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Henrik Ibsen, Emperor Julian, and the crisis of faith in modernity

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Although it is one of his lesser known and performed plays, Henrik Ibsen considered Emperor and Galilean *to be his Hovedverk—his 'main' or 'pivotal' work—in which he finally presented his positive worldview. It remains comparatively little studied in scholarship, though one scholar has recently argued that it is the key to unlocking his entire corpus. The present study builds upon past scholarship uncovering the works Ibsen drew upon in writing the play but goes beyond the mere question of its historical sources and accuracy to consider Ibsen's purpose for including the specific and precise pieces of historical texture he chose in the particular order and configuration he devised. In short, we aim to identify the creative purposes for his curating of the historical details he took*

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from his sources. What emerges from our analysis is that, even when Ibsen is following the sources, his protagonist stands out as a strikingly modern figure, more at home in the nineteenth century than the fourth. Ibsen portrays his Julian struggling with doubt and uncertainty of a distinctly modern caste; he puts in his mouth criticisms of Christianity that stem from modernity rather than the historical figure; and he suggests that, just as Christianity had to prove victorious over paganism in late antiquity, so Christianity itself must be superseded in the modern era, though perhaps some aspects of it are worth preserving in the yet-to-arrive third empire.

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Introduction

The three co-authors of this article coincided at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, DC, in the fall of 2019. We met regularly for ten weeks, during which we read the ten acts of *Emperor and Galilean* (Parts I and II). For Matt and Brad, who had spent years studying texts by and on Julian, Ibsen was the playwright of *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*; for Anna, who had taught the realistic plays of Ibsen for years, the play on Julian was thick and impenetrable, and required extra willpower to be tackled. Our meeting in the ideal conditions of a unique research institution, at an idyllic time, marked the beginning of this scholarly collaboration. Towards the end of the following academic year, in the summer of 2021, we recorded a podcast on *Emperor and Galilean*, which revolved around how much Ibsen knew about the historical scholarship available on Julian at his time and what he did with it, during the long process of composing his Hovedverk—his 'main' or 'pivotal' work.[1] Furthermore, we mentioned some points of contact between his last historical tragedy and the realistic plays that ensued. This article is a more developed and substantiated version of our work on *Emperor and Galilean*. Two years after our first encounter, we immersed ourselves in the mid-nineteenth-century vibe, with its own deceptions and disillusionments, its own sense of loss and despair, at a time when humanity has been counting its dead on a daily basis, united against a common super-powerful enemy, which does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, national origin, sex, and religion. So, the dark transitional era depicted in Ibsen's 'fresco' offered us perspective on times of agony and loss, when the 'burning of our ships' seems meaningful today and senseless tomorrow. We hope that our exploration will contribute to a better understanding of Ibsen's working method, his attunement with his era, while at the same time, it will provide additional insight into the reception of Julian, an emperor who reigned for two meagre years, but whose

[1] As Toril Moi explains succinctly, Ibsen's label for *Emperor and Galilean* as his hovedverk (instead of, for example, mesterverk, 'masterpiece') is important. Hovedverk, which has 'no exact English equivalent', is 'not necessarily an author's most perfect work, but rather a work that is pivotal—central, cardinal, vital—to the understanding of an author's whole production' (2006: 188–89). On this point, cf. Wærp (2011: 105–6).

historical coverage surpassed in volume the sources available for any other Roman emperor up to his time.

The present study is built not only upon our own reading of the play but also upon two foundational studies on *Emperor and Galilean* published nearly a century ago which have been largely ignored in contemporary Ibsen studies.[2] In 1937 and 1938, the French student and translator of Ibsen's works Pierre Georget La Chesnais (1865–1948) traced in meticulous detail what historical sources Ibsen relied upon to craft his play as well as the play's overall historical accuracy.[3] The precision and thoroughness of La Chesnais' scholarship are impressive and, with but one exception noted in the second section of this study, we follow his conclusions. Nevertheless, there is ample scope to push this line of inquiry further beyond the mere question of the play's historical sources and accuracy to ask further why Ibsen included specific and precise pieces of historical texture, and in a particular order or configuration. What creative purposes can be uncovered within his curating of the historical details? The three sections of this article aim to answer these questions by examining closely both where Ibsen follows his sources, creatively reworking them in the process, as well as where he knowingly departs from them. What emerges from our analysis is that, even when Ibsen keeps step with the sources, his protagonist stands out as a strikingly modern figure, more at home in the nineteenth century than the fourth. The modernism of Ibsen's character is of course the standard interpretation of the play.[4] We, nonetheless, intend to add nuance to this claim and to highlight the play as an instance of classical reception by examining closely the historical materials available to Ibsen and their relation to the central theme of the play, Julian's crisis of faith and his failed attempt to wage war against Christ to establish the third empire. More specifically, Ibsen portrays his Julian struggling with doubt and uncertainty of a distinctly modern caste; he puts in his mouth criticisms of Christianity that stem from modernity rather than the historical figure; and he suggests that, just as Christianity had to prove victorious over paganism in late antiquity, so Christianity itself must be superseded in the

[2] Recent scholarship on *Emperor and Galilean* includes Moi (2006: 188–222); Faber and Høibraaten (2011); Fulsås and Rem (2018: 56–66); Sprinchorn (2020: 199–240); Omdal (2021); Gjesdal (2021: 62–85). We were unfortunately unable to take into consideration the scholarship on the play in Norwegian (e.g. Wyller 1999; Kittang 2002; Wærp 2002) but refer readers to Kittang (2011) and Wærp (2011) where some of these insights appear in English.

[3] For an overview of the historical sources about Julian available to modern scholars, see Cancik and Cancik-Lindemayer (2011). Brill's recent *Companion to Julian the Apostate* offers a representative sample of modern methods, questions, and sources for scholarship on Julian (Wiemer and Rebenich 2020).

[4] Ibsen seems to have created the optimum (torn and tortured) modern figure, as per the suggestions of Hermann Hettner in *Das Moderne Drama* (1852), especially in chapters 1 ('Das historische Drama und die Gegenwart') and 3 ('Das Wesen der historischen Tragödien') in part I of the volume, dealing with historical tragedy. More specifically, Hettner sings praises to Shakespeare's Roman character tragedies (16, 44).

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modern era, though perhaps some aspects of it are worth preserving in the yet-to-arrive third empire.

