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ARTICLES

Awakening Imagination: Glimpses of Ignatian Spirituality in Seventeenth-Century French Hagiographic Theatre

Ana Fonseca Conboy

After being severely injured in combat, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) underwent a profound conversion during his convalescence. Influenced by the lives of saints, by his personal pilgrimage and mystical experience, Ignatius later bequeathed his Jesuit companions with what are known as the *Spiritual Exercises*. Just as physical exercise maintains equilibrium in the human body, an individual makes¹ the *Exercises* so as to attain spiritual health and balance. The *Exercises* are meant to be a systematic spiritual journey and a “logic of concrete decision in which the person’s individuality and the individuality of God’s Will surpass the merely normative character of general principles” (Rahner 1976, xiii). They propose an active method of exercising spirituality through meditation, prayer, and imaginative contemplation. Beyond mere spectators, Ignatian disciples are invited to exercise their free will and become actors in the scene unfolding in their sensory imaginations throughout the four weeks of spiritual retreat. In that sense, the *Exercises* possess a performative force, as W. B. Worthen defines it in *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*: the person who engages in the exercises (referred to as exercitant or retreatant), creates, through enactment and embodiment, a space and a place that generates a meaning beyond Loyola’s text (Worthen 2003, 8–9). The significance of the *Exercises*’ performative force is attributed through conventions within which the scenes progress, in a personal context, respective to the one making the exercises.

Given the theatrical nature of the *Spiritual Exercises*, it is possible to recognize some of their motifs in the development of protagonists of seventeenth-century French hagiographic plays. Moreover, the implicit freedom inspired in the retreatants as co-creators of their own inner plays echoes the call to the imagination of the spectator of the hagiographic drama.

My aim in this article is to investigate how the spirit of the *Exercises* may be present in the conception of hagiographic drama, specifically, by investigating a selection of seventeenth-century French hagiographic plays for the presence of Ignatian spirituality and of practices included within the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. I will first explore the content and form of the *Spiritual Exercises* and give a brief overview of the Ignatian charism, using a dramatic lens. I will follow that analysis with a look at the potential influence of Ignatian spirituality in terms of content in select hagiographic plays: I will investigate the prevalence of repetition in *Le Véritable Saint Genest* (1647) by Jean de Rotrou and will also draw attention to the ideas of spiritual and material detachment promulgated in the *Exercises* in order to address how they are expressed and lived out by hagiographic protagonists, namely in Nicolas Desfontaines’s *Le Martyre de Saint Eustache* (1643) and *L’Illustre Olympie* (1645). Furthermore, I will allude to Puget de la Serre’s *Thomas Morus ou Le Triomphe de la foi et de la constance* (1642) and *Sainte Catherine* (1643), to the abbot d’Aubignac’s *La Pucelle d’Orléans* (1642), and to La Calprenède’s *Herménigilde* (1643). Pierre Corneille’s *Polyeucte, martyr* (1642) and *Théodore, vierge et martyr* (1646) are perhaps the most well-known and widely studied hagiographic plays from the period. This is, in part, due to the author’s fame, but also because the first of the two plays is considered the paragon of the genre, while the latter play’s failure is cause for it often to be

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regarded as the symbolic demise of the hagiographic genre in the seventeenth century. Whereas I will allude to the first cornelian play, I have chosen to focus on lesser-known plays of the period that were performed on the Parisian stage.² Finally, I will address how a form analogous to imaginative contemplation may have inspired hagiographic spectators to supplement missing visual clues on stage and to become directors of their own internal and personal plays, much like the retreatant, in the *Exercises*. In both cases, the ultimate purpose is that of transformation and a call to action in daily life.

The Theatrical Nature of the *Spiritual Exercises*

The purpose of the *Exercises* is to help the retreatant discover God's will for his or her life and to link theophany—the individual's experience of God's revelation—with self-identity.³ It is a dual method, involving humanity and divinity, in keeping with the dual nature of Christ.

The structure of the *Exercises* is methodical and rational, divided into four weeks, for a thirty-day retreat. Each week focuses on a particular form of prayer and encourages the use of imagination, memory, and the five senses in an overall context of "indifference." The first week consists of a more personal introspection, of a "purgative life" (Ganss 1992, Ex 10, 24), with the purpose of meditating on the retreatant's place amid God's creation, exploring beauty, but also personal and worldly sin. The later weeks involve a cultivation of friendship with the Christ figure through direct experience with Scripture and the stories therein. By placing themselves in the scene and imagining their surroundings, the exercitants closely follow, experience, and live Christ's birth, private and public life, death, resurrection, and ascension. In the four weeks of the *Exercises*, the retreatants aim to imitate Christ (*imitatio christi*) and to immerse themselves fully in a scene so as to react naturally and authentically to their surroundings and happenings. In Exercise 114, for example, part of the Contemplation of the Nativity, the retreatants are asked to "see Our Lady, Joseph, the maidservant, and the infant Jesus after his birth." They are to embody the role of a "poor, little, unworthy slave, gazing at them, contemplating them, and serving them in their needs, *just as if [they] were there*" (my emphasis). They are to follow up the contemplation with a reflection in order "to draw some profit" from it (Ganss 1992, Ex 114, 58–59). In order to consolidate and reinforce any interior movements experienced previously, the exercitant is asked to review and repeat certain exercises: "I should notice and dwell on those points where I felt greater consolation or desolation, or had a greater spiritual experience" (Ganss 1992, Ex 62, 45). These activities result in an inherent corporeality of the *Exercises* and depend on a strong focus on the engagement of the five senses, and of the imagination.⁴

The foundation of the exercises is, therefore, the human body and the objective is to reach a personal anamnesis, that is, the memorial or remembrance of Christ's Paschal mystery, of his passion, death and resurrection, through the imitation of and the living with Christ (Barthes 1971, 65). The *Exercises* are, in effect, a call to action, a call for conversion and a call for transformation. The exercitants are actively involved in a formative and transformative practice, using all capacities to interact with Scripture and with God on an individual basis and in the world surrounding them. Through the experience of the loving presence of God, exercitants gain self-knowledge through an initial interiorization of the exterior world, whereby they reflect on their relationship with the world around them, followed by a process of self-emptying, through material detachment, which can engender self-acceptance, self-possession, and self-discovery (Egan 1976, 66). In turn, this progression engenders an opposite movement of externalization of the interior, beginning with a

deep movement at the core of the individual, which is followed by an outward form of meditation and action taken in one's daily life (Egan 1976, 19–20). The retreatants' experience is a holistic one and echoes the incarnational foundation of Christian history. This approach gives Ignatian prayer, as Harvey Egan suggests in referring to Fridolin Marxer's commentary on Ignatian spirituality, an anthropocentric character:⁵ "The exercitant's bodily, imaginative and spiritual senses are coordinated to produce a prayer of total experience involving all levels and every dimension of the exercitant's being . . . throughout the Exercises, the bodily, imaginative and spiritual senses are awakened, deepened and transformed" (1976, 20). The exercitants are disciplined and completely engaged, employing the faculties of body, will, memory, understanding, emotions, and affections.

Each week progresses from the previous one, with the continuous objective of allowing the exercitants to become closer to God, all the while freeing themselves of inordinate attachments and cultivating spiritual indifference.⁶ This sense of indifference, as denoted in the *Principle and Foundation* of the *Exercises*, provides radical freedom over all materiality and allows for a better relationship with God, through which exercitants receive consolation or desolation.⁷ The latter two experiences accompany and inform the ultimate goal of making a life decision, an "election,"⁸ be it big or small. The retreatants are open to divine will but are also endowed with free will. They therefore take charge of the course of their actions in a previously uncertain path. Yet, they are asked simultaneously to discern every decision in order to make an appropriate election. The election is frequently viewed as the focal point of the *Exercises* and represents a giving of self to the divine director of the theatre of the world, the *theatrum mundi*.

The motif of *theatrum mundi*, prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and hailing back to the classical age, refers to the drama of everyday life and holds that God and the company of celestial beings look down on the stage of life's theatre, acting as its directors. In the perspective of performative anthropology, as suggested by Shannon Craigo-Snell, life itself is a performance, a theatrical scene, on which "we act our being, act our way into being, and act within a broader company and context" (2014, 63) to become ourselves. This theatrical scene possesses the same sort of performative strength as drama, and as the Ignatian *Exercises*. It follows, as well, the early modern ethos and the topos of *theatrum mundi*. Not unlike humans in the perspective of *theatrum mundi*, the Ignatian disciple, throughout the weeks of retreat, is actor, director and scenographer, collaborating with God in the unfolding of a personal and interior play.

