifteenth century and associated with Croxton in Suffolk (available in *Medieval Drama*, ed. David Bevington [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975]).

**108** "[E]xtravagance": orig. "[ces] extravagants"; the term has recently been used with reference to absurdly excessive theatrical roles. See above, IV.ix.1417 and n. 94.

**109** "[A] stage for grim display": orig. "le bois d'un Théâtre funeste"; the ironic comparison of the scaffold to a theatrical space is a commonplace in deployments of the *theatrum mundi* motif, as, fa-

1668 He has performed the last action he has to play.

### Scene vi

Valérie, Camille, Marcèle (*actress*), Octavius (*actor*), Sergestus (*actor*), Lentulus (*actor*),  
Albinus (*actor*), Diocletian, Maximian, Guards in attendance

(*All the actors kneel.*)

VALÉRIE (*to Diocletian*)

1669 If heaven for me quite empties itself of blessings,  
1670 As its provident eye greets our hopes with caressings,  
1671 I dare yet venture, amidst all this gaiety,  
1672 To ask indulgence for a woman's frailty.  
1673 Permit me, my Lord, at your knees here to display  
1674 All those you sacrifice in condemning Genest.  
(*The Emperor causes them to rise.*)  
1675 The creed he embraces all absolutely shun;  
1676 All know that his crime is unworthy of a pardon.<sup>110</sup>  
1677 But of their life he is such a sturdy mainstay  
1678 That the blow that cuts his short will take theirs away;  
1679 Granting their plea to turn your arms from him aside,  
1680 I yielded to their tears, which could not be denied;  
1681 Nor do I dare insist, if my temerity  
1682 Is asking an injustice of Your Majesty.

DIOCLETIAN

1683 I know that it is pity, rather than injustice,  
1684 That causes you to embrace this merciful office;  
1685 And in any well-born heart compassion will sanction,  
1686 Even for enemies, a truly righteous action.  
1687 But where rank arrogance and scorn for the divine,

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mously, in Thomas More's *History of kyng Rycharde the thirde*: "And so they said that these matters bee kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the more part plaied upon scaffolds" (*The works of Sir Thomas More Knyght, sometyme Lorde Chauncellour of England, wrytten by him in the Englysh tonge* [London: Iohn Cawod, Iohn Waly and Richarde Tottell, 1557], p. 66). Maximian's application of the image adds his intended irony at the actor's expense and, in the Christian context, unwittingly reinforces the larger irony at his own.

**110** "[P]ardon": orig. "grâce" – hence with an ironic theological resonance.

1688 Defiance of the state and of heaven combine,  
 1689 To oppose the judgement of our authority  
 1690 Is to practice a pity spurning piety—  
 1691 To forestall the very tempest his arm provokes  
 1692 And which his intention upon his head invokes,  
 1693 And with importunate care from his hand to wrest  
 1694 The knife which he is wielding to pierce his own breast.

## MARCÈLE

1695 Ah, my Lord, it's true. But of that tempest the blast  
 1696 Does harm to all of us, if on his head it's cast,  
 1697 And if it is left in his hand, the fatal knife  
 1698 Murders us in piercing his breast to take his life.

## OCTAVIUS

1699 If no pardon, my Lord, is due to his offence,  
 1700 Some compassion is owing to our innocence.

## SERGESTUS

1701 The sword that the course of his years abruptly stays  
 1702 Will cut short your pleasures in cutting short his days.

## DIOCLETIAN

1703 I know his merit, and your misfortune I pity.  
 1704 But besides the interest outraged divinity  
 1705 And state alike possess in punishing this error,  
 1706 I feel for that whole sect so violent a horror  
 1707 That when its accessories<sup>111</sup> have faced any torment,  
 1708 Or any must endure, I deem it far too lenient.  
 1709 Still, in token of this Hymen so fortunate,  
 1710 Which promises such blessing to the Roman state,  
 1711 If by repentance, as his own interest should urge,  
 1712 With his blasphemous voice the sacrilege he'll purge  
 1713 And recognise the gods, who the universe made,  
 1714 My pity's open arms to you remain displayed . . .

[*enter Plutianus*]

1715 But here is the Prefect. I fear the execution

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111 “[A]ccessories”: orig. “complices” – a similarly demeaning term.