The fragilization of belief: ambiguity and doubt in Ammianus and Ibsen

One of the primary historical sources for the life of Julian is the *Res Gestae* (or *History*), Ammianus Marcellinus' (c. 330–395) multi-volume history of the Roman Empire.[5] As La Chesnais revealed, Ammianus was overwhelmingly the main ancient source that Ibsen consulted when he was preparing for *Emperor and Galilean*, particularly its first part, 'Caesar's Apostasy'. In fact, Ibsen's original interest in Julian may be traced back to a day in 1864 when he lay under a tree listening to a friend read sections of Ammianus's *History* describing Julian's military campaigns (McFarlane and Orton 1963: 576). In terms of the play's composition, La Chesnais discovered that Ibsen compiled lists of details from Ammianus that he wanted to include and then crossed each one out as he incorporated it (1937: 539).[6] In the following section, we trace the way Ibsen creatively redeployed these granular details to advance a prominent theme throughout *Emperor and Galilean*: the ambiguity of signs. Ibsen uses unclear omens to build a world that provokes in Julian constant wavering, worry, and doubt about religious truth. Though many of the details Ibsen uses are directly from Ammianus, and though divine signs and omens were indeed of great importance to the historical Julian, Ibsen uses them to create a character undergoing a crisis of faith that is distinctive of modernity and foreign to late antiquity.

The relevant historical details from Ammianus's *History* occur in the final Act of 'Caesar's Apostasy'. In the previous Act, Julian deftly averted Emperor Constantius' political trap by manipulating his own disgruntled soldiers into acclaiming him as co-Emperor. As the fifth Act begins, Julian is in the church catacombs in Vienna and anxiously waiting for Maximus, who is deeper in the dark chasms beneath, seeking a sign to guide Julian's next actions.[7] Though Julian's self-orchestrated acclamation in Paris may have been a decisive step, in Vienna uncertainty grows as he contemplates the many decisions—political and religious—still before him. Will he continue his rebellion against Constantius at all costs, or might he sue for a peaceful resolution? Will he finally turn away from the Galilean faith that he once zealously embraced and seek to usher in the third empire foretold by Maximus earlier in the play?

While he waits, Julian's friend Sallust arrives to warn of growing unrest among the troops who want speedier action from their new emperor. Julian tells Sallust that the 'time is not auspicious for action', and he then recounts two recent, portentous events—both of which derive from Ammianus' *History*. Julian asks Sallust, 'Know you not that in the martial games, before we left Lutetia, my shield broke in pieces, so that only the handle remained in my grasp? And know you not that when I was mounting my horse, the groom stumbled as I swung myself up from his folded

[5] A three-volume, Latin-facing-English translation edition is available in the Loeb Classical Library (Rolfe 1939–50). Translations are taken from this edition.

[6] For an example of one such list, see McFarlane and Orton (1963: 589).

[7] On the role of Maximus in the play, see especially Omdal (2021).

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hands?' (196).[8] The signs' significance was, of course, ambiguous—as Sallust points out, when Julian was mounting the horse, he still successfully 'gained the saddle'. But in his uncertainty about challenging Constantius, Julian thinks them ominous: 'But the man fell', he replies to Sallust's encouragement.

As their discussion continues, Sallust reports new developments that push Julian toward action. The pressure builds until Julian reluctantly realizes that 'Indeed, it is time to choose, ere misfortune overwhelms the empire' (204). In his moment of decision, Julian returns to the omens. Occurring now at the end of his conversation with Sallust, these signs form a bracketing *inclusio* for the Act's entire conversation. Julian decides that:

> ... those omens should by no means discourage us. The fact that I retained the handle, when my shield broke during the games, may with ample reason, I think, be taken to mean that I shall succeed in holding what my hand has grasped. And if, in vaulting upon my horse, I overthrew the man who helped me to mount, may not this portend a sudden fall to Constantius, to whom I owe my rise?

The once-ambiguous signs grow clearer to Julian as he settles on decisive action against Constantius as rival Emperor. He commands Sallust to report to the restless troops that 'The Emperor is coming' (207).

Julian's confidence was, of course, tragically misplaced, and the signs misread, as is foreshadowed by Maximus' reports from below following Sallust's departure. His divinatory rituals have been stymied by psalm-singing in the church above, and Maximus' only counsel is to 'Go forward blindly, Emperor Julian. The light will seek you out' (208). Julian does proceed, and he solidifies his opposition to Constantius and to Christ with a baptism-reversing bloody sacrifice (218). But hints of Julian's misinterpretation and future failure follow: as he emerges from the sacrifice, his triumphant speech becomes a counter-liturgy to the church choir's Paternoster above, and Ibsen gives the choir, not Julian, the final words: 'For ever and ever, amen!'[9]

In this climactic moment, Ibsen has Julian rely on two ambiguous signs to turn indecision into confidence, and he appears to have drawn on Ammianus with intention and care to construct the scene. Though both signs come directly from the *History*, they occur at a long remove from one another: Ammianus reports the first well before narrating Constantius's death, and the second comes much later,

[8] All the quoted passages from *Emperor and Galilean* are from the 1911 translation by William Archer, *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen, vol. V, Emperor and Galilean – A World Historic Drama* (London: William Heinemann, 1911).

[9] Sprinchorn describes this as 'one of the most powerful scenes that Ibsen ever conceived' (2020: 222).

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after a long eulogistic interlude following Constantius' passing.[10] We can plausibly imagine Ibsen writing *Emperor and Galilean* with his list of events and details from Ammianus' *Res Gestae* at hand, crossing off two separate lines after he has stitched these details together for the climax of 'Caesar's Apostasy'. While calling attention to the theme of ambiguous signs and omens, this hypothesis also raises questions about what intent Ibsen may have had in his careful culling of historical details. What strategic reasons might he have had for including these details?

