

The Crescent Moon and the Orb

Political Allegory and Cosmographic Detour in
Gabriel Bounin's *La Soltane*

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“O jour phoebien, jour saint ou je dois voir / Mes fils en majesté, en hauteur, & pouvoir, / Les primes du levant, & du fer de leurs lances / Reduire tout ce rond soubz leurs obeissances”—thus Rose, the female protagonist of Gabriel Bounin's little-discussed tragedy *La Soltane* (Paris: Guillaume Morel, 1561) makes her frenzied demand that her sons, rather than Moustapha, Sultan Solyman's oldest son, rule the whole terrestrial orb.¹ Rose's words announce the political question that organizes the play, namely, what is the special nature of monarchical power (“majesté”) and who has it in a kingdom. In *La Soltane's* byzantine plot, Rose, Soltan Solyman's wife, and Rustan, his first vizier, scheme to have Moustapha, Solyman's oldest son born to another woman, executed in an attempt to ensure that Rose's four sons will eventually rise to power.² Rose's maid Sirene tries to temper Rose's desire to rule while Moustapha's friend, the Sophy, attempts to save his friend with his prudent advise to flee; but Rose and Rustan prevail despite these efforts, and Solyman, who has been led to believe that Moustapha is trying to overthrow him, has his son strangled by his mutes for alleged rebellion. The play presents a fictionalized version of the actual struggle for power within the Ottoman dynasty, which led to the ordered execution of şehzade Mustafa, sultan Süleymân I's son in 1553, and it was composed in France at a time when the religious divide between Catholics and Protestants and the rivalry of aristocratic factions threatened the power of the Valois monarchy. This play is thus about very topical issues in France—monarchy and its crisis—and I trace Bounin's ideas about them in the play. I show that the author's political thought is situated in the middle between anti-absolutism and the desire for a strong central government. Being in the middle of the political spectrum, Bounin also finds himself between the nobility and the monarchy, which makes his thought rather conflicted.

Although *La Soltane* has often been called “the first Orientalist tragedy” in France, I argue that the organizing principle of the play is a political idea rather than Orientalism (understood as the systematic denigration of Eastern peoples and cultures by the West), which makes it one (perhaps the first) of a series of minor plays and pamphlets written in French in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in which the figure of the “Turk” and the Ottoman court serve as political allegories for French audiences.³ Thus the play’s Turks—or “the Solymans” as Bounin prefers to call them⁴—indeed constitute an Oriental mirror but this mirror is to reflect the political problems that France is facing. In addition, by situating the Solymans in a picturesque cosmography that renders them exotic, even outlandish, Bounin creates an effect of distancing. The distance created by this Oriental detour reassures the audience that while this sort of crisis *could* happen to them it will not. While the political intrigues of the Solymans, the flows in their cosmography, prefigure the ambitions of the various fractions in France that destabilize the monarchy, they never come home to France, or so Bounin wants to reassure his audience.

1. *La Soltane* and the Challenges of Reading

As Michael Heath notes, Bounin’s Solymans go around swearing by ancient gods—including Rose’s Phoebus—and invoking the demons of Tartary.⁵ Although Bounin borrows the story of Mustapha’s execution from a contemporary pamphlet written by the soldier who had escaped from Turkish captivity, Nicolas Moffan, he replaces the factual descriptions of Ottoman society and politics with references to Greek and Roman mythology, culture, and geography.⁶ Thus, *La Soltane* contains only a handful Ottoman realia: place names like Amasie, Moustapha’s seat, proper names like Solyman and Moustapha, and references to kaftans and Lalcoran. The Solymans are no longer anchored in the geographic space of the Ottoman Empire and its culture, but are afloat in ancient Greco-Roman geography and culture and Ptolemaic cosmography, which are, in turn, riddled with Orientalist references. Rose refers to the place where Solyman’s court is as “Byzance.” The turcophobia that characterizes Moffan’s story has also disappeared from *La Soltane*, wherein there is no suggestion that the Solymans are enemies of Christendom. Although *La Soltane* imitates humanist tragedies popularized in France by Étienne Jodelle and Jean de la Peruse and relies on Senecan tragedy as a model for using violence to teach a political lesson, unlike De la Peruse’s and (later) Robert Garnier’s plays, *La Soltane* does not succeed in creating the illusion of a coherent dramatic

“elsewhere”—modeled on either Ottoman, Biblical, or classic cultures.⁷ With its anachronistic mélange of mythology, cosmography, and local color, it remains detached from history. These peculiarities of the play raise the question of whether the Oriental detour in the play is much of a detour at all. Does Bounin use the Solymans, as Heath has argued, as flat allegories of French persons, or is their strangeness an important element in the play?