The *Exercises* thus integrate the concept of theatricality as explored in Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait's edited collection, *Theatricality*. The editors enumerate various definitions of the multifaceted concept throughout history, but for our purposes, we interpret it as a rapport established among text, performer and spectators so as to provide meaning to the performance:

A play is not just a literary text but a blueprint for theatre, written to be performed. It achieves its substantial meanings and import in performance, and so is judged by its theatricality. . . . The specific modes of behavior, expression, and response determine the meaning of the performance, as recognized and interpreted by the spectators. Theatricality is thus located both on the stage and in the perceiver. (Davis 2003, 21–23)

In the *Exercises*, the retreatants (simultaneously actors and audience of the Scriptures) are fully engaged with the text and respond according to their lived experiences in a particular social, historical, and cultural context. They are guided in a process of composition of place, using all five

senses, so as to articulate their imagination and memory as they undergo a process of self-discovery and connectedness to the Christ figure.⁹ The call to imagination, the senses, and memory emphasizes the *Exercises*' theatrical nature and performative force, in the sense that through their creation of place and scene, retreatants mould their path of self-discovery. It is in imagining and creating with the physical senses and in contemplating with the spiritual senses that the retreatants become more self-aware and self-knowledgeable. Through the *Exercises*, retreatants can shape their identity. In urging retreatants to create a narrative structure, Ignatius constructs something theatrical, his "scenes." As Roland Barthes explains, "It is asked that the exercitant live, in the manner of a psychodrama . . . the Ignatian theater is less rhetorical than it is fantastical: the 'scene' is, in fact, a 'scenario'"¹⁰ (1971, 64–65). Barthes went as far as calling Ignatius of Loyola a scenographer (1971, 10), and the theatrical nature of the *Exercises* can be discerned in the strategies of composition of place, imaginative contemplation, and the application of the five senses.

Composition of place expresses a performative force insofar as it establishes a performative relation between the written Scripture and the place created in the exercitant's imagination, therefore providing it with meaning. Composition of place is a mental operation necessary for different types of exercises: "When a contemplation or meditation is about something abstract and invisible, as in the present case about the sins, the composition will be to see in imagination and to consider my soul as imprisoned in this corruptible body" (Ganss 1992, Ex 47, 40).

Even abstract concepts are to be given a corporeality and materiality so as to be more easily accessed and therefore ease the transition to the retreatants' understanding and reflection. Like actors preparing for a role, the retreatants making the *Exercises* are called to empty themselves of material attachments and thoughts and to become completely available to the presence of another reality. In order to attain such a state, exercitants engage with the scriptures by taking a role as a character present in the story. Retreatants embody a personality (or themselves) and live out scriptural stories using their imagination, which animates their spirit. The practice integrates a material aspect by calling on the use of specific details that the retreatant then uses to stimulate his or her senses, which further underscores the *Exercises*' inherent corporeality and theatricality.

So, the *Exercises* are, in their nature, an active form of prayer and contemplation, and they invite the retreatants to explore their faith by using essentially theatrical strategies. The exercitants are in dialogue with God and with scripture through imaginative contemplation, which includes methods such as assuming a character and composition of place. Marcel Raymond described imaginative contemplation as an attempt to "render things that are absent present, through imagination, through the imagining force, which imprints images deep in the flesh, and changes one's life"¹¹ (Raymond 1985, 22). It involves placing oneself in the biblical action and living scripture readings in real time, as a character in the scene, in order to "feel in relationship with Jesus in the pattern of his life" (Craig-Snell 2014, 59). Imaginative contemplation implies setting the scene (composition of the place) with minutiae: the exact topographical elements of the location; meteorological conditions; precise details about people's faces, clothes, or words; and specific sensorial reactions to the unfolding of the scene. It also implies living the scene alongside Christ, his disciples and all others present:

we should take notice of the following. When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. (Ganss 1992, Ex 47, 40)

This process involves using the imagination to “see,” and to create a “physical place” with all its elements: landscape, weather, people, sounds, smells. The retreatants place themselves in their creation and let the scene emerge naturally as they take notice of what they witness.

Associated with the two theatrical methodologies of composition of place and imaginative contemplation is the application of the senses, which are to be fully occupied during the *Exercises*. Ignatius urges the use of “the sight of my imagination,” of “my hearing,” of “smell” and of “the sense of touch” (Ganss 1992, Ex 122–125, 60). By awakening the bodily senses in meditation, the spiritual senses can also be heightened and are present to any movement of the Spirit (Egan 1976, 78). In the Meditation on Hell, for example, Ignatius invites his retreatants to “see with the eyes of the imagination”; to “hear the wailing, the shrieking, the cries . . .”; to “perceive the smoke, the sulphur, the filth . . .” with the sense of smell; to “experience the bitter flavors of hell” with the sense of taste; to “feel how the flames touch the souls and burn them” (Ganss 1992, Ex 66–70, 46–47). In another contemplation, that of the Incarnation, Ignatius invites the exercitant to contemplate the house where Mary dwells in the city of Nazareth, to see the angel Gabriel greeting her and hear what he says to her and how she responds. The use of sight, touch, smell, hearing, and even taste in Ignatian prayer enhances the sensorial and corporal nature of the *Exercises*, as well as the work’s performative force.

To further exemplify the performative force of the *Exercises*, both Shannon Craigo-Snell, in *The Empty Church: Theater, Theology, and Bodily Hope* (2014), and Max Harris, in *Theater and Incarnation* (1990), explore the dialogue between Constantin Stanislavski’s strategies for the actor and those prescribed by Ignatius of Loyola for his retreatants. Stanislavski’s strategies of Emotion Memory and Method of Physical Action constitute a logical “system” for the formation of actors and their preparation for a role. The system possesses a similar incarnational nature to the Ignatian *Exercises*, insofar as the actor is asked to use the physical body, will, intellect, imagination, and experience to awaken emotions and reactions. This all-inclusive process helps in the development of characters and their embodiment. Like the *Exercises*, Stanislavski’s system is a holistic experience that combines internalization and externalization of motives and emotions and combines the physical with the psychological and, one may argue, the spiritual. In that sense, as well, both Stanislavski and Ignatius of Loyola advocate a performance that is not hypocritical, since its roots lie in the individual and therefore tap into the actor’s (in the case of theatre) or the exercitant’s (in the case of the spiritual retreat) identity. The performance can act as a catalyst in the process of becoming one’s best self and of teaching the individual how to attain that goal.

In the following subsections, we will provide ample textual examples from seventeenth-century French hagiographic plays that support and advance our central argument of the clear relationship exhibited between the experience of an exercitant of the *Spiritual Exercises* and the experience of protagonists from the hagiographic corpus.

Spiritual Indifference and Material Detachment in the Hagiographic Corpus

The *Spiritual Exercises* and Ignatian spirituality were highly influential in the arts of the seventeenth century. As Marc Fumaroli, Kevin Wetmore, Claude Bourqui and Simone de Reyff have shown, Jesuits exerted significant influence over French theatrical production in the seventeenth century, not only for the indirect inspiration they likely had on dramatists who attended Jesuit *collèges*, such as Corneille or Molière, but also in the conception of French baroque theatre.¹² Jesuit dramatists were

prolific in the late 1500s and early 1600s, creating and putting on plays in and out of European schools, on feast days, or other religious festivals (Wetmore 2007, 9). These plays, often retelling the lives of saints and Christian martyrs, “correspond in an unmistakable manner to the hell and passion drama prescribed by Ignatius in the *Exercises*” (Fülöp-Miller 1930, 409) and recall the theatrical nature of the *Exercises* themselves.

The influence of Ignatian spirituality on French hagiographic plays of the seventeenth century is most evident in the way they depict what Ignatius called spiritual indifference and material detachment. Hagiographic protagonists will to live and die in indifference and for their God, to whom they devote and give themselves. They know they will receive divine order and a renewed life on the day they die, and they therefore aim to separate themselves from the corruption of this world as they commit to a spirit of Ignatian indifference during their earthly life of human chaos.

The Ignatian charism, that is to say, Jesuit values or their “way of proceeding,” is also noticeable in seventeenth-century France’s hagiographic corpus in the appeal to the senses made through words spoken on stage, through indirect speech, and through hypotyposis, but also in the protagonists’ path to indifference and detachment, in the protagonists’ transformative experiences, and in their “election” to die voluntarily in the name of their newfound religion. This way of proceeding can be discerned in Nicolas Desfontaines’s *Le Martyre de Saint Eustache* and *L’Illustre Olympie*, as well as in Puget de la Serre’s *Sainte Catherine* and *Thomas Morus*, in the abbot d’Aubignac’s *La Pucelle d’Orléans*, in La Calprenède’s *Herménigilde* and, finally, in Jean de Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest*.

These plays have plots that follow the narrative arc of the *Exercises* and Ignatius’s life, with possible direct references to Ignatian spirituality. In *Le Martyre de Saint Eustache*, for example, editors Claude Bourqui and Simone de Reyff comment on the probable intertextual allusion to the Standards in the *Spiritual Exercises*. On the fourth day of the second week of the *Exercises*, Ignatius introduces the Meditation on Two Standards, which presents the idea that there are two standards to choose from, one of “Christ, supreme commander and Lord” and the other of “Lucifer, the mortal enemy of our human nature” (Ganss 1992, Ex 136, 65). At the very opening of the *Le Martyre de Saint Eustache*, the protagonist states: “For you alone I am ready to die, or to live / I saw your Standard, you will see me follow it”¹³ (act 1, scene 1, vv. 9–10). The play opens, *in medias res*, with Eustache reacting to a divine vision of a stag with a cross over its head. Immediately preceding the beginning of the play, the protagonist had been witness to a vision and a voice coming from above that would provoke his conversion and decision to lead an ascetic life until meeting its end, in a sacrifice and martyrdom alongside his wife and two children. At the end of the play, the family races to the burning bull of martyrdom, creating an embodied performance for their persecutors.