In fact, these two omens provide images that echo through Part II of the play. Ibsen reintroduces horses and shields repeatedly as Julian's mission to inaugurate the third empire crumbles, and the images become symbols that heighten the dramatic tension and link Julian's growing anxiety and uncertainty to ambiguous signs. For the first subsequent instance of horse imagery, we must turn to Act 4 of 'Emperor Julian', where Julian and his army are preparing for the Persian campaign. While talking with soothsayers and Maximus about several unclear signs, Julian receives two new portents, the second concerning his war horse named Babylonius. Ammian (only 'a captain' in Ibsen's character list, but actually a nod to the Ammianus Marcellinus of history, who was on Julian's Persian military campaign) explains that the horse was ready for Julian when 'a detachment of Galilean convict soldiers happened to pass' who 'burst forth into a loud hymn in praise of their deity'. Julian's horse was startled and fell over, soiling its royal vestment in the mud. Although Julian chooses to interpret the sign favourably—'As Babylonius fell, so shall Babylon [in Persia] fall' (381)—he fails to note how this omen might relate to the earlier sign: a horse successfully mounted might still be an unstable seat.[11] This omen too comes from Ammianus' *History*, though there the horse falls due to a missile fired from the

[10] To illustrate a general claim that Julian was adept with 'prophetic signs' (21.1.6), Ammianus reports that 'At Paris, when Julian, still a Caesar, was shaking his shield while engaged in various exercises in the field, the sections of which the orb of the shield was fashioned fell apart and only the handle remained, which he held in the grasp of a strong hand'. Those present thought it was a 'direful omen', says Ammianus, but Julian knew immediately the import: 'I hold firmly what I was holding' (21.2.1). Eighty-eight pages later (in the Loeb's facing Latin/English translation), Ammianus reports the second sign, which Julian saw before he knew that Constantius had died: although he was 'perplexed by ambiguous and obscure predictions and continued to be uncertain of the future', says Ammianus, Julian soon received a 'much more evident sign… For at the very moment when that emperor died in Cilicia, a soldier who lifted Julian with his right hand to mount his horse slipped and fell to the ground; and Julian at once cried in the hearing of many: The man has fallen who raised me to my high estate"'—clearly referring to Constantius, who had raised Julian to be his second-in-command Caesar (22.1.2). La Chesnais also notes in passing the disparate locations of these signs in the *Res Gestae* (1937: 537).

[11] Ibsen does give voice to this alternative interpretation, which turns out to be the correct one: while Julian later speaks with Basil and Makrina, Agathon, who will eventually kill Julian in battle, appears. He cries out that, 'Babylonius fell;—soon shall the Babylonian whoremonger fall likewise' (398).

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artillery (*Res Gestae* 23.3.6). By departing from his source in this respect and having the horse fall due to Galilean convicts, Ibsen reminds the attentive reader of the intertwined religious and political nature of the quest pursued by his Julian.[12]

Ibsen reintroduces horse imagery again at the conclusion of the same scene in Act 4. As Julian and Maximus privately continue the conversation begun with the soothsayers, Julian becomes less confident about the divine intent behind the signs. Maximus then gives a new cryptic vision, trying to calm Julian's anxiety about his mission: 'There is One who ever reappears, at certain intervals, in the course of human history. He is like a rider taming a wild horse in the arena. Again and yet again it throws him. A moment, and he is in the saddle again, each time more secure and more expert; but off he has had to go, in all his varying incarnations, until this day....' Julian claims this is an 'unfathomable riddle', but Maximus's intent is clear (393). The former iterations of Julian's spirit—whether Cain, Alexander the Great, Judas Iscariot—have pursued but failed in the same mission, which is depicted as riding the very horse that Julian now mounts.

Ibsen's three horse-related portents build on one another. In the first, Julian seems confirmed in his 'mounting' of the imperial throne, through the downfall of Constantius who helped him into the saddle by making him second-in-command. Then, his war horse falls because Galilean convicts startle it—suggesting that the horse/throne is unstable before its Galilean opponents. Finally, Maximus envisions various people trying to mount a wild horse that no longer symbolizes the imperial throne but an indistinct future world form. Although he thinks the horse won't throw off Julian as it has the others, the seemingly positive first omen is now doubly troubled.

The shield image recurs, too, at the play's denouement, and Ibsen plays with this second omen's ambiguity to hint at Julian's misplaced and unstable confidences. On his deathbed, the mortally wounded emperor becomes preoccupied with his battle shield. The stage notes tell that his shield *and* sword have been brought in by Ammian (469), but when Julian awakes, he quickly asks, 'Ah where is my shield? Have I lost my shield?' Ammian replies that 'both your shield and your sword' are here, and Julian only acknowledges his 'good shield', saying 'I should grieve to think of it in the hands of barbarians'. He then wants to wear it, and Makrina, ever-insightful, insists ''tis too heavy for you now!' Julian agrees but still wants it laid before him, 'that I may see it' (471–2). Ibsen thus recalls the second ambiguous sign from Julian's conversation with Sallust, and uses it to highlight Julian's fanatical devotion to his doomed quest. Even on his deathbed he still clings to the symbol that had earlier convinced him he would be victorious. The world in which Julian has had to chart his path is, therefore, riddled with uncertainty, and the outcome of his quest reveals the peril that lies in trying to discern messages from the divine amidst this pervasive ambiguity.

These clear patterns suggest a likely intention behind Ibsen's creative adaptation of details from Ammianus: calling attention to the theme of ambiguous signs and

[12] La Chesnais also noted the added detail of Galilean soldiers (1937: 564).

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omens. Ammianus certainly reported omens—like the horse-mounting episode and the broken shield—and they are thus fully 'historical', in one sense. But Ibsen has concentrated the omens by bringing together passages that were far separated in the *History*, and, compared to the role they play for Ammianus, he has made the signs more ambiguous and dramatic, both in their initial appearance in Julian's conversation with Sallust and in their evolving symbolism throughout the play. Most important of all, Ibsen has deployed these signs to highlight the epistemic haziness of Julian's religious landscape. They provoke worry and indecision in Julian, or an unstable confidence, at best. The ambiguous omens thus contribute to creating a play that is, as Kristin Gjesdal has recently commented, 'a drama of doubt and agony'. Ibsen's Julian, she suggests, 'lives in a period of transition and uncertainty.... It is in between these two poles—those of doubt and certainty—that Julian's faith is played out' (2021: 79–80).