Heath suggests that Moustapha stands for the Bourbon Prince of Condé and Rustan for François de Guise. The story of the unjustly executed Ottoman prince due to the scheming of courtiers mirrors the political turbulence at the French court at the time of the play's composition (probably in the second half of 1560).⁸ The brief reign of François II (1559–1560) was characterized by the rivalry between powerful aristocratic families for power: the Guises, who exerted an especially strong influence on the young king, and the Bourbons. The Bourbon Condé, who became the military leader of the French Protestants, was arrested and condemned to death in November 1560. After the death of François II (December 5, 1560), the regent Catherine de Médicis strove—successfully, as Katherine Crawford has shown—to strengthen the monarchy, which opened a brief window of optimism for those who wished for a stronger central government—among them Bounin.⁹ Among other measures, Condé was released. Bounin's goal in the play is to promote Catherine de Médicis and her “moyenneur” chancellor Michel de l'Hospital,¹⁰ but the play is also riddled with ambiguities, making it uncertain whether Bounin is channeling his sympathy for Condé or for Catherine and her court.

Bounin, a lawyer in the service of the Valois, addresses Michel de l'Hospital in the Preface, in which he states that he intends to use his learning to teach a political lesson rather than “[s]e cacher dans les lettres” (6).¹¹ A review of Bounin's handful of writings suggests that he never simply “hid” behind his erudition but sought to speak his mind while also seeking the support of different patrons. In *La Soltane*, he praises Catherine de Médicis and Michel de l'Hospital, especially for their politics of reconciliation; but in *La Tragédie sur la défaite et occision de la Piaffe et de la Picquorée et bannissement de Mars* (1579)—a satirical play in which Piaffe and Picquorée, two pillaging soldiers, are punished—he praises François d'Alençon, the chief of the “malcontents,” the nobility opposed to the politics of Charles IX and Catherine de Médicis, which included the Prince of Condé and Henri de Navarre; finally, after Alençon's death in 1584, he makes an attempt to ingratiate himself with Henri III (who at the time allied himself with the ultra-Catholic fraction of nobility led by François de Guise), in his *Satyre au*

roy contre les républicains (1586) by criticizing both the Huguenots and the Malcontents as agents of rebellion and disorder. Despite these changes in Bounin's loyalties, consistent themes clearly emerge in his writings such as the desire for a strong central government, peace, and law and order and the demand that the sovereign conserve them in the realm. Notably, in *Satyre au Roy*, he presents a powerful defense for the laws and judicial institutions of the kingdom, and advises the king to write strong edicts but also respect the magistrature.¹² He reminds the king that there are laws that transcend even his edicts¹³ and represents these transcendental laws, simultaneously, as divine law, the very body of the magistrates, and the laws of the "Roman Republic." Thus Bounin clearly reveals his fierce loyalty to a tradition in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century French legal and political thought which, as Arlette Jouanna has shown, underscored that royal power was tied to a transcendent rationality and could be "untied" (*absolutus*) from it on special occasions only.¹⁴ This strong demand for limiting royal power while also advocating a strong monarchy also defines the conflicted political lesson that Bounin presents in *La Soltane*.

2. Oriental Persons and French Political Lesson

Indeed, if we take into account Bounin's political ideas, *La Soltane* lends itself to a reading as a political allegory transposed onto a foreign, fictional no-man's land that both is and is not the Ottoman Empire. The dramatis personae in the play can be neatly divided into two groups, those closely associated with the court (the trio of the cunning and jealous Rose, the ambitious Rustan, and Solyman), and those away from the court (the trio of the wise and pious Mahommet, the prudent Sophy and the dutiful Moustapha), which encourages an allegorical reading by providing a convenient schema in which Solyman's court and Moustapha's provincial residence are opposed. The language used by the characters bears this opposition out, for example, when Rose insultingly calls Moustapha "vulgar" and "son of the earth," while describing herself as "royal." The first three acts are set at the court of the Solymans, a place corrupted by the scheming of the courtiers Rose and Rustan.¹⁵