While it is not clear whether Desfontaines was educated by Jesuits, he was a learned man. This may indicate a Jesuit education, which would resemble the path followed by many of his contemporaries (Simone de Reyff, email message to author, April 10, 2017). It is also known that Eustache was a favourite in the Jesuit drama corpus of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in Germanic countries (Bourqui and de Reyff 2004, 56). If Desfontaines indeed had a Jesuit connection, Eustache may have been in the author’s memories from his time in *collège*. Given the impact that Jesuit education had on artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe and the visibility of Jesuit literature in intellectual circles, it is possible that Desfontaines made a direct allusion to the Meditation on Two Standards.

In the same way that Ignatian disciples progressively learn to detach themselves from material concerns, for hagiographic protagonists, earthly life constitutes nothing but “a trial of endurance” (Street 1983, 185), and death is a joyful culmination of the uncertain pilgrimage that is human existence (Marcel 1958, 75). In La Calprenède’s *Herménigilde*, a secondary character describes the protagonist’s death in these words:

Never has an ambitious Prince climbed to a throne so happily as he climbed the scaffold, and never has a Prince presented his head so happily to the crown, as he presented his own to the lethal blade, he scorned the last summons we made on behalf of the King, with insurmountable courage, and he made one last profession of his faith before those who witnessed his death, he proclaimed until his last breath his God’s name and yours, and the fatal sword that separated his head from his body, split in half the name of Indegonde which he still had in his mouth.¹⁴ (act 5, scene 6, vv. 93–94)

The end of mortal life is only a beginning. Time spent on Earth, on the *theatrum mundi*,¹⁵ is simply a prelude to “real” life, played on a different stage above this one. Protagonists believe that they do not suffer in death, for it is Christ that suffers through them. Not unlike Ignatian contemplative imagination, hagiographic protagonists’ experience of conversion and awakening to self-identity, rooted in the newfound religion, possesses an apotropaic function: in the perspective of the protagonists, their conversion is salutary and will ward off any evil that may come upon them. The saintly figures reach a state of peace and full union with God, in which their sole will is God’s will (Moore 1956, 78). This state engenders a voluntary acceptance of martyrdom and a confidence and faith in the life to come.

The path of the protagonists on stage follows a structure similar to the four weeks of the Ignatian retreat. In a first movement, protagonists are awakened to their sinfulness and choose to alter their ways by becoming indifferent and detached to earthly concerns: for example, when Trajane, Eustache’s wife, asserts that “In my closed heart I feel a sweet transport / I do not resist, I give in effortlessly / And my soul quickly burns with impatience / To make this holy prescription lawful”¹⁶ (act 1, scene 2, vv. 61–66); or when Corneille’s Polyeucte refers to his “crimes” during life and that it becomes necessary to “Neglect, in order to please [God], one’s wife, possessions and rank / Expose for his glory and shed all one’s blood”¹⁷ (act 2, scene 6, vv. 687–88).¹⁸ After the first moment of realization and transformation, the protagonists are ready to move on to the next step of action.

Reminiscent of the second week of the *Exercises*, the second movement in the narrative of hagiographic protagonists follows: they take inspiration from the life of Christ. In Desfontaines’s *L’Illustre Olympie*, Alexis gives up his wealth, his status and his new wife to be for others and give to the poor, while in *Le Martyre de Saint Eustache*, Eustache urges his wife to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to see and experience the place of their saviour’s birth and death.

The second movement flows into the third and fourth movements, with protagonists living their own passion and anticipation for resurrection to a new life as they continue following in the footsteps of Christ, in their path of *imitatio christi*. They continue to cultivate their progressive detachment and indifference until death. In Puget de la Serre’s *Sainte Catherine* or the abbot d’Aubignac’s *La Pucelle d’Orléans*, the martyrs are described as being stoic and steadfast, determined in their desire to die, because of what they are convinced they will find on the other side of material

death. The Pucelle (Joan of Arc) insists that, in giving up her life, and in disregarding the perishable world, she reaches ultimate freedom:

I finally reach the happy moment of complete freedom, because I leave prison to leave the world. . . . I am expected in a peaceful glory and a bliss that is always free: And I sense that the holy conductor of my life, is still surrounding me. This hope that elevates me to Heaven, and *this absolute disregard that joyfully separates me from earthly things*, are concrete proof of my weakness.¹⁹ (act 5, scene 1, 136–37, my emphasis)

In the spirit of *imitatio christi*, hagiographic protagonists desire to be raised up by the same spirit that raised up Christ. Likewise, stemming from the topoi of *theatrum mundi* and *contemptus mundi*—the notion that the world is filled with vice and vanity, that one should be ambivalent towards it and that mankind is to be disregarded—they “hope for a better land and see no horizon” (Romero 2003, 75) in the life here below.²⁰

The sequence of events and actions taken by hagiographic protagonists parallels the arc of the four weeks of the *Spiritual Exercises*: from realization to transformation, through inspiration in Christ and culminating in the ultimate self-realization in the imitation of Christ. The latter step appears in the form of the martyrs’ own passion, while for retreatants it involves walking with the Christ through his passion and resurrection. The spiritual journey of the hagiographic protagonists as well as the retreatants’ spiritual journey follows a sequence of meditative experience, profession of faith and, finally, of death, and is meant to be deeply transformational and to have long-lasting consequences.

During the plot development of hagiographic plays, protagonists surrender and undergo a process of self-discovery and self-identification through which they realize that their purpose is to serve and live for God, implying an indifference to material attachments and a change in behaviour.

Desfontaines’s Eustache remarks:

The one whose charms we saw this morning
 . . . also took our troubles upon himself;
 And the cross completed his illustrious deeds.
 It is then not fitting, if we want to follow him,
 That amid pleasures, pride drive us to live,
 And that power and wealth, luxury and treasures,
 These cowardly partisans of bodily desires,
 Impede us from seeing and properly recognizing
 The path that such a good Master traced for us.²¹ (act 1, scene 4, vv. 217–26)

Similarly, Alexis affirms that to follow God’s laws, “I must obey, / To follow its precepts, it is necessary that Alexis hate himself, / That he go without, and that this same day, / He renounce himself and his love”²² (act 1, scene 5, vv. 331–34). Polyeucte views earthly life with disdain and sets his sights higher, on the divine world:

Death takes them away [passing fancies], and destiny is decided,
 Today on the throne, tomorrow in the mud . . .
 I have ambition, but it is nobler, and more beautiful,
 This grandeur perishes, I desire an immortal one,

A guaranteed joy, without measure and without end,
Above jealousy, above destiny.²³ (act 4, scene 3, vv. 1187–94)

Rotrou's Genest demonstrates his indifference and *contemptus mundi* at the moment of revelation of his conversion on stage:

This ephemeral world, and its frivolous glory,
Is a comedy where I ignored my role;
I ignored the fire from which my heart should burn,
The devil dictated to me, when God wanted to speak;
But since the care of an angelic spirit,
Leads me, redirects me and teaches me my lines
I have corrected my role.²⁴ (act 4, scene 7, vv. 1303–8)

Genest, like other saints and martyrs from the hagiographic corpus, is convinced of the corruption of society, and of its vice. As a consequence, he voluntarily separates himself from the materiality of the world to pursue his goal of reaching a divine sphere.

Puget de la Serre's Thomas Morus personifies material detachment and freedom from earthly distractions in the knowledge that on Earth, "all possessions are fake and all troubles are true"²⁵ (act 4, scene 4, 87). In the poignant scene imbued with stichomythia that closes act 3, the protagonist is ready to abandon his only daughter, Clorimène, for the sake of regaining his identity in God. He expresses indifference toward her request that he rescind the statements that have earned him a fate of martyrdom. In his captivity, Thomas Morus finds "bonheur," happiness, and he describes his imprisonment as worthy of jealousy, "digne d'envie" (act 4, scene 4, 83). Clorimène pleads with her father, claiming that his death will engender her own suffering and ruin. Notwithstanding, the protagonist waits impatiently for death, in confidence that his daughter should not fear, for she will be consoled and cared for by God: "You beg me, but God requests that I discard your requests, and be deaf to your complaints, as well as blind to your tears. . . . In the port where I am, there is no danger of shipwreck"²⁶ (act 4, scene 4, 84). He sees himself as being more useful to his daughter in Paradise than on Earth and urges her to be pleased with his joyful fate. In the end, after bearing witness to his death, Clorimène is converted and aspires to follow her father in martyrdom, in honour of his values and God. The play closes with her sacrifice.