By fueling Julian's religious struggles, the ambiguous omens also contribute to the way as Gjesdal says, 'Julian emerges as a proto-modern dramatic character' (2021: 81). Ibsen's Julian does have, as Gjesdal puts it, a 'struggle with his faith' (2021: 66) but it is a distinctly modern struggle: he is caught *between* competing religious claims that all remain somewhat, but never fully, plausible. Late in the play, Julian has completely turned against the Galilean faith, but his vision of the triumphant Jesus carrying his cross from 'world to world' and suffering and dying repeatedly (456) suggests a lingering fear that Christianity may after all disclose the true, if detestable, nature of reality. This interpretation of the play adds depth and complexity to other accounts of Ibsen's modernism. For example, Wærp proposes that Ibsen's positive worldview in the play consists of 'a specifically modern statement of the nature of truths, values, and ideals as relative, not universal and timeless, and a belief in change and development'.[13] We agree with Wærp's analysis but add to it that the constant 'struggle' or 'conflict' she identifies has a perpetually destabilizing effect upon the person caught within it, who is never able to complete the 're-evaluation of truth' required by modernity and is thus stuck fast in ineliminable uncertainty.[14]

Julian is thus troubled in ways that have been identified as characteristically modern. In his landmark study, *A Secular Age*, the philosopher Charles Taylor argued that 'the salient feature of [modern] Western societies' is the 'mutual fragilization of different religious positions' (2007: 595), leading to an unavoidable dilemma of oscillating belief and unbelief. Even Pope Benedict XVI (2004) has made a similar claim, suggesting that, for modern persons, belief and unbelief are inescapably intertwined: 'It is the basic pattern of man's destiny only to be allowed to find the finality of his existence in this unceasing rivalry between doubt and belief, temptation and certainty' (2004: 47). The proximity of incompatible but viable ways of life makes choosing between them, or even stably living within one, a fraught exercise.

13 Wæerp (2011: 117).

14 Our interpretation is thus similar to that of Kittang (2011: 143), who argues that the play depicts 'the power of restlessness and longing that constitutes the dynamics of human life'.

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This diagnosis of the modern Western world makes good sense of Ibsen's Julian, who wavers between the Galilean religion, a past paganism, and some indeterminate future form of life. He desires religious stability and certainty but is continuously haunted by doubt. He is ever deciding but never certain, his confidence constantly fragilized by the competing possibilities.

The historical Julian did indeed live in a world of ambiguous signs, but the indeterminacy existed fully *within* his religious tradition. Ammianus records a short discourse on divinely sent signs just before reporting Julian's shield episode (*Res Gestae* 21.1.7–12), and for a more philosophically grounded account one need only peruse *On the Mysteries* by Iamblichus of Chalcis (a Neoplatonist philosopher whom Julian revered; d. c. 325) to see how sign-reading can go wrong and mislead the diviner.[15] Late antique theories of divine signs allowed for the possibility that the human recipient might misread an omen and even that a deity might deliberately deceive. But in contrast to the world Ibsen created in *Emperor and Galilean*, the ambiguity that Ammianus or Iamblichus acknowledge was a given feature of the cosmos, as understood *within* the historical Julian's Neoplatonism, and, significantly, was not thought to undermine the legitimacy of that religious and philosophical outlook on the world. Ibsen has, therefore, taken the feature of ambiguous signs and deployed it in a modern way, to illustrate anxiety about uncertainty *between* different ways of interpreting and living in the cosmos.[16] His Julian seems to face a Kierkegaardian dilemma, and though he makes a religious and political 'leap' in Vienna, the ambiguous horse and shield omens presage an intransigent uncertainty about whether he has leapt in the right direction. His assertion of will fails to bring any existential stability, and his uncertainty unravels into suicidal madness by the play's final acts. The judgment of La Chesnais from almost 80 years ago was correct: in *Emperor and Galilean* Ibsen deploys meticulous historical detail to bring out his own understanding of the character of Julian.[17] And, we would add, it is a patently modern character, as evident in the crisis of faith that plagues Julian.

[15] See especially Book III (Clarke et al. 2003: 119–201).

[16] Similarly, Sprinchorn has claimed the historical Julian 'was certainly not the divided soul Ibsen wanted him to be' (2020: 224).

[17] 'On voit que ce premier acte présente, ainsi qu'on l'a déjà observé dans *L'apostasie de César*, un curieux mélange d'exactitude historique souvent minutieuse, allant ici jusqu'à la reproduction littérale des ouvrages de Julien et de ses contemporains, et d'un véritable sans-gène dans la déformation des textes et des faits, de façon à faire mieux ressortir la façon dont Ibsen a compris le caractère de Julien' (1938: 558). La Chesnais also suggested that in the religious material of *Emperor and Galilean*, Ibsen's Julian is completely free from Ammianus' portrayal. Though perhaps true in the strict sense, Ibsen's use of Ammianus' material for 'religious' ends, as outlined in this article, complicates La Chesnais' depiction of how Ibsen crafted Julian's religious identity from historical sources (ibid).

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Soul-crushing Christianity and life-giving paganism: reading Strauss with Ibsen

In the last section, we argued that Ibsen has used his historical source material to dramatize a struggle with belief and doubt that is the unavoidable epistemological condition of modernity. We can take this a step further and consider more specifically how the play portrays Christianity as a religion and its role in human history. Although some classicists point out that Julian's identity should not be reduced to his supposed 'apostasy',[18] it was surely this aspect of his life that attracted Ibsen's attention most of all, since he titled the first half of the play 'Caesar's Apostasy'. La Chesnais has traced Ibsen's relation to his sources on the question of the *timing* of Julian's apostasy, observing that this is one of the few instances in which he departs from Neander (1789–1850), one of two modern authors he relied upon heavily (1938: 549–51). Furthermore, the role Ibsen attributes to Julian's wife Helena in his journey to apostasy is one of the most striking inventions of the playwright, which La Chesnais characterized as the play's 'most serious falsification of history' (1938: 555). However, even though the events surrounding Helena (e.g. her infidelity, murder, and status as a miracle-working saint) serve as the final nudge to push Julian to embrace paganism, the play also contains a series of statements characterizing Christianity and paganism as two competing outlooks on the world which function as a supplementary explanation for Julian's apostasy. Thus far interpreters have overlooked that here too Ibsen departs from the historical record, for the criticisms of Christianity placed by Ibsen in the mouth of his protagonist are almost entirely unrelated to those set forth by Julian himself.[19] Examining this contrast highlights another aspect of the distinctly modern profile of Ibsen's Julian and also reveals the probable influence of a nineteenth-century source that has been frequently dismissed in scholarship on the play, that of D. F. Strauss (1808–1874). We will first consider the portrayal of Christianity and paganism set forth in the play, then turn to consider Julian's treatise *Against the Galileans* and Ibsen's knowledge of it, and finally turn to Strauss.