This corruption is born out by Rose's passion for war, conquest, and power. She wants her sons to rule the Levant and the entire terrestrial orb and sees Moustapha as the main obstacle to this ambition. In a striking image, Rose—whose character has been inspired by Seneca's sorceress-like Medea—invokes the demons of the underworld, Vulcan's "cavaliers" armed with firearms and sharp bayonets, a flying squadron of mercenaries

to destroy Moustapha “faster than lightning”—evoking sixteenth-century warfare and an underworld to which Rose has intimate ties (704–714, 29).¹⁶ As Rose rages against Moustapha, her invectives reveal those qualities of the young prince that appealed to a French audience, especially to those sympathetic to L'Hospital's irenicism. Thus, she describes Moustapha as “de tout le levant paisible gouverneur” (278, 18). Rose is not only the most conniving courtier, but she also foresees Moustapha's tragic fate:

O pauvre Moustapha quel Dieu, quelle Deesse
 Te pourra acoiser ta dolente destresse,
 Quell' marine Thetis en son sein écuëus
 Te viendra recueillir les torrens fluctueus? (585–589, 26)

Rose expresses anxiety about the very tragedy that she is working to bring about, affirming Barthe's interpretation that Bounin's characters are defined by a pervasive anxiety.¹⁷ She describes Moustapha as a hero dying in the tempestuous sea—a geographic image having political significance that I will later analyze—and laments the absence of a protective goddess, a “marine Thetis” to lift him out of the waves and save him. Rose's prophetic ability is intimately tied to her will to power.

To further her ambitions, Rose denounces Moustapha to Solyman saying “. . . que Moustapha . . . / . . . avec le Roy de Perse, / Nostre mortel haineus / Journallement converse” (971–974, 37). With the help of fabricated proof (a compromising letter procured by Rustan) and her own “crocodile tears,” she convinces Solyman, who nonetheless hesitates, to take up arms against Moustapha. Having just deposited his harness in the mosque, Solyman is not sure if he should pick it up again:

. . . me faut-il encor' le harnois endosser,
 . . .
 Le harnois moissi, que j'avois fait apprendre,
 Au Moschit de Mahon pour plus ne le reprendre? (1015–8, 38)

This depiction of Solyman, hesitant and inclined toward peace, considerably softens the image of Süleymân I in the public opinion of Europe while exaggerating the negative image of Haseki Hürrem (known as “Roxana” in Europe) and Rüstem Pasha, Süleymân I's First Vizier. In the play, facing sovereign power corrupted by the influence of ambitious courtiers becomes a test for Moustapha.

At the end of the third act, the chorus, lamenting Solyman's willingness

to lend an ear to Rustan and Rose's libels, generalizes by criticizing princes who believe ("créance legiere," 1157, 46) sycophantic courtiers ("courtisans Parasites," 1175, 47), for it leads to wars and animosity between princes. The chorus affirms that kings would live happily and in peace, visiting foreign princes ("Frequentans les Princes estrangeres," 1181, 47), if only they chased away these ill-meaning courtiers. Then the chorus turns explicitly toward France:

L'un dit que devers Franconie,
 Soubs le climat des Sept-trions,
 Au nombreil de la Germanie
 S'éleve une presse ennemie,
 Qui viend froisser les morrions
 Des François escadrons. (1161-6, 42)

The phrase "L'un dit" defines news of a threatening army coming from Germany as precisely the sort of libel that monarchs should not listen to, revealing the chorus's approval of a French alliance with the Protestant German princes. In an apology addressed to Catherine and printed in 1562, Condé defends himself in very similar terms against accusations of rebellion by the Guises, whom he believes to have gained too much influence over Catherine, and defends "un bon et saint accord" that he seeks with the German Princes.¹⁸ The chorus thus defends indirectly Condé and directly diplomatic negotiations with the Lutheran princes by attacking alleged fear-mongers (in France) through the figures of Rose and Rustan.

The chorus also puts the fourth and fifth acts, in which the dramatic action moves to Moustapha's court, into perspective for the audience. In the fourth act, Moustapha discusses his premonitions about the danger that awaits him with his friend, the Sophy. The plot revolves around the differences in attitude toward foreigners at Solyman's court and at Moustapha's, which is born out in the different uses of the word "conversation." Moustapha's "conversation" with the Sophy, in the sense of the Latin verb *conversor* meaning "having business with," is taken by Rustan as the proof of Moustapha's treachery; however, the fourth and fifth acts of the play present two actual conversations between Moustapha and the Sophy, which are examples of a discussion between friends. Indeed, Bounin idealizes "conversation" between princes as a peaceful alternative to war and promotes friendship and alliance as a tool of strong government.