In another example of material detachment, after a profane life of materialism and power seeking, and following conversion and baptism, we see Desfontaines's Eustache embark on a spiritual pilgrimage with his family.²⁷ Eustache's physical and material loss stimulates a desire to travel from Europe to Asia, calling to memory Ignatius of Loyola's own pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The protagonist wishes to retrace the steps of the newfound Saviour and to live simply, as was asked of him in his miraculous vision prior to the opening of the play:

A divine movement which strikes my soul,
Inspires me to go from Europe to Asia,
And there, with a heart seized by a holy fervour,
See the places where my Saviour was born and died
. . .
In these places, far from Rome, far from its slavery,
We will be allowed to freely pay homage

To this immortal being who can lift us up,
 And who has lost us, only to save us.²⁸ (act 1, scene 4, vv. 265–68; 277–80)

Trajane, Eustache’s wife, responds positively to his request to follow, and in her reply emerge other possible allusions to the Ignatian charism:

Heaven has assuredly placed in your soul
 This honourable *desire*, this noble *flame*,
 Which passing through me,
 Imprints in my heart a similar intent
 . . .
 Let us leave, leave an ungrateful homeland without sorrow
*To this detachment my spirit commits itself.*²⁹ (act 1, scene 4, vv. 285–91, my emphasis)

The “*désir*” that was placed in Eustache’s soul may be interpreted as the holy desire that one seeks during the journey of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Furthermore, the use of the verb “*imprimer*” to express the influence on Eustache may recall the impressions or the marks that are left in the retreatant’s memory or imagination during their spiritual journey. Ignatius would tell his disciples to “Go set the world on fire” when they left on pilgrimage or on mission (Manney 2017). Can this “noble flame” be read as a reference to the flame of Ignatius in his appeal to disciples departing on a spiritual journey? While “*flamme*” and “*désir*” are commonplace in the vocabulary of seventeenth-century drama, it is nonetheless reasonable to posit that in the context of a martyr play these terms also reflect the Ignatian charism. If indeed the earlier allusion to the “Standard” is, as Bourqui and de Reyff suggest, a reference to the meditation on the Standards from the *Spiritual Exercises*, and if Desfontaines was, believably, a product of a Jesuit *collège*, the mention of “*flamme*,” “*désir*” and “*imprimer*” may result from a personal choice of the author to continue the expression of Ignatian themes in the play.

Finally, the “*éloignement*” of which Trajane speaks is, explicitly, of a physical nature. However, the “*patrie*” that is left behind and this “*éloignement*” are certainly also, implicitly, of a spiritual nature. The life of material attachments, their former homeland, will be left behind. The act of detachment becomes their indigenous space, one they were originally unaware of but to which they are returning. They will draw away from the materiality of “these fateful places” (“*ces funestes lieux*”) filled with “funereal objects” (“*objets funèbres*”) (act 1, scene 4, vv. 247–49, my emphasis). By distancing themselves, the protagonists can find a new life of spiritual engagement, indifference, and detachment, through a lived experience of the imitation of Christ, in the physical locale of the Messiah’s life. Christians are called to be saints, to live out their lives in an exemplary way and to follow the footsteps of Christ—this is their essence and the place they return to upon completing their process of self-emptying and self-reflection.

Desfontaines also explores material detachment and spiritual indifference in his *L’Illustre Olympie ou Le Saint Alexis*. Here, the author chooses to focus on the viewpoint of Olympie, Alexis’s wife, and the turbulent relationship with her contenders in the absence of her husband.³⁰ Nevertheless, the play follows, on a secondary plane, the hagiographic account of the life of Saint Alexis. In doing so, it also sparks reminiscences of Ignatius’s *Exercises*, his pilgrim life, his charism, and his desire to devoid himself of all material attachments.

At his father's request and as an honourable son, Alexis agrees to marry Olympie. However, heeding a call from the Virgin Mary, the saintly protagonist departs from his home on his wedding night:

But whatever Heaven wills, because its law
 Supersedes my own wishes.
 I tried to resist, I must obey,
 To follow its precepts, it is necessary that Alexis hate himself,
 That he go without, and that this same day,
 He renounce himself and his love
 . . .
 I will go where your voice today invites me
 . . .
 I hear [the Virgin Mary], she wants me to depart,
 And all I can do, is to say Goodbye to you.³¹ (act 1, scene 5, vv. 329–34, 339, 353–
 54)

Alexis is confronted with a choice—to disrespect his brethren and his loving bride or to follow the voice of the Virgin that requests him to depart. He elects to “go without” and “renounce himself” and make his way east. Similarly, after Ignatius's life-changing battle injury, the founder of the Society of Jesus was confronted with a choice to return to his life as a soldier and of *galanterie* or to transform his life and follow the model of the saints whose lives had inspired him during his long convalescence.

At the end of act 2 of *Le Saint Alexis*, we see the concretization of the protagonist's election. He appears on stage, devoid of all material possessions, holding in one hand the vestments of his previous life of wealth and in the other, modest beggars' clothes. The contrast between the two is underlined by Alexis's descriptions. He juxtaposes the “Seductresses of the senses who flattered my desires, / Deceptive ecstasies, ridiculous pleasures, / Luxury, games, pastimes, dangerous delights, / Treasures of their errors, partisans and accomplices”³² (act 2, scene 6, vv. 617–20) to the “Vestments of my joy, glorious instruments” which he pleads to “Be hereafter my most beautiful ornaments, / May power concede to you, and may you serve as trophy / Over my ambition, stifled with your help”³³ (act 2, scene 6, vv. 613–16). Alexis strips himself of the former accusing them, “For too long, you have deceived me / But henceforth your trap is shattered”³⁴ (vv. 621–22), and giving them to two paupers.

The *Saint Alexis* episode certainly echoes the legend of St. Martin of Tours, Christian convert and former knight, who, according to legend, stripped himself of his cloak to give to a poor passerby. It also echoes an incident in Ignatius of Loyola's life at the beginning of his journey east. When he reached the town of Montserrat, in Spain, he left his sword at the Benedictine shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat and proceeded to give away his rich garments to a poor man. From then on, he would wear beggars' clothes (Thiry 1956, 60–62). While this is a common motif in religious accounts, for both Alexis and Ignatius, the gift of the opulent clothing emblematically demonstrates a desire to detach themselves from the material world. Furthermore, the poor vestments they henceforth don represent a victory over the weakness of the flesh and any spiritual temptation.

In Alexis's attempt to travel to Edessa, his vessel is shipwrecked and he is obliged to return to his home in Rome, unrecognizable to his family because of the turmoil he has endured. His profound and internal transformation is externalized in his outward appearance and comportment, in his

desire to remain incognito among his kin. When Olympie asks the “beggar” if he had any news of Alexis during his travels, he answered in ambiguous terms, not lying, but also avoiding self-revelation. His election reflects a desire to maintain detachment without betraying his Christian values. Alexis remains unrecognizable until after his death, when his father finds a note in the deceased’s hand describing his adventure and identifying him as his lawful son. Olympie is filled with grief in the moment of anagnorisis, of recognition of her husband, and swiftly joins her husband in death, after being separated from him during life.

Given the influence exerted by the Society of Jesus on the arts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is possible that Alexis and Eustache’s accounts could have been among those that inspired Ignatius of Loyola. Like Eustache or Alexis, the Spaniard was inspired by a desire to visit the Holy Land. Unlike Alexis, after many obstacles, Ignatius did make it to Jerusalem. However, he did not stay for long, as he was threatened with excommunication for the danger posed by his presence in the Holy Land. Consequently, he too had to return home. Ignatius’s life and writings conceivably acted as a source of inspiration for hagiographic dramatists, such as Desfontaines, in the plot development of their plays. These illustrate exemplary lives of saints and martyrs who, like Alexis or Eustache, or like Catherine or Joan of Arc, can detach themselves from the material temptations of this world and live in spiritual indifference until the transition, through death, to a new beginning, in the world above.

Ignatian Repetition in Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest*

Rotrou’s Genest from *Le Véritable Saint Genest* also opts for a life of detachment and indifference. However, the strength of this play, in its embodiment of the Ignatian charism, comes from a different source. For our argument, the most compelling aspect of the play is the relationship to repetition and its power in engendering the conversion and devotion of the protagonist. This methodical and judicious action is at the root of Genest’s transformative experience, of the revelation of the true or “véritable” Genest, and of the “apprehension of the sacred dimension of existence” (Ligo 2009, 403). Genest transforms his lines through performance. He appropriates them so that he is, literally, performing his identity. It is through his vocation as actor that Genest heeds the calling to divinity.

Genest, a Roman actor celebrated for his parodic representation of Christian baptism, converts and declares himself a Christian in the middle of his performance of the life of Adrian, Roman soldier-turned-Christian convert and martyr. Genest decries the theatre of the world by affirming his vocation has metamorphosed from actor of the Empire to actor of God:

This ephemeral world, and its frivolous glory,
Is a comedy where I didn’t know my role;
I was not aware of how ardently my heart should burn,
The devil dictated to me, when God wanted to speak;
But since the care of an angelic spirit,
Leads me, redirects me and teaches me my lines
I have corrected my role . . .³⁵ (act 4, scene 7, vv. 1303–8)

The sacred and the profane intersect and even merge in this play. Genest describes himself as being in a liminal state between the machinations of the devil, traditionally associated with the

netherworld, and the soft nudging of God above. He was stuck on the world's stage, pulled from above and from below. Once his eyes are opened and he experiences conversion, he can confidently detach himself and “correct his role.” In a similar fashion to the exercitant of the *Exercises*, Genest “does not disappear, but shifts in the place”³⁶ (Barthes 1971, 67). This is the moment of discovery of pre-existing and authentic identity. He has experienced, reflected and now can move on to action. In his transition from actor on the earthly stage to actor of the divine sphere, and in his return to his indigenous space, Genest bridges theatrical performance with Christian identity. His representation of Adrian, originally meant to be simple mimesis, garners meaning and a theological reality as he transitions from performing the character to performing and consequently becoming himself. It is through this transition that he actualizes his theatrical character and professes his identity through embodied performance.