Svendsen has pointed out that the Julian of the play rejects a Christianity consisting primarily of categorical demands and divine retribution (1965: 85). As Julian states in act 5 of the first half of the play, 'My whole youth has been one long dread of the Emperor and of Christ. Oh, he is terrible, that mysterious—that merciless god-man! At every turn, wheresoever I wished to go, he met me, stark and stern, with his unconditional, inexorable commands' (209). In short, for the Julian of the play, Christianity represents a fundamental denial of all that is good about human life. It prevents one from giving vent to righteous anger by insisting upon forgiveness for the worst crimes of all; it negates the love of beauty in this world by enforcing the priority of an other-worldly kingdom; and it denies the desires for bodily pleasure by demanding renunciation for the sake of heavenly reward (see Julian's comments on 209–10).[20]

[18] On the issue of Julian's apostasy from Christianity and conversion to traditional Greco-Roman religion, see Elm (2012: 92n.17, 368–71) and the further literature cited therein.

[19] This is not to deny that there is some overlap. For example, both the historical Julian and the Julian of the play scorn Christian devotion to the martyrs.

[20] Cf. Wærp (2011: 110) and Bee (2011: 71).

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Greek paganism is portrayed by Ibsen as the corresponding antithesis to this image of Christianity. In the first act, Libanius explains that the Galileans are 'blind' to 'a whole glorious world' in which 'life is one long festival, amid statues and choral songs, foaming goblets in our hands, and our locks entwined with roses' (37). Julian later tells his military commander Sallust that it is a good thing that the Greek gods are 'far away' since 'they leave a man elbow-room for action. Oh, that Greek happiness, that sense of freedom' (203). After ascending to the throne and openly sacrificing to the gods in the second half of the play, Julian calls upon Apollo and Dionysus to send down 'life, life, life in beauty', in short, 'ecstasy' (256). In the next scene, as Julian leads a procession to the temple of Apollo in Antioch, he exclaims 'Beautiful earth! The home of light and life, the home of joy, the home of happiness and beauty' (308). As these passages demonstrate, for Ibsen's Julian traditional pagan religion represents an embrace of life in its fullest sense, including joy and beauty on this present earth, leading to the self-actualization of human freedom and potential. In contrast, Christianity is a constraining denial of all that is good in life, powerfully depicted in the group of Christian prisoners who interrupt Julian's procession with their hymns revelling in the gory details of the torture about to be inflicted upon their bodies, culminating in the shocking line 'Blissful to writhe in the blood-death that saves us' (313).[21]

These passages and similar ones are as close as the Julian of the play comes to giving an account of what attracts him to paganism and repulses him from Christianity. In contrast, the historical Julian penned a lengthy three-book treatise titled *Against the Galileans* in which he aimed 'to set before all humanity the reasons that persuaded [him] that the Galileans' fraud is a human fabrication constructed with maliciousness'.[22] Although Julian's work has not been preserved in its original form, we are fortunate to have extensive extracts from it that were quoted by Christian opponents, with 107 fragments in the most recent critical edition.[23] Contrary to the Julian of the play, for the historical Julian the gods are hardly 'far away', leaving a person to enjoy life as they see fit, but rather have imposed their own distinctive natures upon the nations over whom they rule and instituted an eternal world order, including specific prescriptions about various types of sacrifice that must be observed as a process

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[21] Gjesdal (2021: 67) captures part of this contrast when she says: 'For Julian, history serves as a battleground for two different value-systems: pagan celebration of immanence and Christian longing for transcendence'.

[22] Julian, *Against the Galileans* fr. 1.2–4 (87 Mas.), translation by Crawford. This was probably the opening line of Julian's work. For an introduction to Julian's *Against the Galileans*, see Riedweg (2020) and Elm (2012: 300–21).

[23] The most recent critical edition is Masaracchia (1990), which includes the original Greek text and an accompanying Italian translation. See also the recent Greek–French edition that is based almost entirely on Masaracchia's volume: Giavatto and Muller (2018). For the *status quaestionis* on the critical editions of Julian's treatise, see Crawford (Forthcoming).

of freeing the soul from the limitations of the contemptible and corruptible body. Moreover, the historical Julian hardly celebrated the uninhibited pursuit of earthly pleasure but instead practised personal asceticism and created new ethical standards for all those who would serve as priests throughout the empire. In addition, he criticized Christianity for being too morally lax, presenting Jesus in his dialogue *Caesars* as dwelling with a personified Licentiousness and, via the cleansing waters of baptism, offering cheap pardon to the worst offenders, a far cry from the stern god-man giving inexorable commands who so terrifies and disgusts Ibsen's Julian.[24] Indeed, the one thing Julian claimed Christians took from the Greeks was the 'defect' of 'a debased and lax manner of life stemming from apathy and vulgarity'.[25] Christianity was, in his eyes, not too demanding but rather not demanding enough!

One might be tempted to explain this discrepancy by hypothesizing that Ibsen was simply unaware of Julian's *Against the Galileans*, but in fact, he incorporated three references to it in the second half of the play (367, 402, 475). At the time he was writing, accessing the work was possible through a book published in 1764 by the Marquis D'Argens (1704–71) who had extracted the quotations of Julian from the text of his primary Christian opponent and printed them separately as a stand-alone volume including Julian's original Greek alongside a French translation which was reissued four years later by Voltaire in a slightly updated form.[26] Ibsen would have been aware of d'Argens publication, since de Broglie (1821–1901), who served as his primary historical source for the second half of the play, mentioned it in a footnote, though he dismissed it as showing a 'very superficial erudition' and thus 'without any value'.[27] However, Ibsen would not have needed to go to d'Argens' book to learn what the historical Julian said on this topic, since de Broglie himself went on to provide a brief and accurate summary of *Against the Galileans* (de Broglie 1866: 325–29). It seems almost certain that Ibsen read these pages, since he follows de Broglie's claim that Julian was working on the book in the midst of his Persian

[24] Julian, *Caes.* 336A-B. Cf. Elm (2012: 285–6). Julian repeats this criticism of Christianity in *Against the Galileans* fr. 59 Mas.

[25] Julian, *Against the Galileans* fr. 3 Mas. This is somewhat similar to the play, since Maximus points out the hypocrisy evident among the Christian bishops who surpass all others in 'greed and ambition and sycophancy' (213). Julian, however, quickly corrects Maximus by pointing to the example of Athanasius who did not succumb to such temptations.

[26] Cf. Kinzig (2009) and Marcone (2019). In 1880, seven years after the publication of *Emperor and Galilean*, the German philologist Karl Neumann published a properly critical edition of Julian's treatise in Greek as well as a German translation of it (1880a; 1880b).