The insertion of the Sophy in the play seems to be Bounin's own invention (Moffan only briefly mentions a "Turkish doctor" who advises

Mustafa). The term was not unknown in Europe as evinced by the French cartographer and spy Nicolas de Nicolay's correction of what he claims to was a widespread misconception: "les Sophiens, qui sont les Perses, portent le rouge. Sophy n'est pas le nom du roi de Perse, comme aucuns pensent, car ce nom vient de leur secte et religion, laquelle leur commande par humilité ne porter habit de tête plus précieux que de laine."¹⁹ Bounin does not share Nicolay's (etymologically more correct) understanding of the term, but he rather uses it in the sense of "the Persian king" (as Rose, in her allegations, calls the Sophy). Thus, the Sophy is not a moral or religious authority in the play (that role is reserved, as we shall see, for Mahommet) but rather a foreign friend or ally who gives Moustapha advice on how to act wisely and prudently in a political situation. Moreover, the Sophy refers to the Persian Shah, the Shia leader and religious other of the Sunni Ottomans.²⁰ The Sophy is a prince of another faith with whom Moustapha maintains a friendship, which makes him similar to the Lutheran princes of Germany with whom not only the French Protestants but also the Valois repeatedly sought alliance.²¹

However, Moustapha and the Sophy serve as allegories of political ideals at the French court that were both complementary and somewhat at odds. The Sophy represents political prudence, or that corrupt times call for the use of one's own judgment rather than a rigid adherence to laws. Thus, the Sophy advises Moustapha to flee despite his father's summon:

Effuis donc, car ceus là s'exposent au danger
Fol'ment dont s'en peuvoint surement étranger. (1469–1470, 51)

In Middle French, the verbs *étranger* and *s'étranger* meant (in the transitive use) "to chase away" and (in the intransitive use) "avoid," "escape," and "distance oneself from." The Sophy advises Moustapha to distance himself from his father's anger, since death seems inevitable, but in the dramatic conflict of the play such action would undermine Moustapha's worthiness as the next-in-line for the throne, for the words *étranger* and *s'étranger* are inscribed in the language that describes sovereignty and royal dignity. For instance, Solyman, when hearing the false news of Moustapha's treachery, exclaims: "ô traître felon m'en veus tu étranger?," where "en" refers to the "place" where Solyman declares he intended to elevate Moustapha, i. e., to royal power (1024, 38). Moustapha likewise accuses Rose: "Du hault rang ou ie siedz, me voulant étranger" (1370, 48). In the last two instances, *étranger* implies to deprive of a dignity and more-than-human majesty that makes

both prince and king. Moustapha also recalls that this dignity is rooted in a divine rationality:

. . . les Princes

Ne sont nez avec nous en ces basses provinces.

Ains là haut, sainement du ciel étans issus. (51, 1491-93)

He thus sees his duty to obey Solyman as a transcendental law, and, by obeying him, he both recognizes Solyman's majesty and preserves his own "haut rang." Moustapha affirms that to disobey would be to transgress against this divine rationality, and he does not hesitate to call it "rebellion." Moreover, his examples of "les superbes rebelles"—from gigantomachy to Nimrod—depict rebellion as monstrous deviancy (51, 1499-1502). Moustapha's choice reveals both his obedience and Bounin's strong advocacy of a transcendental law to which everyone (king and prince included) is subject.

While by refusing to disobey Solyman, Moustapha makes clear his loyalty to what Jouanna calls "un dessein divin aux dimensions universelles" (143),²² by executing his son, Solyman fails to adhere to the law that binds him, in this case, the law of hospitality. The chorus evokes the Roman *tessera hospitalis*, or law of hospitality,²³ which, in the humanistic literature on law and diplomacy, served in arguments of the inviolability of both sovereigns and their ambassadors when in a foreign country.²⁴ Thus the play circles back from promoting diplomacy (conversations amongst princes) to the inviolability of princes and envoys as the legal/transcendental limit upon royal power, which Solyman (who summons, then executes Moustapha) fails to respect.²⁵ These elements of the play show that Bounin's defines monarchy as a power that is strong in acting upon others, yet also restrained by something greater than it. In the play, Moustapha, rather than Solyman, acts according to this political ideal.

To reiterate the theme that royal power is made in heaven, where it is also "bound," in the fifth act, Bounin makes Islam represent the universal moral law that commands Moustapha to recognize Solyman's—anachronistically named—"monarchal pouvoir" (49, 1212).²⁶ Earlier, the Sophy cites the Quran's ("Lalcoran") teaching of the soul's immortality (58, 1447-49), but in the fifth act Mahommet more explicitly plays the role of the wise advisor. According to Moustapha's description, Mahommet wears imperial clothes—a purple gown decorated with tassels and precious stones, a turban, and a tiara adorned with pearls. He is described as a learned man ("scavant") and, most remarkably, his hands, dress and front, are covered in maps:

Et ses deus mains, son front, et ses robes enceintes
Religieusement de cartes toutes peintes. (1623–4, 55)

The maps painted over Mahomet's clothes and "devoutly" worn by him—in a rare early modern version of the "clothing-map"²⁷—reveal his centrality not only to the political message but also to the cosmographic imaginary in the play.