Genest, as an actor, is accustomed to employing repetition for the purpose of rehearsing a role: “I know that, in order to experience it, through a long study / The art of transforming ourselves becomes a habit”³⁷ (act 2, scene 4, vv. 405–6). It helps in what Fr. James Martin, SJ calls the “spirituality of acting,” whereby the actor grows in knowledge of and compassion for the character (Jackson 2001, 82). Curiously, the term “*répétition*” in French can refer to both the recurrence of an action, as in the English sense, and, in dramaturgy, it refers to the act of rehearsing a scene. Acting, by nature, however, is not repeatable (Wright 2013, 53).

Rotrou plays with the double meaning of the verb “*répéter*,” since it is through the protagonist’s repetition of the role that he makes “foreign something familiar in order to realize its incongruity with the gospel and to reorient [his] performance toward faithful witness” (Lugt 2014, 577). It is in the unfamiliarity of the familiar that newness arrives, that the invisible becomes visible. That which was already present in the depths of the being is revealed and becomes tangible: “Gods, employ against me my defense and yours / In gesture and in name, I find myself to be another / I feign Adrian less than I become him / And take with his name Christian sentiments”³⁸ (act 2, scene 4, vv. 401–4). Genest concretizes Adrian’s identity and from his repetition come discernment of spirits, an election and, ultimately, conversion.

Genest meditates on his role as the Christian martyr Adrian during rehearsal, hears a voice of a divine being urging him to pursue his real role and finally realizes his conversion on stage. The interiorization of his role through repetition concludes with an outburst and revelation of his newly discovered vocation:

I must remove the mask and share with you my thoughts
The God that I have hated inspires in me his love;
Adrian has spoken, Genest speaks now!
It is no longer Adrian, it is Genest who breathes,
The grace of baptism, and the honor of martyrdom.³⁹ (act 4, scene 5, vv. 1244–48).

In his declaration that it is no longer the character Adrian that speaks, but the protagonist Genest who takes the stage, he externalizes the prior process of interiorization and contemplation. He assumes his identity and projects it until his earthly life is taken from him.

Genest perfectly reflects Barthes’s interpretation of the Ignatian exercitant’s self-representation through the use of imagination:

All is done so that the exercitants represent themselves to themselves: it is their body which occupy them . . . an actual someone (Ignatius, the exercitant, the reader, it doesn't matter) takes his/her place and his/her role in the scene: the *I* appears. . . . Their plasticity is absolute: they can transform themselves, minimize their presence according to the needs of the comparison . . . the exercitants (supposing that they are the subject of the meditation) do not disappear, but shift in the place.⁴⁰ (Barthes 1971, 66–67)

Barthes spoke of the *Exercises* as a form of “théâtralisation” and as a dramatic text (Barthes 1971, 47), where the retreatant should not know what would follow. It is in a similar way, where “the exercitants are similar to a subject that would speak while not knowing the end of the sentence they are uttering; they live out the incompleteness of the chain of speech”⁴¹ (47), that hagiographic protagonists, like Genest, behave when faced with their election. Genest goes as far as remarking that the Spirit is now his prompter and it is through his own lips that God's word and desires are proclaimed: “An angel is the prompter, an angel sets me straight / . . . the care of an angelic spirit / Leads me, straightens me and teaches me my lines”⁴² (act 4, scene 7, vv. 1300, 1307–8). In this moment, Adrian/Genest's actions echo perfectly how Egan describes the anthropocentric moment of the *Exercises*, as a

radical return to himself as subject, the active disposition of his entire person, his creative self-presence, his presence to his own deepest mystery as man, a self-presence which sums up, concentrates and fulfills the expectations of his own created self-transcendence to surrender itself to loving Mystery in Christ Jesus. (Egan 1976, 66)

The protagonist becomes who he was meant to be, in a moment of what Laurence Wright might label as “irreplaceable acting” (Wright 2013, 53). Genest puts on his “new self” through baptism and realizes what he already was and knew at the core of his being.

As was noted earlier, repetition is a crucial element in the pedagogy and methodology of the *Exercises*. Ignatius explains his use of repetition in the following terms: “I have used the word repetition because the intellect, aided by the memory, will without digressing reflect on the matters contemplated in the previous exercises” (Ganss 1992, Ex 64, 46). For the founder of the Order, repetition allows for reflection and interiorization supported by memory. It can also function as purgation. In Ex 118–34, the retreatants are asked to do repetitions of previous contemplations and then build on these by applying the five senses in yet another repetition:

The exercitant should make a repetition of the first and second exercises [contemplation of the Incarnation and contemplation of the Nativity]. Always he or she will note some more important points where some insight, consolation, or desolation was experienced. . . . In this repetition, and in all those which follow, the order of procedure will be the same as what was used in the repetitions of the First Week [62–64]. The subject matter is changed but the same procedure is kept (Ganss 1992, Ex 118–19, 59).

In his analysis of the *Exercises*, Barthes mentions two types of repetition: literal repetition and varied repetition. The former consists of redoing an exercise in its content and its form, much like the repetition Genest does at the beginning of the play to memorize his role as Adrian. Varied repetition

involves slightly changing the perspective in conducting a repetition. Whereas in the *Exercises* this may involve reflecting upon a decision from the viewpoint of one's deathbed or looking back on it when entering Paradise, in Genest's case the repetition of the role changes as the actor's viewpoint fuses with that of his character and he fully appropriates Adrian. In neither case, as Barthes argues, is repetition mechanical. Instead, it is meant to bring some form of conclusion or consolidation to a previous reflection, reaction or decision (Barthes 1971, 63–64). With Genest's metamorphosis comes a life decision, his election, to relinquish human control and embrace spiritual indifference and material detachment.

The play inspires dialogue between dramatic spheres through the doubling up of characters and plots, and it unveils the inner workings of theatre, as it discloses its fundamental fictitiousness. By doing so, it can also spark the audience's reflection (Pasquier 1995, 172). The second act opens with a description of the inner play's scenography. Genest, troupe director and actor, argues with the set designer about the best way to conceive the set for the upcoming performance of the life of Adrian. The set designer contends that, given their lack of time for preparation of the performance, a simpler set provides a better perspective for the audience because "One sees better from afar"⁴³ (act 2, scene 1, v. 327). Genest, on the other hand, insists that the set be enriched, ornamented and detailed. This exchange provides commentary to the use of optics in set design, a fairly new and prominent science applied to the theatre (Pasquier 1995, 156–57), as well as to the typical hyperbolic décor of baroque theatre. Yet, it is also possible to look at the insistence on scenography, and analogously, on the composition of the stage where Genest's conversion will occur, as a foreshadowing of Genest's impending conversion and availability to (Ignatian) indifference.

Genest's original obstinacy in composing the scene for his play is influenced by Adrian's openness and availability and metamorphoses into Genest's different, more spiritual and Ignatian composition of place, which will lead him on his path of self-discovery and self-identity in a composition of self (Peters 1968, 30). Genest, the actor/director, who was originally very vocal about certain details and changes to the material set, becomes progressively detached from the physical world and allows for the role of director and stage manager to be appropriated by an external force. He gradually embraces a spiritual freedom and detaches himself from material worries.

As the plot unfolds, the protagonist follows the recommendation of the set designer to step back and take the long view of the set, in order to get the full effect and see better. This attitude is transposed to his life off-stage, but still on the *theatrum mundi*. In an act of letting go, and of freeing himself from the details of material life, Genest has a better perspective on his purpose and true vocation. He is to remain an actor but will make the transition from actor for the Emperor to actor for God. It is in the preparation stages of his role as Adrian that the audience first becomes aware of this transition to come. It is in the rehearsal and the repeated actions and words of Adrian that Genest is exposed to hints of the divine:

If your God wants your death, you have lived too long already.
I witnessed, Heavens, you know, by the number of souls
I dared to send to you through paths of flames,
Over the burning grills and within the bulls,
The singing of the condemned and the shaking of the executioners.⁴⁴ (act 2, scene 4,
vv. 392–96)

These verses are repeated three times during act 2. From persecutor, Adrian had become persecuted, but he gave himself freely to his new vocation and destiny. In internalizing Adrian's conversion during his rehearsal of the role, Genest has the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the meaning of his character's actions. In repeating these words, Genest also foreshadows his own martyrdom at the end of the play. Finally, it is in the repetitions of Genest's lines that we can, once again, catch a glimpse of Ignatian spirituality in the hagiographic corpus.

Overall, saintly figures, including Ignatius and these hagiographic protagonists, strived for a life of material detachment and spiritual indifference. Detachment and subsequent openness were accomplished by Ignatius as well as by Eustache, Genest, and Alexis, among others. They accept and welcome everything that is God-given, and they conduct themselves for God's honour, *ad majorem Dei gloriam*.⁴⁵ These were approaches they could also inspire in others.