[27] de Broglie (1866: 325n1): 'Cette compilation, enrichie d'une érudition très-superficielle, est sans aucune valeur'. On Ibsen's use of de Broglie, see McFarlane and Orton (1963: 598–600), who follow the groundbreaking studies of La Chesnais (1937, 1938). Some portions of de Broglie's book had been translated into Danish but Ibsen seems to have also been consulting the French original.

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campaign, right up to the moment of his death (de Broglie 1866: 324–25).[28] Ibsen's other dominant source, Neander (1789–1850), also provided a survey of the content of *Against the Galileans*, which Ibsen must have read, but which likewise provides little overlap with the portrayal of Christianity and paganism in the play (Neander 1851: 120–7).[29] Ibsen, therefore, seemingly made a conscious decision to ignore the vices of Christianity and virtues of paganism set forth by the historical Julian and instead cast his character in a very different light.

Nevertheless, Ibsen's Julian appears just as much at home in the context of Ibsen's own nineteenth century as he is foreign to the fourth century. As evidence, we may turn to a source that Ibsen himself acknowledged having read, D. F. Strauss's short book *Der Romantiker auf dem Throne der Cäsaren oder Julian der Abtrünnige* published in 1847. In a letter to his publisher Hegel, dated 12 July 1871, Ibsen reported that he had Strauss's book in hand but dismissed it as containing nothing more than 'argumentative figments' that he was perfectly capable of producing himself.[30] This letter has been frequently quoted in scholarship on *Emperor and Galilean*, with most scholars taking Ibsen at his word that he borrowed nothing from Strauss.[31] La Chesnais, for example, says that because Strauss's book was 'an old polemical news pamphlet', Ibsen 'probably did not understand its intention' and, in any case, it 'could hardly have been useful to him' (La Chesnais 1937: 561). Only the Oxford Ibsen entertains the possibility that Strauss may have inspired some of Maximus' remarks in part two of the play but does not explore this idea further (McFarlane and Orton 1963: 598).

La Chesnais was correct that Strauss's book was not intended primarily as a work of historical scholarship but as a satire of the religious reforms of Frederick Wilhelm IV of Prussia.[32] The work was, however, extremely subtle, making no mention of the Prussian ruler and only alluding explicitly to the present-day in passing on a

[28] This claim is without any grounding in the ancient sources and we have not found it in any other modern author.

[29] In addition to Neander's multi-volume church history (referenced above), his monograph on Julian also surveyed some of the same material (Neander 1850: 77–117, especially 83–89). We refer here to the English translations of Neander's two books. Ibsen would of course have read them in the original German. The monograph on Julian was originally published in 1812 and the first volume of the church history in 1825. The second volume of the church history, which contains Neander's discussion of Julian, appeared in 1828. On Neander, see Bennett (2020).

[30] The letter is quoted by Archer (Ibsen 1911: x–xi).

[31] Cf., for example, La Chesnais (1937: 542); Kinzig (1997: 1); Sommer (2011: 88–89). Rhodes (1995), though focusing on the Hellenic culture as mediated through contemporary German authors and culture in Ibsen's works, makes no mention of Strauss (see 28–43, 109–16).

[32] For an introduction to Strauss, see most recently Beiser (2020), who discusses his book on Julian on 183–86. Kinzig (1997) provides a thorough and insightful investigation of the reception of Strauss's book throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Strauss's interpretation of Julian is also analyzed in Sommer (2011: 82–88).

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few occasions. In fact, the pamphlet's satire was so oblique that twenty years after its publication, in the same decade when Ibsen began writing *Emperor and Galilean*, Strauss himself confessed that he could no longer decode all of the innuendos it contained.[33] As a result, it is possible to read *Der Romantiker auf dem Throne der Cäsaren* not as a commentary on nineteenth-century ecclesiastical politics but as a genuine attempt to understand the historical figure of Julian the apostate. Even if it provides almost none of the facts of Julian's life (as Ibsen correctly noted), the book does make a bold attempt to explain Julian's personality and his role in human history.

After recounting several earlier interpretations of Julian's life and aligning himself most closely with the book by Neander published in 1812, Strauss comes to the novel insight that serves as the core of his argument—Julian was 'a pagan romantic on the throne' (1847: 20). Although Strauss's audience would have understood romanticism as a well-defined contemporary movement of the modern era, Strauss proposes that it is a transhistorical phenomenon, specifically a backward-looking reaction that always emerges at 'crossroads of world history' (1847: 20). Romanticism, Strauss notes in passing, is 'essentially mysticism' (1847: 21), and romantics inevitably fail in their undertakings, since they seek to hold back the unstoppable progress of time. Indeed, Strauss's final line of the book is that all romantics 'must be defeated by the Galilean', as was Julian, or, in other words, must succumb to 'the genius of the future' (1847: 52).

The connections here with Ibsen's Julian are obvious: the fact that he is led by someone named Maximus *the Mystic*; that he undertakes a nostalgic endeavour to revive an old order (Strauss 1847: 21); that he is fickle, easily swayed, excitable, and fierce (Strauss 1847: 44); and that his efforts ultimately are futile since he is opposing the unstoppable advance of history (as Maximus tells him in act 3 of 'The Emperor Julian' [372]). Yet there are also undeniable similarities between Strauss and Ibsen in terms of the contrasting ideals of Christianity and paganism. For Strauss, paganism in Julian's era stood for 'free humanism' (1847: 21) and what Julian was seeking to renew was 'the beautiful Greekness' which 'still preserved the freedom of mind that … resists blind faith' (1847: 47). As he draws his essay to a close, Strauss admits that, even though Julian is 'repugnant' as a backward-looking, doomed romantic, nevertheless modern thinkers like himself could not help but sympathize with his attraction to 'the free, harmonious humanity of Greekness' in contrast to 'the principle of unfree faith, of the broken life' demanded by Christianity (1847: 51–52). It would be hard to summarize in more apt terms the reasons given by Julian in Ibsen's play for abandoning the Christianity of his youth and seeking to revive the worship of the traditional gods. Moreover, both Strauss and Ibsen treat the historical figure of Julian as an allegory or cypher for the history of religions, drawing an analogy between the triumph of Christianity over paganism in late antiquity and a vaguely

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33 Kinzig (1997: 8).

defined force that would surpass or at least subsume Christianity itself in the modern era.[34]