It is one of the most remarkable features of *La Soltane* that the wise guide who reminds Moustapha of divine law is Mahomet rather than a Christian prophet.²⁸ Mahomet cannot easily be seen as the reflection of any aspect of French society and serves to render the dramatic world exotic and distant. In addition, the divine rationality of Mahomet also differs from the prudence of the Sophy. Mahomet indeed acts as a guide in a moral dilemma of cosmic proportions, another Sibylle who guides Moustapha in the cavernous underworld ("l'antre d'Acheruse"), inspired by the classical landscape of Hades. He then shows Moustapha two paths, one leading to the Elysian Fields ("champs Helysés"), the other to the swamps of Styx ("stigieuses mares"). Continuing the tour of the picturesque underworld, Mahomet takes the Ottoman prince inside the dark cave, leads him to Pluto's "rich abode" and shows him the prison where the unjust languish eternally, an image of divine justice.

Some of the mythological images serve the function of mediating between the story of the distant Solymans and the French. For example, Rose claims to be able to tear out of the sky, "avec un cri thessalien . . . [l]a lune mi-formé" (34, 35, 11), reminding the audience of the crescent, which was not only the emblem of the Ottoman dynasty but also the impresa of Henri II with the inscription "Until it embraces the whole world."²⁹ The chorus equates Moustapha with Mars (494, 63).³⁰ Bounin repeatedly exploits symbols of power and empire that circulated in the courts of Henri II and Charles IX such as the prophet Sybille, the crescent, and Mars, but, in this play, these symbols appear in conjunction with the Solymans: Mahomet takes the role of the Sybille, the crescent is Solyman's symbol, and Moustapha is Mars-like. Moustapha is both peaceful and victorious, which were the virtues represented, through the figures of a ram and a lion, in the recently deceased Henri II's Tombeau imaginaire by artist Jean Cousin the Elder.³¹ Bounin thus creates strong iconographic ties between the Valois and the Solymans in an attempt to extend the symbolic representation of power, beyond Christian and Greco-Roman symbols. Thus, the audience would recognize from the Valois court the traits of Bounin's Solymans—yet they also remain distant.

3. Theater, Politics, and Cosmography

The play presents a situation that is fraught with the same tensions—monarchical power weakened by the private ambitions of aristocratic fractions—that trouble the life of the court in France. But the political lesson that Bounin offers in this situation remains riddled with conflicts, which renders the audience's distance from the Solymans convenient. This explains why Bounin is not interested so much in the historical particularity of the Ottomans but rather in their otherness. In the prefatory ode addressed to Catherine de Médicis, Bounin calls her governor of the “ship of France” swept away from the safe haven of political unity by the fractious will of the different parties:

Et l'autre en poupe aiant le vent
veut singler devers le Levant,
Les autres devers la Scythie,
Ainsi la nef de France,
Du havre loin devance. (3)

The Ciceronian image of the “ship of state” allows Bounin to provide a cosmographic image in which the fractions threatening the monarchy are represented by flows of water and wind (“Ja des flots étant tout froissé; Au vens ne servant que d'une gyre,” 3) overwhelming the ship. Bounin then praises Catherine for her ability to calm her subjects' passions and unite them (“tu as appaisé les flottes / Et r'alié tous nos François,” 4).³² The metaphor of the ship was a cliché of political discourse in sixteenth-century France, an oft-cited image of the “bien public” (“the common good”), and it was often used to argue that government required not only one's adherence to laws and transcendent principles but also prudence, or *savoir-faire*.³³ Bounin's praise of Catherine de Médicis implies a prudent, diplomatic mode of governing. The playwright optimistically announces that the Regent ensures that France will avoid the crisis of monarchy of the Solymans. In this sense, one can recognize the figure of Catherine de Médicis as the prudent governor of the ship of France in the figure of “marine Thetis,” the sea goddess who, according to Rose, could save Moustapha if she were present in the drama. Crawford shows that Catherine solidified her (and royal) power thanks to her prudent “political uses of maternity” through which she proclaimed herself mother to all her subjects who would represent their common interests.³⁴ However, the increasingly centralized and “untied” power of the French monarchy posed a threat precisely to the transcendental