A Call to the Awakening of the Audience's Imagination

Not only did the content of seventeenth-century French hagiographic plays draw on Ignatian motifs, but these plays also invited spectators to use their imagination in a way that resembled the Ignatian practice of composition of place. In the context of hagiographic theatre, discursive processes such as hypotyposis, a vivid verbal description of events, encourage contemplation, in that the latter "engenders the disposition to await an epiphany of God" (Ligo 2009, 414). Discursive strategies permit a visualization of what is otherwise concealed and invisible from the public eye. Much like imaginative contemplation and composition of place, the discursive processes are a call to imagination and emotional memory, to the creation of internal and personal plots and imaginary performances, in the minds of those observing. Though Eustache and Genest are martyred at the end of their respective plays, spectators are not privy to the spectacle of death. This was in part due to aesthetic constraints stemming from Neoaristotelian restrictions that would drive French tragedy after 1630. It was also due to the difficulty in representing death and miraculous events on stage. Without the ability to strike at the visual reception of the audience through depictions of martyrdom, playwrights had to privilege other senses, namely the spectators' hearing, while still adhering to the rules. In his *Lettre sur la règle des vingt-quatre heures* (Letter on the Rule of Twenty-Four Hours), addressed to Antoine Godeau (1630), Jean Chapelain suggested that it was necessary to introduce narratives ("récits") on the stage that would supplement the plot.⁴⁶ For this purpose, playwrights frequently introduced indirect speech or hypotyposis to describe the trials of martyrdom.

Hypotyposis allows for something that is absent to be represented as if present. In the hagiographic corpus, this figure of speech contributes to and reinforces its Christian message, since it can introduce "in literature the possible appearance of the unsustainable, in other words, of the *divine*"⁴⁷ (Le Bozec 2002, 7). In Genest's case, for example, there is an abolition of Adrian so as to promote the (re)apparition of Genest, who takes his place and his role on a new stage, different from the theatrical stage on which he had lived all of his life. For hagiographic protagonists, the "I" is displaced to reveal an enhanced identity in unity with God. In the plays analyzed, the key elements of the faith journey, those of miraculous vision, conversion, baptism, and death are omitted from the stage. The visualization of what is said captivates the imagination of the addressees, be they internal or external to the plot, and can engender conversion or, at the very least, reflection on the part of those who listen.

The omission of a visual illustration of violence and martyrdom on stage may more effectively inspire admiration, astonishment, and compassion, as well as other emotions called for in dramatic development. It inspires the use of affective memory in order to compose the scene in the spectator's imagination. As a consequence, external spectators may experience for themselves the pain and loss caused by martyrdom, but also the abounding joy that ensues in the divine presence. In effect, this omission may have contributed to a different and more powerful reaction, reflection, and transformation of the spectators. As Gabriel Marcel states, the dramatic representation,

interests the human being behind the spectator, the human being engaged in this sort of precarious pilgrimage that is human existence . . . it is necessary, I insist, that this human being . . . recognize in the dramatic action which takes place before him/her something of vital concern to him/her, something where he/she feels implicated.⁴⁸
(Marcel 1958, 75)

The appeal to the sense of hearing in order to recount the martyr's experience, which is invisible to the audience, is equally as evocative as the imaginative contemplation prescribed by Ignatius's *Exercises*.

The employment of discursive processes recalls the experience of the retreatants in the *Spiritual Exercises*, who are invited to react to Scriptural passages by acting simultaneously as director, actor, and audience to the scene composed. By conjuring a scene in the exercitants' minds, they are called to visualize and live out the story. Just as evoking emotions "is a part of how the Exercises help the Christian shape her own life into conformity with the arc of the redemption story that is the pattern of the Exercises as a whole" (Craig-Snell 2014, 44), so does the use of imagination to evoke emotion have the potential to transform the life of spectators of hagiographic drama. The playwright elicits the audience members' imagination, even if they are not explicitly guided by a director. The appeal to the sense of hearing is an invitation to external spectators, which they are free to accept or decline. By accepting the offer, spectators can also become their own directors, actors, and scenographers to supplement what they hear on stage.

The role of the internal spectators to martyrdom on stage may reflect the role of the external spectators in the theatre. Spectators internal to the hagiographic plot react to martyrdom in such a way that they may become models for spectators external to the play, in their reactions to what is witnessed. After bearing witness to the sacrifice of the martyrs, many secondary characters, like Desfontaines's Olympie or Puget de la Serre's Clorimène, are spiritually and emotionally converted.⁴⁹ Perhaps the most poignant example of conversion of secondary characters is that of Pauline and Félix at the end of Corneille's chef d'oeuvre *Polyeucte, martyr*. Pauline witnesses the death of her husband off-stage and returns changed, having received a blood baptism and declaring her conversion to her father, Félix:

In dying, my husband left me his light,
His blood, with which his executioners covered me,
Unbound my eyes, and opened them for me.
I see, I know, I believe, I am disillusioned,
By this blessed blood you see me baptized,
At last, I am a Christian, is that not saying enough?⁵⁰ (act 5, scene 6, vv. 1724–29)

Pauline's recounting is enticing and inspires compassion in those listening to her narrative. It also awakens their imagination. Pauline's father, Félix, is so moved by his daughter's faith and devotion that he also converts in the very last moments of the play. Her reaction to the trials and tribulations endured by her husband are revelatory and may act as an invitation to external spectators, as well, to react and convert.

Even if no overt depiction of blood and gore exists onstage, the descriptions coming from the mouths of characters may also inspire the external spectators' imagination. In the absence of a visual depiction of violence, the action portrayed should stimulate surprise and admiration in the audience members. External spectators witness the torment through the eyes and reactions of secondary characters. They may recreate martyrdom in their imaginations to supplement the missing visual cues, in a process reminiscent of Ignatian composition of place. Moreover, in a process reminiscent of imaginative contemplation, external spectators' senses are activated, and they are encouraged to react as do the secondary characters, that is, the internal spectators.

Conclusion

Theatre's revelatory power to unravel the character of human experience can engage and awaken active participation from the audience. Given the emotion stirred in internal spectators to the spectacle of death, and the reaction of conversion or repentance engendered in some of these onstage witnesses, it is plausible that external spectators experienced similar emotion and affective intuition. Neoaristotelian tenets called for spectators to be filled with pity and fear at the end of a tragedy. If we are to follow that paradigm and make the assumption that external spectators were marked by the tales of suffering and death on stage, we may pursue the idea that they were driven to a sense of admiration for the protagonists. Moreover, the hagiographic plots could inspire active participation from the audience, in a call to contemplation and communion with the experience of theatre.⁵¹ Theatregoers could be moved to follow in the footsteps of the saintly figures and, after an initial experience, proceed to their own processes of reflection and action, the three hallmarks of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm that emerged from the *Exercises*.⁵² In that sense, they could actualize the goal of metatheatre, as it is defined by Lionel Abel, to foment social action and change.

Theatre's dramatic force lies in the relationship that is established between the spectators and what is performed. This is especially true of hagiographic theatre, which can engage and awaken awareness to what had always been present, but not necessarily perceived. For external spectators to the hagiographic drama, the reflective and transformative journey begins at the close of the play when they are brought back to the reality of their own lives and continues with the emotional memories stirred by the lived experience of theatre. The use of discursive processes in hagiographic plays reinforces how imagination and performativity can be used in the service of faith. In this way, the corpus resonates with Ignatian methodology in the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In the spirit of self-discovery, Ignatius promulgated the use of imaginative contemplation and the application of the five senses, two practices that are deeply meditative, spiritual, and personal. Furthermore, he insisted on repetitions of previous meditations or on meditations that built upon each other in his *Spiritual Exercises*.⁵³ In the context of the *Exercises*, repetition deepens the moments of consolation or desolation in specific meditations and provides more "spiritual relish and spiritual fruit" (Ganss 1992, Ex 2, 21) for the individual making the *Exercises*. Repetition therefore

complements the learning process, as was also demonstrated in the plot development of Rotrou's *Le Véritable Saint Genest*.

In their spiritual journey, all protagonists referenced in this essay adhere to a pedagogy of contemplation based on a triad of experience, reflection, and action. They contemplate and experience Christian mysticism, in the sense described by Bernard McGinn, by following the sequence of "preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God" (McGinn 1991, xvii). The call to the use of imagination and memory, in both the *Exercises* and in hagiographic plays, reinforces this pedagogy. Like the hagiographic protagonists I have described, the exercitants become re-connected to their identity and their God as they strive to live in a state of detachment and indifference. They are transformed and renewed in a process that goes beyond the cerebral and touches on the affective and even their visceral intuition (Ligo 2009, 405–6). Both exercitants and protagonists evoke in their behaviour the performative force of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

In this paper, I have attempted to illustrate the dialectic between Ignatian spirituality, in the specific example of the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the performance of seventeenth-century French hagiographic theatre. The dialogue between the two is exemplified through historical analysis of the *Exercises*, textual analysis of select plays and, finally, informed conjectures regarding audience reaction and action following the theatrical performance. I have aimed to demonstrate that the experience of conversion of the martyrs and saints portrayed on stage follows a similar path to that lived by exercitants making the *Spiritual Exercises*. In both cases, the process of self-emptying and self-reflection leads to self-discovery and finally to the act of self-gift to the ultimate spiritual director, God. All character studies, as Stanislavski would prescribe, also require a progression of self-emptying and self-reflection, followed by the actor's self-gift to the audience. The process of embodying a character on stage, best illustrated by the protagonist of Rotrou's *Le Véritable Saint Genest*, is composed of steps parallel to those described above for the *Exercises*, therefore underlining their theatrical nature.

