In Jean Rotrou’s *Le Véritable Saint Genest* (1645) through the play-within-the-play structure, a real audience views Genest’s concerns with the performance text and also observes the reactions of the Roman audience to the performance text. In this play the distinction between a dramatic text and a performance text is very evident. Keir Elam in *The Semiotics of Theater and Drama* discusses the theoretical differences between the two. He says that semiotics is the “science dedicated to the production of meaning in society. As such it is equally concerned with signification and communication, that is, the means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged.”¹ Semiologists distinguish between drama and theater. Drama is a type of fiction designed for presentation on the stage, and it is written following certain dramatic conventions. Theater, on the other hand, refers to the “complex of phenomena associated with the performance audience transaction: that is, with the production and communication of meaning in the performance itself and with the systems underlying it.”² Theater also includes the interactions among the spectators. There is not an absolute differentiation between drama and theater since traditional performance represents dramatic fiction. Research in the theater includes material produced “for the theater” which is the “dramatic text” and material produced “in the theater” which is known as the “performance text.”³

Until 1931 drama was analyzed by literary critics while reviewers evaluated performances because the critics considered the stage spectacle “too ephemeral” for any systematic analysis.⁴ Jan Mukarovsky, who was important in establishing the foundation for theatrical and dramatic theory, concluded that the sign is the theatrical performance. It consists of the signifier, the work itself, and the signified, the “‘aesthetic object’ residing in the collective consciousness of the public.”⁵

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SIGN (a theatrical performance)

SIGNIFIER
(the work itself)

SIGNIFIED
(aesthetic reaction of the audience)

Therefore, the performance promotes meaning through its total effect. The advantage of analyzing performance is that this analysis takes into account the audience as a "maker" of meanings.6

In *Le Véritable Saint Genest* the play-within-the-play structure highlights the actual theatrical performance and the importance of the role of the audience in creating meanings. There are several levels of audience interaction in the play:

1. the privileged-position audience viewing the entire play *Le Véritable Saint Genest*
2. on the stage the Roman audience preparing to celebrate the military victories of Maximinus and his marriage to Valerie by viewing *The Martyrdom of Adrien* starring the actor Genest
3. Genest viewing heavenly intervention

The privileged-position audience is able to observe the actors’ and stage designer's preparations for the performance in addition to the reactions and interactions of an audience on the stage. Imbrie Buffum states that baroque art necessitates an audience to impress.7 By including several audiences, Rotrou conforms to the baroque tendency to multiply reality. In addition to the three distinct audiences, Adrien creates his own audience in the play about his conversion. When he anticipates martyrdom, Adrien does not want his wife to reveal her Christianity and join him in death. He insists that she act as a spectator who comprehends and appreciates his conversion while he plays the leading role,8 that of the true martyr. Audience reaction complements the dramatic text and functions as an integral part of a performance.

Genest himself, in speaking of Corneille's plays, distinguishes between the dramatic text and the performance. He says:

A qui les rares fruits que la muse produit
Ont acquis dans la scène un légitime bruit
Et de qui certes l'art comme l'estime est juste,
Portent les noms fameux de Pompée et d'Auguste.