legality Bounin champions, and this threat is mitigated through the distance that Bounin creates between the depiction of crisis in “Byzance” and the prudent governorship of Catherine in France. Jouanna shows that there is a tension, in sixteenth-century French legal and political thought, between prudence and the transcendental rationality that Bounin promotes in the play as the sole guarantor of stability. Prudence posed a potential problem.³⁵ While in the case of special exigencies when the “common good” was threatened the king was allowed to act based on his own judgment, rather than according to laws, many legal and political thinkers tried to limit these special occasions and emphasized rather, as Bounin does, the need to obey a transcendent law. In the course of the second half of the sixteenth century, political prudence will be presented as Machiavellian opportunism in pamphlets, since it allows one to diverge from the law, which is precisely what Bounin’s Moustapha cautions against.

It is this political conundrum of power imagined as both “tied” by (transcendental) law and yet acting “untied” by law when it is required by a higher good that riddles Bounin’s writing carrier and makes the characters of Moustapha and Rose ambiguous to a point that they resemble French persons yet cannot be fully identified with them. For example, Rose not only represents the courtier whose scheming threatens political stability but also bears resemblance to the carefully crafted public image of Catherine de Médicis. Barthe has already noted this similarity between Rose and Catherine de Médici, especially since Rose mentions that she has four sons in line for power.³⁶ The play’s title too, *La Soltane*, equates the feminization of power with crisis. Catherine’s image will be blackened and rendered similar to Rose’s—a poisoner, a Medea, ready to do anything to ensure her own power—in pamphlets published in later years.³⁷

The same ambiguity characterizes Moustapha. The play depicts him as an ideal prince who does not shy away from seeking an alliance with a foreign prince, but ultimately disregards what is prudent for a higher obligation. With his obedience to a divine rationality and the monarch, Moustapha stands in stark opposition to Solyman who disregards the law of hospitality. He thus represents political ideals that Bounin as a lawyer and supporter of a strong monarchy—and lifelong critic of absolutism—wanted to uphold. As we have seen earlier, Heath argues that Moustapha represents Condé, implying Bounin’s sympathy for the Bourbon prince. However, this interpretation raises the issue that the playwright heroicizes an aristocrat who had been deemed a threat by the Valois court, including his own *dédicacée* Catherine de Médicis. Anti-absolutist and wishing for

a strong monarchy, he aligns himself with the tradition of French political thought and his play reveals the tensions that riddle it. These tensions are also present in Bounin's loyalty to the Valois court, whose patronage he seeks, and his sympathy with the nobility (Condé), all of which together make the distancing effect of an Oriental mirror very useful.

Thus, although the play establishes a similarity between the French and the Solymans—even at the price of leveling cultural and doctrinal differences between Islam and Roman-Christian morality—it also resorts to Orientalist images of exoticism, violence and lawlessness to create distance.³⁸ Given the political ambiguities, it is not by chance that Bounin decided to set his political drama at a place far away, a place that is not really a place but a mixture of places and a space of pure fiction, and, moreover, in a geographic space that emphasizes distance, fluidity, and impassability. The abysmal rivers (“fleuves les plus creus des horribles Tartares,” 1645, 56) that are said to separate the East from the West are the first topographic markers of the audience's distance from the crisis of sovereignty brought about by Rose and Rustan's scheming and Solyman's dismissal of the law of hospitality. In his dedication addressed to de l'Hospital, Bounin states that he offers a theatrical view of the distant other (“monter les Solymans sur le Theatre”) to improve the viewers' political judgment (“pour affiner et assagir nos François de leurs perils tragiques,” 6). Bounin thus contends that the sight of political drama theatrically presented would be able to produce political prudence.

Now, distance takes different forms in the two spatial models of the world that compete with each other in the sixteenth century: the Ptolemaic, spherical, infinite one, on the one hand, and the Copernican, mechanical, and finite world, on the other.³⁹ Tom Conley underscores that the landmass and habitable space in the Ptolemaic world is always exposed to the flows of the winds and a great oceanus, and its basic unit is the island. This world is insular because no abstract and/or homologizing principle connects it. The flows that divide the Ptolemaic space up into spatial singularities also create a theatrical view for the audience. Insular space, Conley contends, has been made available for contemplation as a finite stage or theater. Insularity refers both to the general economy of the Ptolemaic cosmography in which the land is surrounded by flows (of water and winds) and to the textual space in which every place works as isolated and distinct from the viewer's place, surrounded by uncertainties of cosmic proportions. Bounin's Solymans are thus both exotically other and similar to the French. They are similar because they are subject to the same uncertainty caused by the