It is, of course, important to distinguish the Ignatian *Exercises* from theatre, even though they possess a performative force and are theatrical in nature. That is, they are meant as a deeply spiritual method, with faith as their foundation, to enter into greater relationship with the divine. The Ignatian method shares commonalities with theatrical strategies and has a relationship to theatre, but it aims for authenticity and belief in the context of its religious experience and spiritual journey. Conversely, hagiographic plays, while including aspects reminiscent of the *Exercises* as we have aimed to demonstrate, are not spiritual. They may provide for a spiritual experience, should the spectators choose, but their objective is not exclusively religious.

Regardless of which saintly figure is represented onstage, the conduct of hagiographic protagonists, reinforced by strategies of reflection and contemplation, exemplifies spiritual indifference and material detachment. It inspires admiration and calls for imitation by the witnesses of their tales, be they internal to the plot or external to the theatrical scene. In the Ignatian sense, hagiographic theatre has the potential to awaken the imagination of spectators, encourage reflection on lived experience, and invite imitation, intentionality, and transformative action in the quotidian.

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Notes

1. Scholars consistently use the terminology of “making” the *Exercises* in their writings. I have maintained this language in my writing. See Ganss 1992; Rahner 2014; O’Malley 2017.

2. The hagiographic corpus also includes plays that were performed in the countryside (the *province*). See Teulade 2012.

3. Ignatius describes his *Exercises* as

every method of examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal or mental prayer, and other spiritual activities. . . . For, just as taking a walk, traveling on foot, and running are physical exercises, so is the name of spiritual exercises given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God’s will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul. (Ganss 1992, Ex 1, 21)

4. «L’image est la matière constante des Exercices: les vues, les représentations, les allégories, les mystères [. . .] suscités continûment par les sens imaginaires, sont les unités constitutives de la méditation» (Barthes 1971, 69–70).

5. Egan’s problematic gives Ignatian prayer a three-part character, anthropocentric, christocentric and mystagogical. For the purposes of this article, the most pertinent of these characters is the first of the three.

6. The hallmark of spiritual indifference, in the Ignatian sense, does not mean disinterest or carelessness. Instead, it implies extreme availability and absence of any personal inclinations. This attitude provides a vulnerability to the influence of God.

7. The *Exercises’ Principle and Foundation* states that “it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters. Rather, we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created” (Ganss 1992, Ex 23, 32).

In Ex 316–24, consolation is defined as “that which occurs when some interior motion is caused within the soul through which it comes to be inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord” (Ganss 1992, Ex 316, 122) and desolation is defined as “everything which is the contrary of what was described in the Third Rule [consolation]; for example, obtuseness of soul, turmoil within it, an impulsive motion toward low and earthly things, or disquiet from various agitations and temptations. These move one toward lack of faith and leave one without hope and without love. One . . . feels separated from our Creator and Lord” (Ganss 1992, Ex 317, 122).

8. The election, which appears in the second week, is an act of freedom in its “non-choice”: “I ought to focus only on the purpose for which I am created, to praise God our Lord and to save my soul. Accordingly, anything whatsoever that I elect ought to be chosen as an aid toward that end” (Ganss, 1992, Ex 169, 74).

9. In the Meditation about the Three Sins, for example, the retreatant is asked to create a “composition made by imagining the place. . . . When a contemplation or meditation is about something that can be gazed on, for example, a contemplation of Christ our Lord, who is visible, the composition will be to see in imagination the physical place where that which I want to contemplate is taking place. By physical place I mean, for instance, a temple or a mountain where Jesus Christ or our Lady happens to be, in accordance with the topic I desire to contemplate” (Ganss 1992, Ex 47, 40). Later, in the Meditation on Hell, the retreatant is asked to “see with

the eyes of the imagination,” to “hear the wailing,” to “perceive the smoke, the sulphur,” to “experience the bitter flavors of hell” and to “feel how the flames touch the souls and burn them” (Ganss 1992, Ex 66–70, 46–47). Later even, in the Meditation on Two Standards, the exercitant should imagine the place of the two standards, by imagining “a great plain in the region of Jerusalem, where the supreme commander of the good people is Christ our Lord, then another plain in the region of Babylon, where the leader of the enemy is Lucifer” (Ganss 1992, Ex 138, 65).

10. «Qu’il est demandé à l’exercitant de vivre, à la façon d’un psychodrama [. . .] le théâtre ignacien est moins rhétorique que fantasmatique: la “scène” y est, en fait, un “scénario”».

11. «Rendre présentes les choses absentes, par l’imagination, par la force imaginante, qui imprime les images au plus profond de la chair, qui change la vie».

12. For a more in-depth discussion of this subject, consult Fumaroli 1996.

13. «Pour toi seul [Dieu] je suis prêt de mourir, ou de vivre / J’ai vu ton Etendard, tu me le verras suivre».

14. «Jamais Prince ambitieux ne monta si gayement sur le trosne qu’il est monté sur l’eschafaut, & jamais Prince ne presenta si gayement la teste à des couronnes qu’il l’a présentée au glaive mortel, il a dédaigné les derniers sommations qu’on luy a faites de la part du Roy, avec un courage invincible, & a fait une dernière confession de sa foy devant ceux qui assistoient à sa mort, il a proféré jusqu’à son dernier soupir le nom de son Dieu & le vostre, & la fatale espée qui a separé sa teste de son corps, a partagé par la moitié le nom d’Indegonde qu’il avait encore à la bouche».

15. *Theatrum mundi* is ubiquitous in plot development of hagiographic plays and echoes the theatrical nature of the *Spiritual Exercises*. It also reinforces our choice of analysis of hagiographic theatre in the context of its performative force. It is important to note that death on a scaffold can be reminiscent of representations on a theatrical stage, as illustrated in Charles Regnault’s *Marie Stuard, reyne d’Écosse*:

The people, however, in waves
Move with us amidst darkness
And runs to the scaffold so that without obstacle
It can observe this tragic spectacle
Spectators speak in their own way
And each judge according to their own sentiment
One says that this torture is a poor example
At the same time as he contemplates [the spectacle] without feeling
Another says that this judgement shocks all laws
That respect, in the least, the sacred blood of Kings.
Lastly, we hear from a people that whispers
Either of your order or of this adventure (Regnault 1639, act 5, scene 4, p. 102).

[Le peuple toutesfois en ondes agité
Se coule avecque nous parmy l’obscurité
Et court à l’échafaut afin que sans obstacle
Il puisse regarder ce tragique spectacle
Chacun des assistans parle diversement
Et chacun veut juger selon son sentiment
L’un dit que ce supplice est de mauvais exemple
Lors que sans passion son ame le contemple
L’autre que cet arrest choque toutes les lois
Qui respectent du moins le sacré sang des Rois.
Enfin, l’on oit par tout un peuple qui murmure
Ou de vostre ordonnance ou de cette advanture]

The passage exemplifies well the theatrical nature of martyrdom. The masses, composed of individuals who judge differently and independently what they see, are drawn to the stage of martyrdom so as to observe and be witness to the “tragic spectacle,” much in the same way that spectators are drawn to the theatre, to watch, interpret, and discuss its “spectacle.” The nature of the spectacle of death is not dissimilar to the nature of a theatrical performance. In turn, the theatrical nature of martyrdom itself and the embodied performance of the protagonists of hagiographic theatre in their path towards death to the material world are reminiscent of the theatrical nature of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

16. «Dans mon cœur interdit je sens un doux transport / Je ne résiste point, je cède sans effort, / Et mon âme aussitôt brûle d’impatience / De réduire en effet cette sainte ordonnance».

17. «Négliger pour lui plaire, et femme, et biens, et rang, / Exposer pour sa gloire et verser tout son sang».

18. Thus recalling in his audience’s mind the biblical passage from the Gospel according to St Mark “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age” (Mark 10:29–30).

19. «Je touche enfin l’heureux moment d’une entière liberté, puis que je sors de prison pour sortir du monde [. . .] je suis attendue dans une paix de gloire & une félicité toujours libre: Et je sens bien que le sacré conducteur de ma vie, est encore alentour de moy. Cette esperance qui m’élève au Ciel, & ce mespris absolu qui me separe avec joye des choses terrestres, en sont des preuves sensibles à ma foiblesse».

20. In doing so, they also heed St Paul’s advice to the Ephesians to “put away [their] old self of [their] former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of [their] minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth” (4:22–24).

21. «Celui dont ce matin nous avons vu les charmes / [. . .] prit aussi nos maux; / Et la croix a fini ses illustres travaux. / Il n’est donc pas séant si nous le voulons suivre, / Que parmi les plaisirs, l’orgueil nous fasse vivre, / Et que la pourpre, l’or, le luxe et les trésors, / Ces lâches Partisans des voluptés du corps, / Nous empêchent de voir et de bien reconnaître/ Le sentier qu’a tracé pour nous un si bon Maître».

22. «Il faut que j’obéisse [. . .] [qu’] Alexis se haisse / Qu’il se prive de tout et qu’en ce même jour, / Il renonce à soi-même ainsi qu’à son amour».