1716 May have rendered vain your merciful intervention.

### Scene vii

Plutianus, Diocletian, Maximian, Valérie, Camille, Marcèle, Octavius, Sergestus,  
Lentulus, Albinus, Guards in attendance

#### PLUTIANUS

1717 By your order, my Lord, that glory-covered actor,  
1718 Of the most famous heroes famous imitator,<sup>112</sup>  
1719 Of the Roman theatre the splendour and the glory,  
1720 But such a bad actor in his own history,  
1721 More stubborn than ever in his impiety,  
1722 And by all my best efforts solicited vainly,  
1723 Has, of the gods' outrage against his perfidy,  
1724 With a bloody act concluded the tragedy.<sup>113</sup>

#### MARCÈLE (*weeping*)

1725 Which we shall complete by the ending of our days.

#### OCTAVIUS

1726 Oh, fatal disclosure!

#### SERGESTUS

Oh, how this speech dismays!

#### PLUTIANUS

1727 I joined to gentleness, to offers and to prayers—  
1728 To the slight inspiration heaven with me shares<sup>114</sup>—  
1729 Persuaded that my efforts uselessly were spent,  
1730 All the art whose cruel rigour can bodies torment.  
1731 But neither the racks, nor the red-hot blades' fell  
biting,  
1732 Nor the iron claws, nor the torches flesh igniting

**112** Cf. above I.v.239-44. Plutianus intends an irony which actually turns against him (see the Introduction to the translations, pp. 16-17).

**113** In the original, Plutianus' speech is similarly Latinate in its syntax, with its formal unity reinforced by rhymes on the same sounds, as if recalling a tragic declamation.

**114** L. 1728: orig. "A si peu que les Dieux m'ont donné de lumières".

1733                Were more to that rock than soft zephyrs passing by,  
 1734                And could not from his breast tear forth the merest sigh.  
 1735                With more than human strength he seemed all to sustain;  
 1736                We suffered more than he from horror at his pain;<sup>115</sup>  
 1737                And while our hearts detested his Christian belief,  
 1738                Our eyes, despite ourselves, instead of his showed grief.  
 1739                At last, finding force as futile as speech had been,  
 1740                I carried the tragedy to its final scene,  
 1741                And caused, at the same instant as his head, to sever  
 1742                His god's dear name, which he sought to repeat forever.

DIOCLETIAN (*as he exits*)

1743                Let such swift and bitter punishment be the end  
 1744                Of any who dares the gods' justice to offend.<sup>116</sup>

VALÉRIE (*to Marcèle*)

1745                You see how earnestly I presented your case,  
 1746                But his pardon<sup>117</sup> now lies beyond the human race.

MAXIMIAN (*leading Valérie offstage*<sup>118</sup>)

1747                Don't mourn, Madam, an ill that must wilful be deemed,  
 1748                Since he could have passed through it and himself  
                        redeemed,<sup>119</sup>  
 1749                And he instead preferred, in his impiety,  
 1750                By his death to forge, by feigning, a verity.<sup>120</sup>

END

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**115** Cf. the testimony of Adrian, as played by Genest, in awe at the Christians' endurance of like torture: II.vii.495-516 and III.ii.741-48. There is an ironic contrast with Plutianus' impervious pagan belief, which matches that of Marcèle, despite her role as Natalie.

**116** As is supported by the following speech of Valérie, the official Roman view attributes Genest's "premature" execution to the righteous intervention of the angered pagan gods.

**117** "[P]ardon": orig. "grâce", with, as elsewhere, an ironic religious resonance.

**118** Orig. S.D.: "emmenant Valérie". There may be a suggestion that she would have lingered out of sympathy for Marcèle; Valérie must be the "Madam" ("Madame") Maximian addresses.

**119** "[H]imself redeemed": "s'être salulaire" – lit. something like "done himself a good turn", but the ironic religious resonance of "salulaire" (evoking "salut"/"salvation") is preserved by "redeemed".

**120** On the ironies involved in this adaptation of Lope's title, see the Introduction to the translations, pp. 15-16. "[F]orge" brings out more of this doubleness than the orig. "faire" ("make").