It would seem, therefore, that even though Strauss's book could not provide Ibsen with the 'facts' about Julian's career he was so eager to discover in 1871, he nevertheless took much more from the famed and highly controversial biblical scholar than he admitted. Ibsen's Julian is, in all important respects, but a dramatic rendering of the personality described by Strauss in his 1847 publication. The influence of Strauss may in fact explain an abiding puzzle in Ibsen scholarship. La Chesnais argued that Ibsen did not read de Broglie until 1871, after he was well into writing the play, such that the Frenchman could not be primarily responsible for the negative characterization Ibsen gave his protagonist (1937: 557–8, 1938: 570–3). However, we know that Ibsen checked Strauss's pamphlet out of a library in Rome in 1866, presumably well before he ever encountered de Broglie.[35] As a result, Strauss's short work could have exerted a fundamental influence at this early stage of Ibsen's own creative process, one that Ibsen himself either was unaware of or wished to keep obscure. To be sure, Strauss's portrayal of Christianity and paganism might not have been entirely novel for Ibsen but could have resonated with ideas he was already considering. Ibsen said he incorporated much of his own life experience in the play and La Chesnais has proposed he was referring specifically to his own initial religious fervour and eventual apostasy (1938: 552–3).[36] As a result, the critique of Christianity as focused on rules and divine retribution and the presentation of paganism as an attractive, life-affirming alternative might also have arisen from Ibsen's own life experience. But, even if so, this is merely to highlight again that the apostasy Julian undergoes in the play is characteristic not of the fourth century but of the crisis of faith endemic to modernity.

Christianity and the future of humanity? Maximus versus Macrina

Despite the criticisms of Christianity surveyed in the last section, *Emperor and Galilean* also acknowledges that the religion has played an unsurpassed role in human history, and the play leaves open the possibility that it might have something positive to contribute to humanity even in modernity. As in the last two sections, this point becomes most apparent when we examine closely Ibsen's dependence on and departure from his historical source material. Perhaps his most unexpected departure from the historical record is the role he ascribes to Macrina, the sister of

[34] Cf. Sprinchorn (2020: 201): Ibsen 'recognised that the central events of nineteenth-century Europe were essentially a repetition of the events of the fourth century'.

[35] Kinzig (1997: 2); Gjesdal (2021: 67n18).

[36] Cf. Moi (2006: 189); Sprinchorn (2020: 205). Sprinchorn goes on to observe '[Ibsen] was so determined to make Julian a replica of himself that he altered the known facts and then denied having done so. He seemed blind to what he was doing and asserted, "I have adhered strictly to the historical facts", a quite preposterous claim' (2020: 225).

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Julian's friend and fellow student Basil.[37] Macrina first appears in act 2 of the first half of the play, when Basil in Athens receives a letter from her which he reads in the presence of the prince. Two elements of Macrina's characterization stand out in this exchange. First, she seems to possess an uncanny insight into the future. She mentions that Maximus' activity in Ephesus is attracting a great deal of attention (81), which she interprets as 'a proof that we are under the wrath of the Lord' and that 'great afflictions are in store for us [Christians]' (82). This, of course, is precisely what does happen in the second half of the play; Maximus' goading of Julian to ascend the throne and inaugurate the third empire results in great suffering for the Christians of Antioch and Cappadocia when they refuse to go along with the new emperor's religious program. Second, Julian is clearly smitten with Basil's sister, despite the fact that he has never even met her. In Julian's eyes, she is a 'remarkable woman' and hearing passages from her letter read aloud is like 'listening to something full and perfect, such as I have long sighed for' (82). There next follows a discussion of Macrina's commitment to pursuing an ascetic lifestyle despite being 'young and beautiful' and in possession of both 'riches' and 'learning', a decision that Julian finds unintelligible (82). Though he does not say so explicitly, we are left suspecting that he would prefer to have Macrina by his side rather than living in the desert. Moreover, it is not too much of a stretch to conjecture that when, in the next act, Julian comes to believe Maximus's prophecy that he, as the reincarnated Adam, has been promised 'the pure woman' (104), it is Macrina whom he specifically has in mind.[38]

We do not meet Macrina again until she and Basil make a surprise appearance as Julian marches east on his Persian expedition in the penultimate act. By this point, the siblings have established twin male and female ascetic communities which happen to be located along the route taken by the Emperor. They are offering refreshment to the weary soldiers as they pass, when they encounter Julian himself and fall into an argument with him. Julian again expresses contempt for Macrina's other-worldly asceticism (400) and is annoyed at the influence the two are exerting through their letters strengthening the suffering Christians of his empire (392). Basil correctly recognizes that Julian's march against Persia is actually an attempt to make war against Christ (396), but Ibsen once again bestows upon Macrina an even keener insight, this time not with respect to the future but instead into Julian's own soul: 'What is it that you hate and persecute? Not him, but your belief in him. And does he not live in your hate and persecution, no less than in our love?' (402–3). Although Maximus is, of course, ostensibly the mystic of the play endowed with supernatural

[37] On the role of the Cappadocians in the play, see especially Bee (2011), who also comments on the lack of historical accuracy on this topic on 66–69.

[38] Though, even if Julian at this point is thinking that Macrina is his prophesied partner, by the end of the act, he clearly believes, on the basis of the words of Leontes, that Helena is the pure woman promised to him (133).

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powers of perception, Ibsen portrays him as consistently failing to live up to this role, at times even ridiculing him.[39] Even when he gets something right, such as the oracle predicting danger for Julian in Phrygia, he actually misses the point. In contrast, it is Macrina who recognizes what Julian cannot admit about himself, that the power of the Christ he has come to hate is evident precisely in the extent to which he is willing to go to eradicate his influence from the world.[40]

In his frustration, Julian forces Basil, Macrina, and their followers to join his expedition in order to attend to his army's sick and wounded (406). We then meet Macrina in the play's final scene as she stands with a small group around Julian's deathbed. Ibsen takes care to inform us that Macrina is among the trio closest to him, even closer than Maximus who is positioned at the foot of the bed (468). Throughout this scene, she appears as the person who is most perceptive of Julian's state and most attentive to his needs, even more so than his court physician Oribasius: Macrina binds Julian's bandages (469), notices him awakening (470), realizes he is once more bleeding (474), comments on his laboured breathing (476), and brings him water when he complains of thirst (478). Finally, at the moment of Julian's death, Macrina and Basil fall on their knees in prayer, after which she boldly rebukes Maximus's fatalist monologue (479). Ibsen bestows upon Macrina the final words of the play, which amount to a statement of assurance that, even if Julian was foreordained to do battle against Christ, he might yet find mercy on the final day of judgement (480).