23. «La mort nous les [biens passagers] ravit, la fortune s’en joue, / Aujourd’hui dans le trône, et demain dans la boue [. . .] / J’ai de l’ambition, mais plus noble, et plus belle, / Cette grandeur périt, j’en veux une immortelle, / Un bonheur assuré, sans mesure, et sans fin, / Au-dessus de l’envie, au-dessus du destin».

24. «Ce monde périssable, et sa gloire frivole, / Est une comédie où j’ignorais mon rôle; / J’ignorais de quel feu mon cœur devait brûler, / Le démon me dictait, quand Dieu voulait parler; / Mais depuis que le soin d’un esprit angélique, / Me conduit, me r’adresse, et m’apprend ma réplique, / J’ai corrigé mon rôle, [. . .]»

25. «Tous les biens sont faux, & les maux véritables».

26. «Enfin, vous m’en priez, mais Dieu me commande de rejeter vos prieres, & d’estre sourd à vos plaintes, aussi bien qu’aveugle à vos larmes [. . .] Dans le port où je suis, il n’y a point de peril de naufrage».

27. Amid turmoil and turbulence, as well as physical separation, imposed on the family by pirates and wild animals, they wander in search of an ascetic, but meaningful life:

Let us abandon without displeasure this delusion of grandeur,
This happiness that is but passing
This shadow that misleads us, and this illusion
Which places in your mind this confusion
. . .
Accept without moaning these material ravages,
And know that today our calamity
Opens for us the way to immortality (act 1, scene 4, vv. 197–200; 214–16).

In time, they mature in faith and eventually reencounter each other, only to accept the paradoxical victory of dying to destroy death and find eternal life, through selflessness and martyrdom. Eustache and his kin give up materialism after their spiritual awakening. They exemplify Ignatian detachment on the path to martyrdom and new life.

28. «Un divin mouvement, dont mon âme est saisie, / M'inspire de passer de l'Europe en Asie, / Et là d'un cœur épris d'une sainte ferveur, / Voir les lieux où naquit et mourut mon Sauveur. / [. . .] Dans ces lieux, loin de Rome, et de son esclavage, / Il nous sera permis de rendre un libre hommage / A cet être immortel qui nous peut relever, / Et qui nous a perdus, afin de nous sauver».

29. «Le Ciel assurément a mis dedans ton âme / Cet illustre *désir*, et cette noble *flamme*, / Qui se faisant passage au travers de mon sein, / *Imprime* dans mon cœur un semblable dessein / [. . .] Laissons, laissons sans peine une ingrate patrie, / *A cet éloignement mon esprit se résout*».

30. This is done in order to render the plot more appealing to the audience, who would have been familiar with the life of the saint.

31. «Mais quoi le Ciel le veut, et son commandement / Dessus mes volontés agit absolument. / J'ai beau lui résister, il faut que j'obéisse, / Que pour suivre ses lois Alexis se haïsse, / Qu'il se prive de tout, et qu'en ce même jour / Il renonce à soi-même ainsi qu'à son amour/ [. . .] Je vais où votre voix aujourd'hui me convie / [. . .] Je l'entends, elle veut que je quitte ce lieu, / Et tout ce que je puis, est de te dire Adieu».

32. «Charmeresses des sens qui flattiez mes désirs, / Trompeuses voluptés, ridicules plaisirs, / Luxe, jeux, passe-temps, dangereuses délices, / Trésors de leurs erreurs, partisans et complices».

33. «Habits de mon bonheur, glorieux instruments [. . .] Soyez dorénavant mes plus beaux ornements, / Que la pourpre vous cède, et servez de trophée/ A mon ambition par votre aide étouffée».

34. «Trop longtemps vous m'avez abusé, / Mais pour moi désormais votre piège est brisé».

35. «Ce monde périssable, et sa gloire frivole, / Est une comédie où j'ignorais mon rôle; / J'ignorais de quel feu mon cœur devait brûler, / Le démon me dictait, quand Dieu voulait parler;/ Mais depuis que le soin d'un esprit angélique, / Me conduit, me r'adresse, et m'apprend ma réplique, / J'ai corrigé mon rôle, [. . .]».

36. «Ne disparaît pas mais se déplace dans la chose».

37. «Je sais, pour l'éprouver, que par un long étude / L'art de nous transformer nous passe en habitude».

38. «Dieux, prenez contre moi ma défense et la vôtre; / D'effet comme de nom je me trouve être un autre; / Je feins moins Adrian que je ne le deviens, / Et prends avec son nom des sentiments chrétiens».

39. «Il faut lever le masque et t'ouvrir ma pensée; / Le Dieu que j'ai haï m'inspire son amour; / Adrian a parlé, Genest parle à son tour! / Ce n'est plus Adrian, c'est Genest qui respire / La grâce du baptême et l'honneur du martyre».

40. «Tout est fait pour que l'exercitant s'y représente lui-même: c'est son corps qui va l'occuper [. . .] quelqu'un d'actuel (Ignace, l'exercitant, le lecteur, peu importe) prend sa place et son rôle dans la scène: le *je* apparaît [. . .] Sa plasticité est absolue: il peut se transformer, se rapetisser selon les besoins de la comparaison [. . .] l'exercitant (à supposer qu'il soit le sujet de la méditation) ne disparaît pas mais se déplace dans la chose».

41. «l'exercitant est semblable à un sujet qui parlerait en ignorant la fin de la phrase dans laquelle il s'engage; il vit l'incomplétude de la chaîne parlée».

42. «Un ange tient la pièce, un ange me redresse; / [. . .] le soin d'un esprit angélique / Me conduit, me redresse et m'apprend ma réplique».

43. «On voit mieux de loin».

44. «Si ton Dieu veut ta mort, c'est déjà trop vécu. / J'ai vu, Ciel, tu le sais par le nombre des âmes / Que j'osai t'envoyer par des chemins de flammes, / Dessus les grils ardents et dedans les taureaux, / Chanter les condamnés et trembler les bourreaux».

45. "For the greater glory of God." This is the Latin motto of the Society of Jesus.

46. «Introduire aussi les messagers, pour faire entendre les choses qu'il fallait qui se passassent ailleurs et décharger le théâtre d'autant» (Chapelain 1936, 120).

47. «Dans la littérature la possible apparition de l'insoutenable, autrement dit du *divin*».

48. «Intéresse l'être humain derrière le spectateur, l'être humain engagé dans cette sorte de pèlerinage hasardeux qu'est l'existence humaine [. . .] il faut, dis-je, que cet être humain [. . .] reconnaisse dans l'action dramatique qui se déploie devant lui quelque chose qui le concerne essentiellement ou vitale, quelque chose où il se sente lui-même impliqué». Later in his book, Marcel states that «la tâche suprême de l'auteur dramatique chrétien est de mettre le spectateur non pas en tant que spectateur, je le répète, mais en tant qu'être humain, en *présence de Dieu*» (86, his emphasis).

49. In Rotrou's *Genest* only the main character converts, contrary to what occurs in most hagiographic theatre. This element distinguishes the play from others of the corpus and adds to its ambiguous nature. Desfontaines's *L'illustre comédien*, a play we do not address in this paper, but which also tells Genest's narrative, hints at a possible conversion of Dioclétian at the end of the play. The Emperor makes clear that he regrets having martyred Genest and Pamphile and that he repents and will pay homage to the Christian couple and ensure their posterity. He does not explicitly convert, however. Any conversion of the character Dioclétian would go against historical evidence.

50. «Mon époux en mourant m'a laissé ses lumières, / Son sang dont tes bourreaux viennent de me couvrir / M'a dessillé les yeux, et me les vient d'ouvrir. / Je vois, je sais, je crois, je suis désabusée, / De ce bienheureux sang tu me vois baptisée, / Je suis chrétienne enfin, n'est-ce point assez dit?».

51. As an example of theatre within theatre, *Le Véritable Saint Genest* demonstrates the power that acting can have on an audience, and how it can move and inspire emotions in the observers. At the end of act 2, notably, the internal play is interrupted by exclamations and compliments of Dioclétian's court in regard to Genest's brilliant presence and performance. Contrary to what occurs in most plays from the hagiographic corpus, while the court is moved by Genest's acting, they are not converted in the end.

52. In the *Ratio studiorum* (1599), the Jesuits laid out a teaching methodology based on the elements of Experience, Reflection, and Action. This teaching methodology would later become labelled the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, and its precepts were already visible in the *Spiritual Exercises*. The progression from week to week in the retreat can be described, as Barthes suggests, from deformation to reformation (week 1), from reformation to conformation (week 2), from conformation to confirmation (week 3) and finally from confirmation to transformation (week 4) (1971, 63). This process depends highly on strategies addressed in the *Exercises*, namely patterns of repetition, meditation, contemplation and colloquies, a sequence that accompanies the first two moments of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, those of Experience and Reflection, with the aim of flowing into the third, that of Action.

53. "In this way the person who is contemplating, by taking this history as the authentic foundation, and by reflecting on it and reasoning about it for oneself, can thus discover something that will bring better understanding or a more personalized concept of the history—either through one's own reasoning or insofar as the understanding is enlightened by God's grace. . . . For what fills and satisfies the soul consists, not in knowing much, but in our understanding the realities profoundly and in savoring them interiorly" (Ganss 1992, Ex 2, 22).

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