contingency of political ambitions or “passions,” figured as frothy waves in the dedication to Catherine de Médicis, and, in a parallel fashion, as the foam on the messenger’s horse (“prends . . . / Ton coursier écumeux,” 40, 111–112) dispatched by Solyman to summon Moustapha in the play. In this image, the horse’s foamy body recalls the metaphors of passions in the political realm, revealing Solyman’s failure to “calm” them and prevent them from undermining his sovereign rule. However, the play also makes the audience aware of an impassable distance between themselves and the persons in the play through the cosmographic images we have seen so far and also, and again when Rustan wishes that Moustapha should flee to Europe without being able to return (literally, “row back,” 765–768, 31). By making the audience aware of this distance, the cosmographic images create the theatrical illusion of an “insight,” the ability of seeing clearly despite the byzantine plot of intrigue. Bounin’s play provides the audience with a vibrant image of the crisis of sovereign power, and seeks to reassure the French that they can escape this crisis, even as the rhetorical strategies of distancing to which Bounin resorts reveal his intimate familiarity with the crisis.

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Notes

1. I cite Michael Heath’s modern edition, *La Soltane*, ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977), 574–578, 26. Henceforward, page numbers in parentheses in the body of the text will refer to this edition. When citing Bounin’s verse, the first number will refer to the line(s), the second to the page(s).

2. I keep Bounin’s spelling and typography of these and other proper names to refer to the imaginary world of the play and use a modernized English transcription of the Ottoman Turkish names to refer to the historical characters, places, and other *realia*.

3. For example, the malcontent pamphlet *La France Turquie* (Orléans, 1576) uses the Turk as the allegory of tyrannical monarchy that removes the nobility from power. In the early seventeenth century, plays like *La Tragedie mahommestiste* (1612) represent Turks as extremely violent and vengeful to allow, according to Christian Biet, French audiences to reflect on the violence perpetrated during the French civil wars. See Biet, “A ‘Senecan’ Theatre of Cruelty: Audience, Citizens, and Chorus in Late-Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth-Century French Dramas,” *Choruses: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 189–202.

4. Bounin uses this Gallicized form to designate the Ottomans in his dedication “A monseigneur Monsieur de l’Hospital” (6).

5. Heath, ix.

6. On Bounin's sources, see Clarence Dana Rouillard's *The Turk in French History, Thought, and Literature* (Paris: Boivin, 1941), 169–212.

7. While Heath suggests that Bounin simply applied his erudition randomly, Pascale Barthe argues that the anachronistic Greco-Roman images serve to mediate between the Ottomans and France. My reading will suggest that the erudite but anachronistic imagery is rendered necessary by Bounin's political ideas. Barthe, "Oriens Theatralis: La France dans le miroir de *La Soltane* de Gabriel Bounin," *Spectacle*, ed. Jeff Persels (2010), 107–120.

8. Heath suggests that the date of the play's composition was the late summer or fall of 1560, before the death of François II, while the preliminary pieces were written for the printed publication a few months later.

9. Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

10. Michel de L'Hospital belonged to the "moyenneurs," moderate Catholics who believed that, for the sake of peace, Protestantism was to be tolerated as a temporary solution until the Catholic Church could be reformed. See Denis Crouzet, *La Sagesse et le Malheur: Michel de l'Hospital, Chancelier de France*. (Paris: Champ Vallon, 1998).

11. Bounin indeed used his learning successfully to procure offices from the Valois. After studying law, he served first as barrister at the Parlement of Paris, then as bailiff (the king's administrative agent) at his birthplace, Châteauroux in the Berry. In the 1570's, he became *maître de requêtes* of the duke of Anjou, Catherine's youngest son who engaged in a bitter rivalry with the Guises as the chief of the party of the "malcontents." See Louis César de La Baume, et al., *Bibliothèque du Théâtre françois depuis son origine* (Dresden: Groell, 1768), 157–159.

12. See Trevor Peach, "Une Catilinaire de légiste: La Satyre au Roy de Gabriel Bounin (1586)," *Court and Humor in the French Renaissance*, ed. Sarah Alyn Stacey (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 165–182.

13. Peach, 168–9.

14. On the history of absolutism and its critics in the sixteenth century, see Arlette Jouanna, *Le pouvoir absolu. Naissance de l'imaginaire politique de la royauté*. Paris: Gallimard, 2013.