The role Ibsen grants to Macrina is admittedly a smaller portion of the play than many other characters, yet she intervenes at crucial moments, expresses striking insight, and, most pertinent to the present study, is almost entirely an object of Ibsen's own creation. Basil, it is true, did have a sister named Macrina who was renowned for her religious devotion and transformed their family's estate into an ascetic community.[41] Yet this community was in Cappadocia, nowhere near Julian's path into Persia, and there is not a shred of evidence to suggest the emperor was even aware of her existence. This is, therefore, one of Ibsen's most fanciful additions to the historical record, on par with his characterization of Helena and her role in Julian's apostasy. Indeed, if Helena serves as the primary female presence in the final two acts of the first half of the play, Macrina does the same in the final two acts of the second half. What might the insertion of Macrina into the drama mean? La Chesnais proposed that Ibsen added Basil and Macrina into the second half because he needed his Julian to have 'an educated adversary' with whom to converse and 'non-malicious Christians' at his deathbed (1938: 565). This is true but inadequate. Toril Moi more helpfully argued that Macrina 'is the only person [in the play] incarnating love … the pure woman, who is uninterested in sex, loving, forgiving, and the embodiment

[39] Cf. Omdal (2021: 18).

[40] Ibsen is here channelling Neander's own words: 'the anger [Julian] shows towards [Christ] proves how much he dreaded his influence' (Neander 1851: 76).

[41] For an introduction to Macrina, see Silvas (2008).

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of mercy' (2006: 214).[42] Quoting a speech Ibsen gave in 1874 in which he highlights the centrality of love at the end of the play, Moi directs our attention to Julian's tragic realization that he, like Alexander and Caesar before him, has won mere 'cold admiration' which cannot compare with Christ who 'sits throned as the king of love in the warm, believing hearts of men' (455). As Moi persuasively argues, Macrina, more than any other character in the play, exhibits the life of mercy pursued by someone in whose heart the Galilean reigns, as she stands close by the deathbed of her enemy tending to his needs and easing his suffering.[43]

Moi's recognition that Macrina is intended by Ibsen to represent the power of love is compelling. However, this analysis can be pushed further in two complementary directions if we consider Macrina's character in light of Strauss' view of the role of Christianity in human history. First, if Ibsen was following Strauss' idea that Julian's Christian opponents represented, in the fourth century, 'the new principle of progress and the future' (1847: 51) and thus were destined to prove victorious over Julian's paganism, the playwright needed to provide some explanation in the play for this inevitable triumph of the Galilean. He apparently took as his inspiration a famous letter from Julian himself in which he praised Christian charity and claimed that it was the reason so many converted to the new faith (Wright 1923: 67–73). Ibsen himself alludes to this letter in the final act of the play, with Julian pointing out to his philosopher friends that among the Galileans there are 'none poverty-stricken and helpless' because they care for one another (440). Therefore, the principle of love, exemplified most clearly by Macrina, explains why Julian's attempted pagan revival could never have succeeded and why we moderns are, to use Strauss's terminology, drawn 'in a formal sense' to the Christianity Julian opposed, since it demonstrates the inevitability of historical change and progress.[44]

Second, it may be that Ibsen wanted to use the character of Macrina to highlight those aspects of Christianity that he thought worth preserving in the new synthesis of the third empire that was about to appear. Although Strauss claimed that the progress of human history in the nineteenth century was destined to bring a return of the pre-Christian ideals of the classical world, he did not completely discount Christianity but said the next stage in human development should also be 'enriched

[42] In contrast, Templeton (1997: 109) sees Macrina as a deconstruction of the notion of a 'pure woman' since she achieves this status 'only because she has become dead to life, a condition which makes it impossible for her to be Julian's, or anyone else's earthly partner'.

[43] See also the brief analysis of Helena and Macrina as contrasting ideals, in Templeton (1997: 108–9). A more negative view of Macrina is offered in Bee (2011: 78), who sees her words following Julian's death as indicative of the same instrumentalizing tendency evident in Maximus's actions throughout the play.

[44] Cf. Wærp (2011: 106): 'The main focus of the play is—as I will be arguing—on the re-evaluation of truths, values and ideals in a period of transition and change: The third empire is first and foremost an image of this re-evaluation, that is, an image of the fact that truths, values and ideals do change, or develop, as well as of how they change/develop. As such, it can be understood as a crucial mark of modernity in Ibsen's writings'.

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with the spiritual and moral achievements' of the Christian middle ages (1847: 51). We do not know what achievements Strauss had in mind but perhaps, for Ibsen, Macrina's model of love was one such inheritance from the Christian past which should be retained even as history marches on with unstoppable force towards the syncretistic third empire.

Moi claimed that 'Macrina's last words are there to exemplify mercy, not to convey the ultimate religious or philosophical message of the whole play' (2006: 214). Yet the fact that in the last scene Macrina rebukes Maximus and reinterprets his deterministic view of history by pointing to divine mercy suggests that she *is* giving us the play's final message. At the very end Maximus realizes that the 'world-will' cannot be resisted and demanded the sacrifice of Julian as a 'victim on the altar of necessity', a recognition that leads the mystic to conclude that all of life is but 'sport and mockery', in other words, that no meaning can be found because moral agency is impossible (479). Macrina, however, provides the counterpoint to such a bleak view of human existence. She has shown the transforming power of love and pursued mercy even in the awareness that she and others were suffering under forces they could not control. Ultimately this is where Ibsen leaves us. Macrina's example of love and mercy, born of her personal self-denial, stands as the bold negation of Maximus' nihilistic fatalism.[45]

Conclusion

Our main goal in this article was to shed light on how Ibsen used the historical sources available when he was researching and composing *Emperor and Galilean*. We hope to have highlighted both his excellent knowledge and usage of the primary sources, as well as his beneficiary interaction with other works that focused on Julian. For authors ranging from Ammianus Marcellinus to Neander and Strauss, this unique emperor has been much more impactful as a memory and inspiration than he was as a general and ruler. And today, one can ask, does this historical tragedy still have a meaning for the curious reader? Undoubtedly, given that the major dilemmas torturing Julian still exist during our post-enlightenment era, with some desperately clinging to the past amidst an ever-changing world and others blinded by their faith in a techno-utopian third empire. To put it in Macrina's words 'Oh, brother let us not seek to fathom that abyss' (480).

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45 Cf. Moi (2006: 215): 'Modern human beings will have to struggle to overcome their scepticism, if they want to love each other'. For a contrasting interpretation of the ending of the play, see Kittang (2011: 138–9, 142–3).

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