15. Silene, who advises Rose to temper her passion, constitutes an exception to the corruption that characterizes Solymán's court. Barthe argues that Silene's advice is representative of the moral ideals of the "moyenneurs."

16. This image may be a poetic representation of Erasmus's description of guns as "engines of hell." See John Rigby Hale, *Renaissance War Studies*. (London: Hambledon Press, 1983), 119.

17. Barthe, 109–10.

18. Condé not only defends an agreement with the German princes as legitimate and useful to the monarchy but also accuses the Guises of seeking an agreement with Spain, Switzerland, and even the German princes in a more menacing manner. *Discours des choses faites par Monsieur le Prince de Condé*. 1562. No pagination.

19. [Nicolas de Nicolay], *Dans l'Empire de Soliman le Magnifique*, ed. Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud and Stéphane Yérasimos (Paris: Presses du CNRS, 1989), 199.

20. Barthe has noted this role of the Sophy (108).

21. François I sought the alliance of German princes against Spain, and so did Henri II, who concluded the treaty of Chambord in 1552 with them. Charles de Marillac, a moderate Catholic and former ambassador who had repeatedly negotiated with the Lutheran German princes was also for the alliance. In the Assembly of Notables in Fontainebleau in August 1560, he warned that treating French Protestants too harshly would alienate the Lutheran princes. Pierre de Vassière, *Charles de Marillac, ambassadeur et homme politique sous les règnes de François I, Henri II et François II, 1510–1560* (Paris: H. Welter, 1896), 385.

22. Jouanna, 143.

23. Sixteenth-century authors knew about the *tessera hospitalis* from texts like Plato's *Symposium* and Plautus's *The Small Carthaginian*.

24. For example, the protestant pamphlet *Le Reveille-matin des François* published after the Saint-Bartholomew massacre calls violating this law a “perfidy” and states that its violation has been the subject of many tragedies. *Le Reveille-matin des francois . . .*, ([a Edimbourg], 1574), 24.

25. In addition, Heath argues that the mention of the *tessera hospitalis* serves the specific purpose of condemning François II for the imprisonment of the Prince of Condé who was summoned to Orléans and then imprisoned in the late summer of 1560 (xiii).

26. Barthe notes that Solyman is more often called “king” or “monarch” than “sultan” in the play. The reason for this is not so much that he is an allegory of a French king but because Bounin's objective is to describe through him the crisis of sovereign power—this is why he bears attributes like “Soltan le puissant, et treshaut” (47, 1353).

27. I have not been able to discover other instances of maps worn, so I borrow this term from Christian Jacob, who mentions modern T-shirts with maps in this category in *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History*, translated by Tom Conley, ed. Edward H. Dahl (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 48.

28. In his later *Satyre* (1584), written during the years of the Catholic League's political influence, Bounin returns to the figure of a Christian god as king Henri III's guide:

Dieu luy guide sa main, son oeuvre, et si ses pas

Sagement il mesure et les dresse au compas. (lines 239–240, cited in Peach, 176.)

29. Giovio, *Dialogo dell'Imprese militari et amorose*. Lyon: G. Rouillé, 1559. 24; Paradin, *Les Devises héroïques*. (Lyon: G. Rouillé, 1557), 20.

30. Henri II was often depicted as Mars. Luisa Capodiecì, *Medicaea Medaea. Art, astres et pouvoir à la cour de Catherine de Médicis* (Geneva: Droz, 2011), 160–162, 351–361, 430–432.

31. Pierre de Paschal, *Henrici Gallorum Regis Elogium* (Paris: Michel Vascosan, 1560).

32. On Catherine de Médicis's use of diplomacy in a later period, see Denis Crouzet, “A Strong Desire to Be a Mother to All Your Subjects: A Rhetorical Experiment by Catherine de Medici,” *JMEMS* 38:1 (Winter, 2008), 103–118.

33. Jouanna, 41.

34. Crawford, 31–32.

35. Jouanna, 41–45.

36. Rose's self-description as “foreign born” further underscores their similarity.

37. It is in a malcontent pamphlet, *Le Discours merueilleux de la vie, actions et dépor-*

tements de Catherine de Médicis (1575–1576) that Catherine will be described in terms similar to Rose.

38. This violence is underscored by the sole description of a sixteenth-century performance by François de Belleforest, who states that “la Tragedie a esté sanglamment jouee.” See *Cinquième tome des histoires tragiques*. Paris: Jean Hulpeau, 1572. 193r-v.

39. Tom Conley, “Pierre Boaistuau’s Cosmographic Stage: Theater, Text, and Map,” *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992), 59–86.